



A Soviet border guard detachment with a dog securing the state frontier on the Kuril Islands in 1973.

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Words or Swords

Russia's Strategies in Handling its Territorial Disputes

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Abstract:

States can choose to cooperate, delay or escalate their territorial disputes, but there is a lack of understanding of strategy behind each choice. In this study, Russian territorial disputes are looked at using the theory of omnibalancing and the theory of preventive warfare, theories which have already been applied by Taylor Fravel in his analysis of the Chinese territorial disputes. The results of this research show that Fravel's approach can explain a slight majority of Russia's cases, but the explanatory power could be increased by changing certain premises of his theory.

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1 Introduction

Territorial claims are always tied to notions of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, which are one of the most pressing geopolitical concerns of every state. However, there are many claims which are disputed between two or more states. Political experts are all aware of claims presented in cases which receive media highlights: Tibet, Taiwan, Kashmir, and Kosovo, to name a few. How states deal with their core principles perhaps best exemplifies their behaviour. By state actions or behaviour, I refer to a wide variation of behaviour among countries when it comes to territorial disputes, but they can all be grouped into three main categories: first, cooperative behaviour; second, coercive or escalatory behaviour and finally, status-quo behaviour. Distinction is not always clearly cut between these categories, but categorization serves a very important purpose.

Territorial disputes are important not only because they represent core concerns, but also because, in an international system composed of sovereign states, contested land has been the most common issue over which states collide and go to war.¹ Paul Diehl found a close correlation between wars and territorial “proximity or contiguity.”² Similarly, Lewis F. Richardson also found a close correlation between shared frontiers and external wars.³ This varied behaviour of many countries creates a puzzle that I seek to solve; namely, why do countries pursue compromise in some disputes but use force in others? After all, although the majority of wars occur between neighbours, most of the time neighbours keep their disputes under control. Even then one can observe borders as thermometers of tension between states.⁴ An answer to the puzzle will help us understand when states resort to force as a tool of statecraft, as well as when states choose to cooperate. I will utilize a causal model, seeking to identify the main reasons and factors. I have chosen to use Russia as a case study because it contains a rich history of territorial disputes, concessions and use of force. The answer to the question behind Russia’s rationale to cooperate or use force in a territorial dispute will help us illuminate the trajectory of Russia’s behaviour as a great power. It will give us an insight into Russian foreign policy and whether it resembles a realist and a rationalist approach. A “medium-n” research design will be used, which refers to a number of cases between two and one hundred. It strives to preserve most of the valuable assets of the case-oriented approach while maximizing the

¹ K.J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989*, vol. 14 (Cambridge Univ Pr, 1991); J. Vasquez and M.T. Henehan, "Territorial Disputes and the Probability of War, 1816-1992," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 2 (2001); J.A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, vol. 27 (Cambridge Univ Pr, 1993).

² Paul F. Diehl, "Contiguity and Military Escalation in Major Power Rivalries, 1816–1980," *The Journal of Politics* 47, no. 04 (1985): 1206.

³ Lewis F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (New York: The Boxwood Press, 1960), 176-77.

⁴ C. Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," (2006): 99.

explanatory power of the relevant theory by selecting additional cases.⁵ The first chapter will provide a literature review on this research question. The second chapter will outline theories of cooperation and escalation, as well as provide details about the research design. Chapter three will start with empirical evidence, namely the case of Kuril Islands. Subsequent chapters will deal with other disputes, in the following order: The Sino-Soviet border dispute, the territorial dispute between Russia and the Baltic States, the Ruso-Ukrainian dispute over the Tuzla Island, the Soviet Union's dispute with Turkey and Iran, and finally, Russia and Kazakhstan's border demarcation. I conclude by assessing the empirical results which confirm evidence for my hypotheses in the majority of episodes presented here. These results also show implications for assessing Russia's future behaviour, which through the past evidence points towards greater likelihood that Russia will cooperate than use force in its territorial disputes.

This research contributes to the social science, first of all, because territorial disputes are an important source of conflict that can result in violence. Yet research on territorial disputes' impact on international relations has received little interest among international relations scholars because the majority of such conflicts tend to be localized.⁶ Yet the importance of territorial conflicts should not be minimized. After all, one reason why Hitler rose to power in Germany was due to the bitter feelings Germans felt for losing part of their territory to Poland. Also, Morris, in his study on the Kuril Islands, concluded that the reason why there has been no solution on the Kuril Island dispute is primarily because the international environment is not conducive to resolving the dispute. Neither side feels the pressure to cooperate.⁷ However, here we will gain a better understanding what a conducive international environment might look like, and why forceful seizure of land will likely see an escalation in conflict (depending on the internal and external dynamics of Russia). If the theories tested in this research prove to be applicable to Russia, then practitioners in the fields of international relations, politics, diplomacy and international business will be better equipped to understand the risks and opportunities that Russia, but also possibly other countries face. Finally, an indirect contribution of this research will be to understand whether Russia tends to be a more aggressive or a more cooperative power when it comes to dealing with its territorial disputes.

⁵ D. Levi-Faur, "Comparative Research Designs in the Study of Regulation: How to Increase the Number of Cases without Compromising the Strengths of Case-Oriented Analysis," *The Politics of Regulation* (2004).

⁶ T. Forsberg, "Theories on Territorial Disputes," *Contested Territory. Border Disputes at the Edge of the Former Soviet Empire. Studies in Communism in Transition* (1995): 24.

⁷ Gregory L. Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," (DTIC Document, 2002), Kindle location 1540-50.

2 Literature Review

Although there have been systematic studies dealing with questions such as why countries choose to cooperate, as well as use force in territorial disputes, Fravel's case study on China is a breakthrough because it utilizes several previous overarching theories to explore qualitative depth of a single case. He confirms that "although research on China's conflict behaviour highlights the role of territorial disputes, they have yet to be examined systematically."⁸ From his understanding, previous studies through quantitative analysis have identified important empirical regularities in how states behave in these disputes. The following three factors linked with the settlement and escalations of territorial disputes have been the most featured. First, both democracies and alliance partners in a territorial conflict against each other are more likely to compromise and often settle their disputes, and less likely to initiate military confrontations, than nondemocratic or nonaligned states in such conflicts. Second, all types of states are more likely to use force and less likely to cooperate in disputes over land highly valued for its strategic importance, economic resources, or symbolic significance. Third, militarily stronger states are usually more likely to use force to achieve their territorial goals than weaker ones which lack the means to resist or coerce their opponents.⁹

Building on the above findings, Fravel selects specific theories and approaches which deal with questions of territorial dispute in order to point out their weaknesses. One such theory is ideational theory by Tanisha Fazal, who identifies the emergence in the international system of a norm against territorial conquest from the 1920s; one that became entrenched after World War II.¹⁰ She suggests that the presence of a norm against conquest makes states more likely to offer concessions because changing a territorial status quo through force is viewed as increasingly illegitimate and thus more costly. Fazal's theory is very similar to the democratic peace theory, which also utilizes norms to explain cooperation in territorial disputes. It claims that democracies rarely, if

⁸ M.T. Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton Univ Pr, 2008), 4.

⁹ G. Chiozza and A. Choi, "Guess Who Did What," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47, no. 3 (2003); G. Goertz and P.F. Diehl, *Territorial Changes and International Conflict*, vol. 5 (Psychology Press, 1992); P.R. Hensel, "Contentious Issues and World Politics: The Management of Territorial Claims in the Americas, 1816–1992," *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2001); P.R. Hensel and S.M.L. Mitchell, "Issue Indivisibility and Territorial Claims*," *GeoJournal* 64, no. 4 (2005); P.K. Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict* (Univ of Michigan Pr, 1998); P.K. Huth and T.L. Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 82 (Cambridge Univ Pr, 2002); A.M. Kacowicz, *Peaceful Territorial Change* (Univ of South Carolina Pr, 1994); R. Mandel, "Roots of the Modern Interstate Border Dispute," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24, no. 3 (1980).

¹⁰ T.M. Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation* (Princeton Univ Pr, 2007); M.W. Zacher, "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001).

ever, go to war against each other, including over territory.¹¹ Doyle claims that free states and partly-free states account for 24-26% of international violence while non-free states account for 61%.¹² Democracies are thus assumed as more pacific and thus more likely to compromise in territorial disputes. Finally, liberals have also promoted theories of economic interdependence.¹³ Their rationale is that states with high or growing levels of economic interdependence may be more likely to compromise in their disputes in order to increase trade or investment which is being jeopardized by the presence of a dispute.¹⁴ Some call this process a “capitalist peace”.¹⁵ This approach details conditions under which the use of force will decline.

Fravel dismisses these arguments on the grounds that a consolidation of a norm against conquest fails to explain change in a state’s decisions once the norm becomes consolidated. Above theories also fail to explain why states would choose cooperation over delay, or especially why democracies/capitalist nations choose to cooperate or delay, or go to war with non-democracies. Interdependence can also be asymmetrical, and thus used as a leverage in bargaining. Thus, a state has motivations behind each decision, even if the state is heavily restrained. For these reasons theories of norms and economic interdependence are deemed inadequate to answer this research question.

Like idealist and normative approaches above, realists have proposed their own explanations as most feasible. Theories of offensive realism and power transition¹⁶ argue that states should be most likely to use force when they can seize disputed land at an acceptable cost or impose a favourable settlement on their adversary. That is, states will expand when they possess the capabilities to do so at an acceptable cost. Thus, states in territorial disputes will exploit advantages in relative capabilities to realize their territorial claims. The problem with this theory is that it is illogical for states to use violent means when they have an upper hand in negotiations due to their military power. If they can expect to win without using force, why would they expend the military option?¹⁷

However, there is also a defensive logic in using force, which is an approach utilizing a reputational logic. According to this logic, a state will use force in a territorial dispute not because of

¹¹ B.M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton Univ Pr, 1995).

¹² M.W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *The American Political Science Review* (1986): 1154.

¹³ B.A. Simmons, "Rules over Real Estate," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 6 (2005).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 844.

¹⁵ S.G. Brooks, *Producing Security: Multinational Corporations, Globalization, and the Changing Calculus of Conflict* (Princeton Univ Pr, 2007); E. Gartzke, "The Capitalist Peace," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007).

¹⁶ A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (Knopf New York, 1968).

¹⁷ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 35.

the importance of the land being contested but because of the need to invest in a general reputation for toughness.¹⁸ Barbara Walters explains this logic by stating that a state with multiple territorial conflicts has a strong incentive to build a reputation for toughness in order to dissuade opponents in other territorial conflicts from demanding concessions or strengthening their relative power.¹⁹ There is a second logic to this - a state might use force in a territorial dispute, not to strengthen its position in the dispute, but to signal resolve (or coerce its opponent) over other interests.²⁰ This implies looking at the broader dynamics of rivalry. The territorial dispute is then actually a proxy for the rivalry. According to Fravel, rivalry does distort his theoretical framework, so rivalry should be a conditional variable. Yet one should also expect a varied behaviour between rivals, from violence to status-quo, but sometimes even cooperation. Some applicability of Fravel's theoretical framework should thus exist among rivals as well.

Critiquing traditional realists' focus on external factors, Christensen presents neo-classical realism's logic of mobilization and diversion, which also deals with our research question. This logic examines domestic political incentives for escalating territorial disputes. As territorial disputes are among core interests of a state, they provide an issue over which leaders may rally a society to achieve other goals.²¹ Yet Fravel believes that this is unlikely to explain broad variations in the use of escalation strategies in territorial disputes as mobilization and diversion don't account for external factors, but only some domestic issues. He also states that rallying the public around the issue of a territorial dispute is dangerous, since the costs of failure are substantial.

While we are receiving the benefits of deepening general knowledge about territorial disputes, the studies to date lack a complete theoretical account of how states choose to pursue their territorial disputes. The above mentioned studies utilize mostly cross-sectional variation in the outcome of disputes, identifying those conflicts that are more likely to be settled or to experience the use of force. Thus, they focus on the structural conditions, ignoring choices leaders make within the same or similar structures. As such, although some might say that the value of land indeed varies across disputes, which explains variation, it is equally as valid to say that value of a land is relatively

¹⁸ P.K. Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment," *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (1997).

¹⁹ B.F. Walter, "Explaining the Intractability of Territorial Conflict1," *International Studies Review* 5, no. 4 (2003).

²⁰ P.F. Diehl and G. Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry* (Univ of Michigan Pr, 2001); K.A. Rasler and W.R. Thompson, "Contested Territory, Strategic Rivalries, and Conflict Escalation," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2006).

²¹ T.J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton Univ Pr, 1996); J.S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," *Handbook of war studies* (1989).

constant in particular disputes. Thus, the aforementioned literature fails to explain how states would behave over time. They fail to explain dramatic decisions of states to cooperate or escalate.²²

²² Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 11.

3 Theory

The purpose of this research is to test the theory of omnibalancing and the theory of preventive warfare beyond China. In order to do this, the two theories need to be explained, especially in the context of how Fravel applied them to the case of China. The theory of omnibalancing is based on Steven David's explanation of third world alignments.²³ It claims that national leaders will forge alliances to balance against the most pressing threat to state security, external or internal. The rationale is that territorial disputes carry some price or opportunity costs, such as not having diplomatic assistance, and when these costs outweigh the value of the land disputed, then a state needs to compromise in order to secure aid for a more pressing threat it faces. However, the balancing factor is irrelevant if a state is facing both a threat and a decline in its claim strength simultaneously. In such a case, the state will use force because there will be a perception that adversaries are seeking to profit from country's internal difficulties.²⁴ As for the preventive war theory, it assumes that a loss in a state's relative position in a territorial dispute explains decisions to escalate a territorial dispute, to halt decline in its influence.²⁵ The same theory implies that a state which faces a much stronger opponent is likely to use force when an adversary's power suddenly and temporarily weakens, creating a window of opportunity to seize the land and strengthen otherwise weak negotiating position.²⁶ Thus, the former theory focuses on cooperation while the latter theory focuses on escalation.

The theory of omnibalancing and the preventive war theory imply that there are three general strategies for national leaders to adopt in territorial disputes. Each strategy precedes the final outcome of a dispute, as the final outcome depends on the response of the opposing side. There is a 'delaying strategy' involving doing nothing, whereby states maintain their territorial claims through public declarations but neither offer concessions nor use force. There is a 'cooperation strategy' which excludes the threat or use of force and involves an offer either to transfer control of some or all of the contested land to the opposing side or to drop claims to land held by the other state. Finally, there is the 'escalation strategy' which involves the threat or use of force to seize land or to coerce an opponent in a territorial dispute.²⁷

As this approach is in line with the state-centric approach of Stephen Krasner, a neorealist, as well as classical neorealism which deals with domestic factors, one can further specify the research

²³ S.R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* (1991).

²⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict*.

question as follows: in an international system composed of sovereign states, why do states sometimes pursue compromise while at other times they escalate in solving territorial disputes?²⁸ Fravel exclaimed that “testing my theories in such a diverse set of disputes should improve its validity and potential application beyond China’s numerous conflicts”.²⁹ Our task is to do precisely that.

A state-centric approach means that the state is viewed as a unitary actor that exists apart from the society that it governs. The state seeks to maximise its autonomy to ensure both its survival abroad and its self-preservation at home.³⁰ To achieve its goals, the state must manage varied challenges, such as consolidation of its territory. A state-centric approach is the most appropriate approach because territorial disputes are a matter of core state interests, namely sovereignty and territorial integrity. As well, a state as an autonomous actor inhabits both international and domestic arenas, which suggests that there are a range of factors that can create incentives for cooperation or escalation in territorial disputes. This combination of state’s domestic interests in addition to its foreign interests permits a more nuanced understanding of the sources and degree of state power in international relations, as scholars in the rationalist, as well as classical and neoclassical realist traditions have recognized.³¹ Overall, this means that I am shifting the analytical focus from dispute outcomes to individual state decisions, which are based on the perceptions of the leadership. Even Brad Williams, who focused on role of subnational units in territorial disputes, stated “it is central governments that ultimately make decisions regarding national border demarcation”.³² However, the state-centric approach does not mean that the wider context becomes less important. In fact, a state has to make many policy decisions by taking into account the wider context, and this will especially become visible with the territorial disputes studied here.

²⁸ Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003).

²⁹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 40.

³⁰ M. Mastanduno, D.A. Lake, and G.J. Ikenberry, "Toward a Realist Theory of State Action," *International Studies Quarterly* (1989).

³¹ Morgenthau Hans J, "Politics among Nations," (Scientific Book Agency, 1966); R.L. Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," *Progress in international relations theory Appraising the field* (2003).

³² Brad Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 15.

4 Methodology

4.1 Hypotheses

In order to accommodate the theory of omnibalancing and theory of preventive war into a research design, I have to state clear hypotheses implied by each theory. The first hypothesis is important because it defines the sensitivity of a state to changes in its claim strength:

H1: A state is more likely to threaten or use force over more valuable land, while it is more likely to compromise over less valuable land.

However, from the theory of omnibalancing, I can assume the following hypothesis:

H2: A state is more likely to compromise when it faces either internal or external threats to its security, but it is more likely to threaten or use force if a threat coincides with a decline in its claim strength.

From the theory of preventive war, I assume the following hypothesis:

H3: A state is more likely to threaten or use force when its relative position in a dispute is declining, yet if a state has a weak claim already and its relative position suddenly and temporarily improves, it is also more likely to use force.

There are namely three scope conditions for these two theories: first, a state will choose to cooperate only if an opponent has an ability to provide military, economic, or diplomatic support. If the opponent state cannot provide these, giving it territorial concessions for free is illogical. Second, a state facing a relative decline or a temporary opportunity must possess a viable military option to either seize at least some of the disputed territory it contests or attack its opponent's forces in the territory that the latter controls.

4.2 Operationalization of Variables/Concepts

Perhaps the most important concept is a territorial dispute. It is to be defined as a conflicting claim by two or more states over the ownership of the same piece of land. The definition includes offshore islands but excludes disputes over maritime rights, such as exclusive economic zones.³³ Next, in line with the research question, definitions of status-quo and revisionist foreign policies are necessary. In relation to territorial disputes, status-quo policy involves doing nothing, maintaining a

³³ Hensel, "Contentious Issues and World Politics: The Management of Territorial Claims in the Americas, 1816–1992," 90; Huth and Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, 298.

territorial claim through public declarations but neither offering concessions, nor threats, or use of force. Thus, this is similar to a null hypothesis, whereby as long as there are no concessions or use of force, status-quo policy is in place. This is why status-quo policy will not be analyzed, as it is the default option of any government coming into power. The indicators of status-quo are the absence of cooperation or escalation policy. A cooperation strategy (1) excludes the threat or use of force and (2) includes an offer either to transfer control of some or all of the contested land to the opposing side or (3) it refers to a drop of a claim to land held by the other state. Such compromise must (4) precede the final settlement of a dispute in a bilateral treaty or agreement, even in those settlements where one state drops its entire claim. As for the escalation strategy, it involves (1) the threat or (2) use of force to seize the land or (3) to coerce an opponent in a territorial dispute.³⁴ It is also worth mentioning what preventive war means. It is defined as “a war fought now in order to avoid the risks of war under worsening circumstances later.”³⁵

First variable that shapes the decisions to cooperate or escalate in a territorial dispute is the underlying value or salience of the contested land. Salience plays a critical role in determining the stakes in any territorial conflict and thus the odds that a state will either pursue compromise or threaten or use force. The lower the value of the land being disputed, the more likely a state will consider territorial concessions because it has less to lose through compromise. By contrasting logic, the higher the value of the land at stake, the more likely a state will consider escalation because it has more to lose through an unfavourable settlement of the dispute. This variable should be mostly constant in any particular conflict as the value of the land cannot easily change.³⁶ There can be several dimensions of the value of the land: (1) symbolic (indicators would be a number of cultural/heritage sites, frequency of emphasis on this land in history books, presence of the land in popular tales); (2) economic (indicators would be access to an important trading routes such as rivers or ports, presence of valuable raw resources; how much land is arable; and energy potential of the land); and (3) military (does the land provide a natural barrier, does the land decrease the line of defence, does the land offer natural camouflage such as forests and mountains).

A second variable is ‘claim strength’, defined as bargaining power in the conflict or the ability of each side to control the land that it contests. It also plays a role in decisions to cooperate or escalate. States with strong claims will be more likely to compromise than those with weak claims. A strong-claim state can hope to use its power at the negotiating table to achieve a favourable

³⁴ Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict*.

³⁵ J.S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* (1987); S. Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Cornell Univ Pr, 1999); D.C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Cornell Univ Pr, 2000).

³⁶ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 37.

outcome and control over the land under dispute. A state with a weak claim will wait for its relative position to improve in order to achieve a more favourable settlement. I assume that 'claim strength' can shift over time, and thus create different incentives to cooperate or escalate in specific conflicts. A state whose bargaining power is increasing steadily at its opponent's expense will be less likely to use force because it is even more optimistic about achieving a favourable settlement and thus control over disputed land. By contrast, a state whose position in a dispute is deteriorating relative to its opponent will be more likely to use force to arrest its decline. The greater the rate of decline, the more likely a state will threaten or even use force to defend its claim. Claim strength can have several dimensions: (1) legal and political strength (examples of indicators are: support from international arbiters, loyalty of the citizens in the disputed territory), (2) economic strength (example of indicators: state investment, such infrastructure, in the disputed territory compared to the other disputant(s)), and finally (3) military strength (examples of indicators: increased troop strength; military fortifications or set up positions nearby; new military capabilities in the area).

A third variable is the overall security environment in which a state maintains territorial claims against another state. There are external and internal threats. In the absence of both internal and external threats to its security, a state has little reason to pursue cooperation in a dispute and would be expected to delay a settlement instead. As a state's security environment worsens, however, it should be more willing to pursue compromise to garner military, economic, or diplomatic aid to counter the specific threat that it faces. A security environment is the broadest concept in terms of dimensions and indicators. As mentioned, an external threat is one type of a security problem. It can have the following dimensions, (1) a threat from the strongest states in the system, stemming from an imbalance of power. This is based on structural realist assumptions.³⁷ The logic is that a state declining in power relative to other states will pursue compromise to maintain its influence and arrest its decline. Also, a state rising in power relative to others may offer concessions to prevent the formation of a counter-balancing coalition by stronger states. A second dimension (2) is a competition with a specific state. The logic of compromise in this context draws on balance of threat theory and the literature on rivalries.³⁸ The threat here arises with the initiation or intensification of security competition with a specific country. Again, an important emphasis is that if a state encounters both a decline in its claim strength in a dispute and other threats in its security

³⁷ Kenneth Waltz, "Theory of International Politics," *Reading, Addison Wesley* (1979).

³⁸ Diehl and Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry*; S.M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Cornell Univ Pr, 1987).

environment, it may exaggerate the stakes in the conflict and be even more willing to use force than if it was just managing the consequences of relative decline.³⁹

Both types of external threats can have the following dimensions: political security (example indicators would be answers to the following questions: Is the regime about to be overthrown or removed by an external force? Is another state's rise threatening power balance in the world?⁴⁰); economic security (example indicators would be affirmative answers to these questions: Is the state facing an economic collapse? Is another state's rise in economic power threatening? Are economic sanctions threatened or being implemented?); military security (example indicators would be answers to the following questions: Are any countries threatening war or sabotage? Is there a presence of uninvited foreign military units in the country or a friendly country? Are other threatening states performing any military actions to which the state has objected on security grounds?) As for scope conditions, security goals can be stated as follows, and thus only states which can offer one of the following are considered for cooperation: (1) direct assistance or an alliance that strengthens its military power and diplomatic influence; (2) to deny potential allies to an adversary or rival by improving ties with third parties; or (3) to facilitate internal balancing through increased bilateral trade or the marshaling of resources for defense.

There are also internal threats, defined as 'threats to regime security, which itself is defined as the strength, stability, and legitimacy of a state's core political institutions'.⁴¹ The dimensions are as follows: political security (indicator example would be the question is the regime threatened to be overthrown or removed by domestic actors⁴²); economic security (example indicators would be affirmative answers to these questions: Is the state facing an economic collapse? Is the economy largely benefitting few individuals at the expense of others?); military security (For example, is there a presence of unloyal military units in the country?) States pursuing internal security seek the following types of support from neighbours: (1) direct assistance in countering internal threats, such as denying material support to opposition groups; (2) indirect aid in marshalling of resources for domestic policy priorities, not external defense; or (3) bolstering international recognition of the regime, leveraging the status-quo bias within international society to delegitimize domestic challengers.⁴³

³⁹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*.

⁴⁰ Waltz, "Theory of International Politics."

⁴¹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 20.

⁴² M. Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Lynne Rienner Boulder, CO, 1995).

⁴³ Mastanduno, Lake, and Ikenberry, "Toward a Realist Theory of State Action."

Combined together, these variables outline the conditions under which states will most likely shift from a strategy of delaying settlement of a dispute, adopting strategies of either cooperation or escalation. Again, a state is most likely to pursue cooperation in disputes over less salient land, while its claim strength is stable, strong, or strengthening, or when security threats arise abroad or at home that can be countered by improving ties with a territorial adversary. A state is more likely to pursue escalation in disputes over more salient land, while its relative position in the dispute is declining or, when it simultaneously faces declining relative position and a security threat. However, a state will also use force as an opportunity to gain leverage while a stronger opponent has a temporarily weaker position. By implication, then, a state is most likely to delay in its most important disputes, while its claim strength is stable, strong, or strengthening, and it faces a benign security environment abroad and at home.⁴⁴

4.3 Case Selection

As was previously stated, many of the previous studies have dealt with structural conditions, which focus on the arrangement of relations between states, whether it is balance of power or democracy, while lacking explanations of strategies within structures. Thus, to minimize the effect of structural conditions, I have selected a single case of Russia, which contains territorial disputes which themselves contain both strategies of cooperation and escalation. Choosing Russia controls for factors which may explain interstate differences, such as political culture, but it also reduces the effects of other confounding variables. For example, Russia has a history as a great power. It is multiethnic and has a long tradition of territorial problems. It also used to be an ideological superpower. Many of these points are similar to China, which also has a history as a great power, multiethnic composition and a long tradition of territorial problems. Its ideology used to be in line with the Soviet Union's. For these reasons we can be sure that any potential failure to apply the theory of omnibalancing and the theory of preventive warfare will not be due to confounding variables (for example, if I had chosen Pakistan, and my hypotheses failed, one could claim that this is because Pakistan is/has been an Islamic state, a military regime, or such). This may make findings of this research less generalizable to the whole world, but then again, if the theory of omnibalancing and the theory of preventive warfare pass the test in the Soviet Union/Russia, then one can be sure that these theories apply at least to states with above characteristics. Any future research will then either a) attempt to generalize by testing less-likely cases to see if the above characteristics make any difference in results; b) attempt to explain deviant cases among other similar countries, if there is a belief that deviant cases exist. Finally, Russia is intrinsically rich as a state that had a large portion of

⁴⁴ Frelv, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*.

its borders under dispute. For instance, at the beginning of 1991, nearly a quarter of Russia's 61,000 kilometers of border was not formally recognized and specified in any international treaties.⁴⁵

Case study on Russia has been broken down as follows. I have followed Van Evera's suggestion of using *congruence procedure* for theory testing. First, this means a comparison of a case to 'typical' or 'expected values'. This is what Van Evera calls 'congruence procedure type 1: comparison to typical values.'⁴⁶ I have used values expected from the hypotheses. Variation in land value (h1) posits that Russia should more often compromise on low-value territory, while escalate on high-value territory. This is why I have included disputes such as the Estonian-Russian border conflict, but also the Kuril Islands. Then for the theory of omnibalancing, (h2) I present cases with high internal and/or external threats to Russia's security, where the expectation is an extreme outcome, namely, a lot of compromise. However, when a threat coincides with a losing territorial claim, opposite should be true, which is tested here on Russia during its early 1990s period. For the theory of preventive warfare, (h3) I present cases of Russian strong decline in a relative position in a dispute, where the expected outcome is use of force. As well, this study also includes one case, Kuril Islands dispute, where a state with a very weak claim suddenly improved its relative position, but only temporarily. Here, the expected outcome is also use of force. Naturally, Russia's rich history in the past century or so gives us variation on almost all the variables, for example, situations when Russia faced powerful threats and situations when Russia faced minor threats, and so on. Second, in addition to comparing Russia's variation to theoretical predictions, in this study I used 'congruence procedure type 2: Multiple-within case comparisons', which essentially means looking at one case though different time periods, to see if values covary in accordance to our predictions. Overall, the case of Russia was selected based on within-case variance and data richness.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

Since this research is from a state-centric view emphasizing perceptions of the national leadership and its interests, the primary evidence has been sought in government documents, agreements, treaties and statements of leaders to determine the reasoning behind each decision of cooperation or escalation. The content, namely, the economic, security and political environment during the episodes of cooperation and escalation, was looked at as it was perceived by the leadership and sources close to it. Many secondary sources were sought as well, especially media articles covering important events in relation to each dispute, and studies which have dealt with

⁴⁵ Forced Migration Project, "Estonia and Latvia: Citizenship, Language and Conflict Prevention," (New York: Open Society Institute, 1997), 18.

⁴⁶ S. Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Cornell Univ Pr, 1997), 59.

Russian territorial disputes were also useful. A lot of credits should go to the glasnost period when openness and transparency led to a discovery of many important sources in the Soviet archives.

To clarify which data have been sought for which particular concepts, the following points are noteworthy. Treaties and agreements have been an important source for finding evidence on cooperation. Escalation and use of force is usually well-recorded in history books and media at the time; however, a few witnesses through public statements have filled in information when data was controversial or lacking. Data for the first variable (value of the land) stemmed from three sources. First, for symbolic value, I have utilized cultural, religious and educational books, popular tales, as well as official data on heritage sites. Second, for the economic value of the land, geological surveys were useful, official publications on development projects, as well as official documents on trading routes and similar issues. Third, for the military value, military publications or statements were relevant when mentioning the disputed territory. As for the second variable, claim strength, since it also contains political/symbolic, economic and military types of strength, a similar approach has been used, namely by looking at official statements for the political/symbolic strength; governmental, geological and business ventures and publications for the economic strength; and military publications, statements and interviews for the military strength. Interviews have been utilized whenever there was some missing or controversial data. As for the third variable, security environment, I mentioned that it is divided into external and internal components. Looking for external and internal threats, however, can seem to be difficult given many different perceptions of what constitutes a threat. However, data for threats has only been marked as relevant if it came from prominent political or societal figures, found strictly in the primary oral and written evidence of the leadership or persons influential to it. Thus, any threat not perceived as such by the leadership was not relevant, as it is the leadership which has the ultimate say over interests of the state. It is true that a leadership may downplay or exaggerate a particular threat, and for this reason it was necessary to verify threats by looking at actions of the governments in response to particular situations: legislative documents, the budget, media, military movement and interviews. The time period of all the data for this study begins with the Bolshevik revolution until today.

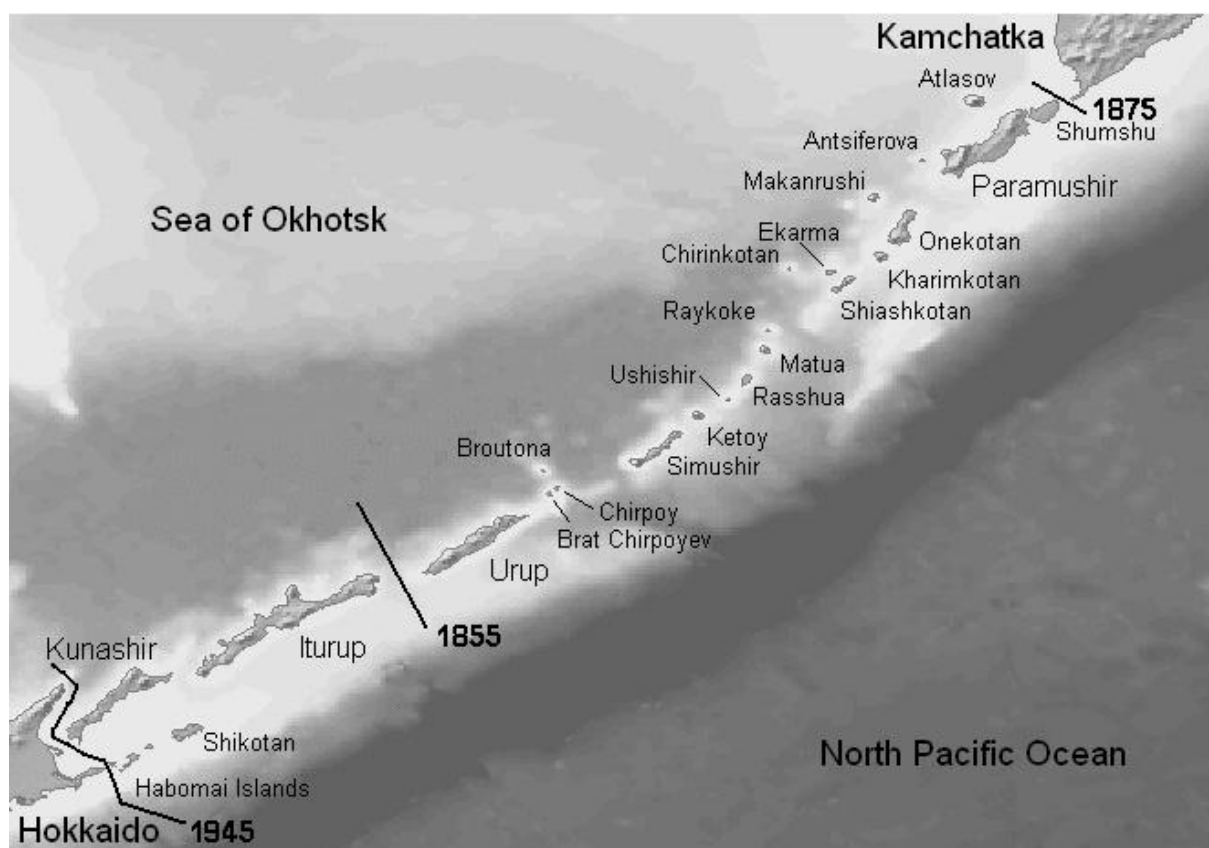
4.5 Scope and Limitations

There are certain phenomena which lie beyond the scope of this research. The first limitation is that I do not identify sources of delaying strategy (status-quo) in territorial disputes. It is the least costly and most used strategy, as it carries no costs, especially if the opponent is also using the same strategy; however, this research does not seek to explain why and when states might adopt this strategy. This is due to material and spatial limitations of a project of this size. I assume it is when

costs to a cooperation or escalation policy outweigh the benefits. As such, it is the default option for not using cooperation or escalation, and the theory based here starts from this assumption. A second phenomenon beyond the scope of this essay is the initiation of territorial disputes in the first place.⁴⁷ This research seeks to understand actions of states once these disputes already exist, not why or when they are created. The following chapters assess the empirical evidence to test the theory by dissecting each case in two ways. First, I will look to see whether Russia's behaviour across each of its disputes is consistent with the mechanisms of the theory. That is, is variation of behaviour consistent with the theory? Second, I will analyze what led the Russian leadership to change from delaying strategy to escalation or cooperation.

⁴⁷ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 15.

5 The Kuril Islands Dispute



Territorial dispute over Kuril Islands is an important case within Russia's history because it contains an unresolved outcome, one which persisted for over 100 years. For some, it is mysterious that even no peace treaty has been signed between Russia and Japan. It is worth glancing over history of this territory prior to 1905, when I start the analysis. In early 1800's, the area around Kuril Islands were under a sort of condominium under joint Russo-Japanese sovereignty. In 1855, Treaty of Shimoda was signed to divide Kuril Islands in such a way that four southernmost islands in the Kuril chain were acknowledged to belong to Japan, while Urup and other islands north of it belonged to Russia. Sakhalin Island was not discussed.⁴⁸ However, since Russians, Japanese and Ainu lived on Sakhalin side by side, there was constant conflict between these groups, even violence, but a legal limbo prevented proper handling of these issues. This led to the Treaty of St. Petersburg in 1875,

⁴⁸ Hiroshi Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, trans. Mark Ealey (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 27; *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, (Hephaestus Books, 2011), 2.

giving Russia sovereignty over Sakhalin in exchange for giving the entire Kurile Islands chain to Japan.⁴⁹

5.1 Value of the Land

The value of Kuril Islands to Russia can be taken from several statements. First is the strategic value of the islands. One can observe the strategic value in comments made by Anastas Mikoyan, then first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers (highest-ranking Soviet official to visit Japan). During his stay in Japan in 1961 and 1964, he stated the following, “most of the Soviet Union is frozen, so each acre of Japanese land is worth one hundred acres of Soviet soil....Etorofu and Kunashiri may only be small islands, but they are the gateway to Kamchatka and cannot be abandoned.”⁵⁰ Value of Kuril Islands increased immensely after Sea of Okhotsk became strategically important location for the Soviet Union to station submarines. Namely, in 1978, Soviet Union employed a “bastion strategy” of transforming the Sea of Okhotsk into a “sanctuary” for ballistic-missile firing nuclear submarines of the Soviet Pacific Fleet.⁵¹ The whole area very quickly received sonar barriers, radars, stockpiled mines and depth-charges, a naval base, and even an airfield. By the start of 1990s, however, the value of the area dropped as submarine-launched missiles were able to reach any target in North America from the Barents Sea, reducing the need for a “sanctuary”.⁵² Thus, the Sea of Okhotsk reverted to its pre-1978 low strategic status.⁵³

Second is the economic value of the islands, which is mediocre. They have no petroleum potential, and whatever deposits of tin, zinc, lead, nickel, sulphur and metallic sulphides is present, it would be marginal to Russia’s existing mineral resources, especially due to the infrastructure that would need to be put in place.⁵⁴ Deposits of titanium, magnetite, nickel, copper, chromium, vanadium and niobium are slightly more valuable, yet the highest economic value is seen in fishing potentials. It is said to be one the world’s three great fishing grounds, containing the spawning grounds for several commercially viable fish species.⁵⁵ According to calculations by the Russian State Fisheries Committee, the fishing industry in the Russian Far East stands to lose US\$1-2 billion a year if

⁴⁹ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, xxiv.

⁵⁰ , *Asahi Shimbun* May 27, 1964.

⁵¹ Geoffrey Jukes, *Russia's Military and the Northern Territories Issue* (Canberra: working paper no. 277 of Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1993), 7; Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 22.

⁵² Jukes, *Russia's Military and the Northern Territories Issue*.

⁵³ Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 645-55.

⁵⁴ Tsuneo Akaha and Takashi Murakami, "Soviet/Russian-Japanese Economic Relations," in *Russia and Japan: An Unresolved Dilemma between Distant Neighbours*, ed. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, Jonathon Haslam, and A.C. Kuchins (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 168-9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 168-9; Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 721-42.

the South Kuril Islands are transferred to Japan.⁵⁶ Lastly, the islands also possibly have oil and gas reserves.⁵⁷

Finally, there is a symbolic value attached to the islands. The four islands are considered a reward after Russia's bloody struggle with Japan and thus many political figures in Russia consider it a 'sacred territory', such as Dmitrii Rogozin, Igor Farkhutdinov, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy or Valentin Fedorov.⁵⁸ In fact, the symbolic value of the islands matters the most to the local Russian residents, who believe that this was the land won with the blood of Russian soldiers.⁵⁹ According to 1991 survey in Sakhalin oblast (region) of Russia, only 2.7 percent of respondents favoured to return the islands to Japan.⁶⁰ They believed that islands were an inalienable part of the motherland and that the entire Kuril archipelago was discovered, settled and developed by Russians. Especially after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians were most vehemently opposed to giving up Kuril Islands. "The Kurils were the last straw for Russians, whose national pride was already wounded. With the Kurils they were compensating for what they had lost elsewhere – getting their emotional revenge for their national humiliation."⁶¹ In fact, symbolic value of the Kuril Islands has been emphasized as being the most important factor in the dispute because the public opinion is strongly against giving up these islands. The Russian leadership must obey rising nationalist feelings of the public, whose feelings have been hurt by Soviet Union's loss of territory. In the media, any act of compromise is equivalent to treason.⁶²

5.2 Tracing the Negotiations

1904-5 is the period when cooperative relationship over Kuril Islands between Russia and Japan ended. At this time, Japan launched an attack against Russia due to failure of two sides to peacefully resolve problems related to Manchuria and Korea, territories which Russia occupied but Japan desired. This clash of interests, and the subsequent Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 led to war.⁶³ Japanese forces have dealt humiliating defeats for the Russian forces, but since both sides

⁵⁶ Konstantin Sarkisov, "The Northern Territories Issue after Yeltsin's Reelection," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 5, no. 4 (1997): 359.

⁵⁷ "Russian President Visits Disputed Kuril Islands," (1 November 2010), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11663241>.

⁵⁸ , *Nezavisimaya gazeta* November 16, 2004; Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 408-19.

⁵⁹ Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 125-6.

⁶⁰ Itahashi Masaki, "Saharin-Karafuto Shi Kenkyu Ni Tsuite: Ryodo Mondai O Chushin Ni," in *Saharinshu No Sogu Kenkyu*, ed. Naoto Takeda (Dai-issu, Sapporo: Aiwado, 1999), 18.

⁶¹ Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova, *Zhirinovskiy: Russian Fascism and the Making of a Dictator*, trans. C. A. Fitzpatrick (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), 113.

⁶² Richard Weitz, "Why Russia Is Challenging Japan over Kurils," *World Politics Review* (1 Mar 2011): 1-2; Vasily Bubnov, "George Bush 'Gives' the Kuril Islands to Japan," *Pravda* 28 February 2002.

⁶³ I.H. Nish and A.H. Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Longman, 1985).

were facing exhaustion, they agreed for the United States to mediate a peace agreement.⁶⁴ Peace conference was held in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where the Treaty of Portsmouth was concluded on September 5, 1905. Russia was to withdraw her troops from Manchuria and Korea, as well as cede southern part of Sakhalin Island to Japan, but would not be required to pay any indemnity.⁶⁵ Treaty of Portsmouth is considered legal as both sides signed it and agreed to its conditions.

When Russia faced the October revolution of 1917, which brought tsarism to an end, establishing a Soviet administration, many Western powers, plus Japan, intervened to extend their interests in Russia. Japan landed a military force in the area near Vladivostok and occupied most of the trans-Siberian railway east of Lake Baikal.⁶⁶ This led to the creation of a Far Eastern Republic, to serve as a buffer zone between the Soviet state and Japan. It was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1922 after the last Japanese troops left Vladivostok. During this period, in 1920 precisely, Bolshevik partisans clashed with Japanese troops in Nikolaevsk, near the mouth of the Amur River, where partisans executed 384 civilians and 351 soldiers as a punishment of Japan's meddling in Russia's internal affairs.⁶⁷ Out of revenge, Japan occupied northern part of Sakhalin Island and kept troops there until 1925.

Soon after, Japan faced a clash of interests with United States, partially due to political and economic challenge Americans posed in East Asia, therefore Japan desired to establish a friendly relationship with the Soviet Russia, although 'painted red' due to previous bloodshed.⁶⁸ Since the Soviet Union needed to find international allies as well, it agreed to sign the Convention Embodying the basic Rules of the Relations Between Japan and the USSR and Japan in 1925. It is also known as the Peking Convention or the Japanese-Soviet Basic Treaty.⁶⁹ Under Article 2, the Soviet Union recognized the legal validity of the Treaty of Portsmouth, namely, that Southern Sakhalin was ceded to Japan. However, this relative calm lasted only until 1938. By that time, Japan had already established a puppet state in Manchuria (Manchukuo) and concluded Anti-Comintern Pact (1936).⁷⁰

⁶⁴ J.A. White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (Princeton University Press Princeton, NJ, 1964), 310-29.

⁶⁵ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 174-5.

⁶⁶ James W. Morley, *The Japanese Thrust into Siberia, 1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

⁶⁷ George A. Lensen, *Japanese Recognition of the Ussr: Soviet-Japanese Relations, 1921-1930* (Tallahassee, FL: Diplomatic Press, 1970), 131.

⁶⁸ George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West under Lening and Stalin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 33-48.

⁶⁹ Lensen, *Japanese Recognition of the Ussr: Soviet-Japanese Relations, 1921-1930*, 177.

⁷⁰ Leonid N. Kutakov, *Japanese Foreign Policy on the Eve of the Pacific War: A Soviet View* (Tallahassee, FL: Diplomatic Press, 1972), 1-68.

This led to full scale border clashes, such as Changkufeng incident and the attempted Japanese invasion of Mongolia, where Soviets decisively humiliated the Japanese battle after battle.⁷¹

Just as World War II was unfolding, relations between major powers in the world became quite complex. Essentially, even though the Soviet Union and Japan just experienced brief, but full-scale clashes, Japan in 1940 sought a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, in order for Japan to concentrate its forces against China. However, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov said that such a pact was only possible if Japan returned "Southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands".⁷² Otherwise, the Soviets would only agree to a neutrality pact. Japanese rejected the Soviet conditionality, so on April 12th of 1940, Stalin agreed only on a neutrality pact.⁷³ However, as World War II proceeded and allies became more determined to defeat Japan, they issued the Cairo Declaration in November of 1943, which declares that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has taken by violence and greed.⁷⁴ Russians assumed that this also applied to previous treaties in which Japan had the upper hand as the victor in forcing Russians to secede their territory.

As the World War II was coming to a close, the Soviet Union with its Western allies organized the secret Yalta Conference in February of 1945 on how to proceed with the war, where Stalin expressed his desire to return Sakhalin and Kuril Islands to the Soviet Union by attacking Japan. Roosevelt intended to grant this wish to the Soviet Union as a reward for entering the war against Japanese.⁷⁵ Yalta Agreement was signed and it stated under Article 3 that Sakhalin and Kuril Islands shall be returned to the Soviet Union. Thus, in August of 1945 Soviet Union declared war on Japan and quite easily seized Kuril Islands while Japan faced exhaustion from its war with the United States. Russia in the process did violate the timing of end of the neutrality pact⁷⁶, however, legitimacy of this neutrality pact during the war was often scrutinized rhetorically, even by the Japanese.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Potsdam Declaration ended the war, officially carrying out terms of the Cairo Declaration stated above.⁷⁸ President Truman also lived up to the Yalta agreement by allowing the Soviet Union to occupy Kuril Islands, but this was not officially stated in the Potsdam Declaration.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 441-52.

⁷² Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 39.

⁷³ George A. Lensen, *The Strange Neutrality: Soviet-Japanese Relations During the Second World War, 1941–1945* (Tallahassee, FL: Diplomatic Press, 1972), 277-87.

⁷⁴ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 42.

⁷⁵ Andrei A. Gromyko, "Pamiatnoe," (Moscow: Politizdat, 1988), 189.

⁷⁶ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 48; Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 22.

⁷⁷ L.N. Kutakov, "Istoriia Sovetsko-Iaponskikh Diplomaticheskikh Otnoshenii," (IMO, 1962), 305; Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 452-63.

⁷⁸ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 46.

⁷⁹ *Stalin's Correspondence with Roosevelt and Truman 1941-1945*, (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), 266-7.

After the war, Stalin made a speech stating that the occupation of Kuril Islands was an opportunity for Russia to be avenged for defeat in the Russo-Japanese War.⁸⁰ Later on, Soviet authorities issued decrees unilaterally integrating all the occupied islands into the Soviet Union.⁸¹

Virtually, for ten years after WWII, the Soviet-Japanese relations did not exist and legally they were still 'at war'. Even their interpretation of legal historical documents did not match, with each side stating that international agreements supported their claim while accusing the opponent of violating international legal obligations.⁸² In 1951, Soviet Union missed a chance to sign a peace treaty with Japan at San Francisco Peace Conference, primarily because the treaty stated that Japan was forced to relinquish the Kuril Islands, but it did not specify to which country the territory was to be relinquished. American objections to clearly specify that the Soviet Union was the sovereign over this territory made Soviets abstain from signing, which in retrospect was a bad diplomatic move by Soviets as it led to a legal ambiguity of the status of Kuril Islands.⁸³

In 1955, the Soviet Union and Japan normalized their relations after holding the 'London Talks', but they stalled over the territorial issue. More precisely, the Soviets were prepared to return Habomai and Shikotan islands, but the Japanese demanded the return of all four islands because Americans leveraged the Japanese not to accept only two.⁸⁴ This did not prevent further diplomatic initiatives to normalize relations between the two states, leading to the Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration, signed in Moscow in 1956. It was here that the Japanese agreed to remove the clause which stated that the two sides had a territorial question to resolve.⁸⁵ This was a Japanese blunder, as after that, Soviets insisted that there was no territorial issue to discuss. The only reference to the Kuril Islands was a statement that only after a peace treaty was signed the Soviet Union would hand over Habomai and Shikotan Islands.⁸⁶ Since the peace treaty never materialized, all up to the 1970s Japan's relationship with the Soviet Union was rather stagnant. Even worse, in late 1970s the Soviet

⁸⁰ V. N. Berezin, *Kurs Na Dobrososedstvo I Sotrudnichestvo I Ego Protivniki: Iz Istorii Normalizatsii Otnoshenii Ssr C Poslevonnoi Iaponiei* [Course for Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation and Its Opponents: From the History of Normalization of Ussr's Relations with Postwar Japan] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1977), 5.

⁸¹ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 51-2.

⁸² Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 133-50.

⁸³ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 60-61; *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 1.

⁸⁴ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 70; *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 5; Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 594-604.

⁸⁵ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 73.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

Union committed itself to increase its military capabilities and was in no mood to diplomatically engage Japan. As a matter of fact, in 1978-9, the Soviet Union stationed troops on Kunashiri, Etorofu, and Shikotan, thus increasing its claim over the islands, allegedly in response to a perceived encirclement by the US, China and Japan.⁸⁷ Soviet actions in Afghanistan did not help either as Japan reacted by following the American lead in imposing sanctions on the Soviet Union and holding joint military maneuvers.⁸⁸ In 1981 Japan actually escalated its claim over the four southern islands by designating a "Northern Territories Day", and sending its Prime Minister Suzuki to the border area.⁸⁹ Soviets were outraged and continued to militarize the islands until Gorbachev's rule.

Gorbachev period in the Soviet history was a positive factor for Soviet-Japanese relations, but not necessarily for the territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands. For example, Gorbachev acknowledged that a territorial dispute existed, and he also cancelled Khrushchev's 1960 memorandum⁹⁰, among many other positive measures such as cultural exchanges and signing of the Japan-Soviet Joint Communiqué. Yet for Japanese it was shocking that Gorbachev did not accept the 1956 Joint Declaration in its entirety.⁹¹ In other words, for Japanese he was not much better than Khrushchev.

Yeltsin's rule brought the two sides very close to a resolution of the dispute. At first, in 1990, Yeltsin started off with a desire to acknowledge and resolve the territorial dispute.⁹² Only shortly after he advocated that Gorbachev should not compromise on the issue.⁹³ However, in 1991 after attempted coup d'état, Yeltsin, as a president of the Russian Federation, immediately approached Japan by sending a letter that a peace treaty and the territorial dispute must be settled as soon as possible.⁹⁴ Two months later he wrote a similar letter to the Russian people, supported by his foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.⁹⁵ Japan responded favourably by offering a very flexible approach toward

⁸⁷ Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 22.

⁸⁸ , *Izvestiia* February 24, 1980.

⁸⁹ J. Ferguson and J.P. Ferguson, *Japanese-Russian Relations, 1907-2007*, vol. 19 (Psychology Press, 2008), 169.

⁹⁰ Aleksandr N. Panov, *Diplomaticheskia Sluzhba Iaponii I Evoliutsiia Iapono-Sovetskikh I Iapono-Rossiiskikh Otnosheniiv V Poslevoennyi Period (1945-1955gg): Uchebnoe Posobie [Diplomatic Service of Japan and Evolution of Japanese-Soviet and Japanese-Russian Relations in the Postwar Period (1945-1955)]* (Moscow: Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi institut mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii ministerstva inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1995), 78.

⁹¹ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 99.

⁹² M. K. Gorshkov and V. V. Zhuravlev, *Kurily: Ostrova V Okeane Problem [Kuriles: Island of Problem in the Ocean]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998), 317-22; 64-66; Brad Williams, "Russia and the Northern Territories," *Russian and Euro-Asian Bulletin* 7, no. 8 (1998): 2.

⁹³ Igor A. Latyshev, *Pokyslenie Na Kurily [Encroachment into the Kuriles]* (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskaia Assotsiatsiia "Pressa", 1992), 160.

⁹⁴ , *Sankei Shimbun (evening edition)* September 10, 1991.

⁹⁵ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 105; Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, "Why Did Russia and Japan Fail to Achieve Rapprochement?," in *Japan and Russia: The Tortuous Path to Normalization, 1949-1999*, ed. Gilbert Rozman (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 183.

settling the territorial dispute. Yeltsin promised to visit Japan, but he kept delaying and cancelling his trip until his power base became too eroded by the nationalist and conservative forces, and therefore his confidence that he could solve this problem.⁹⁶ But he finally did visit Japan in October of 1993 (while he ordered tanks to shell the parliament at home) where he made progress on the territorial issue by acknowledging it, mentioning four islands under dispute instead of two (Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu), accepting the 1956 Joint Declaration of Japan in its entirety (thus confirming that Russia will hand over Habomai and Shikotan), and accepting all treaties and agreements as relevant for solving the problem.⁹⁷ This became known as the Tokyo Declaration.

The problem for Japan is that although Yeltsin basically made two steps forward (out of three), he later made comments indicating that a lot more work was needed before settling the territorial issue. This irritated the Japanese but they still sought to improve relations with Russia, especially economically.⁹⁸ This led to an agreement of cooperation in areas of fishing, as well as granting of visa-free travel to Japanese families visiting the Kuril Islands. Two other agreements were also achieved during various visits in 1997 and 1998. First was an agreement to conclude a peace treaty by the year 2000. Second was the Hashimoto-Yeltsin Plan, which planned for Japan to provide economic assistance to Russia. It led to even further agreements such as during the Kawana Summit. In November of 1998 an additional agreement was reached to reaffirm previous agreements. It was called Moscow Declaration to Build a Creative partnership Between Japan and Russia (also called 'Moscow Declaration'). It also included creation of committees to draw a demarcation line around four disputed islands. However, Yeltsin's failing health soon reversed much of this progress as new faces in Kremlin rejected not only many previous proposals, but also agreements such as Hashimoto-Yeltsin Plan.⁹⁹ Later research discovered that if Yeltsin had ever compromised on this issue, he would have been overthrown.¹⁰⁰

Putin, as soon as he replaced Yeltsin, showed little interest in resolving the territorial dispute with Japan or concluding a peace treaty, despite his early visit to Japan in 2000. He did acknowledge the 1956 Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration, but preferred to not have it mentioned in the summit.¹⁰¹ In 2001, Mori and Putin met in Irkutsk and issued a joint statement validating the 1956 Japan-Soviet

⁹⁶ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 106-7; Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 21.

⁹⁷ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 109-10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 111-12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114-16; , *Japan Times, Asahi Evening News* February 23, 1999; Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 34-5.

¹⁰⁰ Motohide Saito, "Russia's Policy Towards Japan," in *Russia Nd Asia-Pacific Security*, ed. Gennady Chufrin (Tokyo: Japan Institute for International Affairs, 1999), 73.

¹⁰¹ Kazuhiko Togo, "Irukutsuku Shuno-Kaidan Go No Nichiro-Kankei [Japanese-Russian Relations after the Summit at Irkutsk] (Lecture at the Nihon Taigai Bunka Kyokai)" (April 19, 2001).

Joint Declaration.¹⁰² Overall, there were several summits, but relations took a hard hit after Junichiro Koizumi took over as Japan's prime minister.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the two sides worked together to repair the relationship which led to the Japan-Russia Action Plan, which was a comprehensive package to solve the territorial dispute by focusing on all areas of cooperation. When Putin got re-elected as the President in 2004, siloviki (power holders with security and military background), who were tough on any territorial compromises, gained more representation in the Russian politics.¹⁰⁴ Putin maintained the commitment to the 1956 Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration, but did not promise anything else. However, Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, did state that Russia was ready to negotiate, as long as a comprehensive package was included and Japan was ready to compromise as well.¹⁰⁵ Whether Russia was aware of this or not, Japan did reject the idea of getting back anything less than all four islands.¹⁰⁶ In 2005, Putin retaliated with equally uncompromising statement, namely that all four islands are Russian territory and there is nothing to discuss.¹⁰⁷ Later, he clarified that he meant that Japan needs to show good will towards Russia, and Russia will reciprocate by giving the two islands it promised.¹⁰⁸ Yet Japan did not heed Putin's statement.

In 2008 Dmitry Medvedev assumed office as the Russian president until 2012. Medvedev immediately faced a challenge from Japan, where textbooks were being published claiming that Japan has sovereignty over the Kuril Islands. The Russian Ministry of Foreign affairs responded by reaffirming Russia's sovereignty over the islands. Medvedev and Japanese Prime Minister did meet in Sakhalin in 2009 but they only agreed to speed up their efforts to find a solution. Nonetheless, situation on the ground deteriorated as Japanese fishermen were fired upon for illegally fishing in the Russian territorial waters. In 2010 Medvedev visited the disputed islands, which also caused a diplomatic row between the two countries.¹⁰⁹ Overall, even with this diplomatic confrontation, the

¹⁰² Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 25.

¹⁰³ "Makkartizm Na Iaponskii Iad: V Strane Voskhodiashchego Solntsa Nachalas' 'Okhota Na Ved'm' - Opytnykh Spetsialistov Po Rossii [McCarthyism in a Japanese Way: In a Country of the Rising Sun with Witch-Hunting against Experiences of Russian Specialists Has Begun]," *Rossiiskaia gazeta* June 20 2002, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Olga Kryshchanovskaya and Stephen White, "Putin's Militocracy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 04 (October-December 2003): 249, 96, 300.

¹⁰⁵ "Bbc International Report (Asia)," (November 14, 2004).

¹⁰⁶ , *Kommersant* November 15, 2004.

¹⁰⁷ "President's Live Television and Radio Dialogue with the Nation," (The Kremlin, Moscow September 27, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ Kimura, *The Kurilian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 138.

¹⁰⁹ *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 6; "Russian President Visits Disputed Kuril Islands."; Weitz, "Why Russia Is Challenging Japan over Kurils," 1.

situation was nothing new in Moscow, where leaders, in order to secure their electoral victory, needed to appease the powerful siloviki group and the Russian public opinion.¹¹⁰

5.3 Changing Factors

The first factor worth examining is the sudden willingness of Russia to accept the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905 when much of the Russian military personnel believed that Russia could recoup by continuing the war to reverse the losses. However, at this time, the Russian society was in a state of chaos, just short of a revolution.¹¹¹ Given that only several months later exactly this occurred, seriousness of internal threats to Russia cannot be downplayed. It can then be interpreted that Russia conceded much of its territory at a time when continued fighting was possible, but very costly. Russia chose to make peace with Japan, which confirms the theory of omnibalancing, namely that compromise is more likely when a state faces either internal and/or external threat(s) to its security.

To test my hypotheses why the USSR eventually escalated in this territorial dispute during the Second World War, it is worth examining which factor most strongly represents the change between status-quo and escalation policy. Considering that by the summer of 1945 Japan's national resources were completely exhausted, Soviet attack on a weak Japan was an act of a traditionally weaker claimant who saw an opportunity to seize a territory from the stronger claimant, while the stronger claimant was facing other threats and thus was unable to respond. Two points are worth reiterating here. First, Japan was the stronger claimant prior to the World War II. Second, Japan was unable to respond to the Soviet challenge due to its war with United States. In other words, Soviet Union perceived a temporary shift in the balance of power to increase its bargaining position over the disputed islands. This affirms my hypothesis on escalation. More precisely, states will escalate their territorial dispute if they believe there is a temporary 'window of opportunity'.

After the Second World War, I already stated that for a decade, relations between the USSR and Japan were non-existent. Just before signing of the Joint Declaration, relations improved and the USSR offered to return Habomai and Shikotan to Japan since the USSR was facing a hostile international environment. USSR needed to increase its international standing, and better relations with Japan was one way to do that. However, it is important to note that by this time Japan has just regained its independence for four years, and has not yet consolidated its alliance with the US, which was to come in a few years. Thus, for the Soviet Union, it is very likely that USSR expected Japan would move in a more independent direction if the territorial dispute was resolved. Again, this affirms the hypothesis that compromise occurs in relation to a certain perceived threat.

¹¹⁰ Weitz, "Why Russia Is Challenging Japan over Kurils," 2.

¹¹¹ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 35.

However, one factor led the USSR to try and unilaterally change the offer on the Declaration. It was Khrushchev's memorandum to Japan in 1960, stating that the content of a revised U.S.-Japan Treaty of Cooperation and Security was unacceptable and that the Soviet Union unilaterally amends the offer to transfer the two islands. Japan now had to not only sign the peace treaty with the Soviet Union, but also all American troops had to withdraw from Japan, in order to receive the two islands.¹¹² This perhaps contradicts my hypothesis that internal and external threats will lead to cooperation. Instead, here Khrushchev used coercion, or punishment of Japan, when facing a growing anti-Soviet alliance. However contradictory this may sound to my hypothesis, the inverse logic proves otherwise. Let's consider this. Khrushchev desired to cooperate if only Japan was to help Soviets undermine American power. In other words, this is where scope conditions must be restated. Cooperation only occurs towards states which have something to offer in helping counter a certain threat. Japan at the moment of Khrushchev's letter could not offer anything to the USSR. Thus, Khrushchev's action was logical to my theory. After all, in 1969 he stated that if he had relinquished the islands to Japan, they would have become American military bases.¹¹³ Compromise would have been counterproductive.

As for the 1978-9 deployment of Soviet troops onto Kunashiri, Etorofu, and Shikotan Islands (escalation), one can still observe Khrushchev's logic, although the hypotheses on escalation definitely do not apply here. Namely, the deployment of Soviet troops was a response to yet another external threat: Japan and China's Peace and Friendship Treaty of August of 1978.¹¹⁴ The effect of this treaty was that it increased the threat posed by the United States. One can also state that the Soviets deployed troops and military installations on Kuril Islands for another reason - sudden increase in the value of land. Specifically, the value increased because Soviets built and stationed nuclear submarines (SSBNs) in the Sea of Okhotsk in order to be able to target North America west of the Great Lakes.¹¹⁵ But a more realistic explanation is that the escalation took place in order to punish Japan for mingling with China, and also to strategically improve own position due to a threat coming from the United States. Value of the land would have not changed without the threat. My hypotheses do not predict this.

There is one factor which dramatically reduced the Russian claim strength over the Kuril Islands. It is the discovery of the Draft of the Additional Instruction to Admiral Putiatin, issued on February 27, 1853, in the name of Tsar Nicholas I. Existence of this document was only unearthed on October 4, 1991 by Professor Koichi Yasuda at Naval archives in St. Petersburg, and Professor

¹¹² Ibid., 75; Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 48.

¹¹³ Nikita Khrushchev, "Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes," (Boston 1990), 89.

¹¹⁴ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 86.

¹¹⁵ Jukes, *Russia's Military and the Northern Territories Issue*, 5-10.

Konstantin O. Sarkisov.¹¹⁶ The importance of this document is that it gave tremendous legal weight to Japan's claim over the Southern Kuril Islands since the Russian Tsar Nicholas I proclaimed in this document the following:

On the border issue...The southernmost island of the Kurile Islands that belongs to Russia is Uruppu, which we could identify as the last point of Russian authority in the south – so that from our side, the southern tip of this island would be the border with Japan.¹¹⁷

Thus, this proclamation nullified all Soviet statements that Kuril Islands, particularly the four southern islands, always belonged to Russia.¹¹⁸ Yet the document had little impact on Yeltsin. Already in September of 1991 he sent a delegation to Japan urgently seeking to sign a peace treaty and to resolve the territorial dispute. Thus, there was no escalation on the Russian part, despite its losing claim on the islands. Instead, Yeltsin only continued his initial policy of cooperation. This cooperation can only be understood in the context of internal threats Russia faced, such as the attempted coup d'état and a widespread poverty creating nationalist sentiment.¹¹⁹ Yeltsin sought cooperation with Japan while facing these threats. For example, he visited Japan while shelling the parliament at home.¹²⁰ Of course, such cooperation may have been a bluff, as already indicated, but bluffing is a dangerous policy, not surprisingly the reason why Yeltsin became extremely unpopular in Japan and Russia.¹²¹ While Yeltsin's cooperation can be understood within the framework of my theory, the failure of Russia to escalate after it lost the legal claim cannot be explained by my theoretical framework. Even more so, the theoretical expectation is that escalation occurs when a losing claim coincides with an internal or external threat. In 1991 Yeltsin faced tremendous internal unrest and a losing claim, but he did not escalate.

5.4 Alternative Theories

The first group of alternative theories are ideational theories. Analysis of democracies does not apply to Russia, as Russian democracy is seen as semi-democratic or a 'managed democracy'. Analyzing alliance partners in a territorial conflict also does not apply here since Japan was never an ally of Russia. As for the presence of a norm against conquest that would make states more likely to offer concessions, since I already noted that Russia seized Kuril Islands in World War II despite the Cairo Declaration of 1943 where allies established a norm against forceful seizure, then logically such

¹¹⁶ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 24.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 172-73.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹⁹ Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 44.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

norm mattered very little. The theory on norms, however, may best explain Yeltsin's failure to escalate while he faced domestic problems plus a losing territorial claim due to the discovery of the Draft of the Additional Instruction to Admiral Putiatin. Namely, Yeltsin started pursuing compromise only a few months before the discovery of the draft. That is, if he was to suddenly change his stance, it would have violated norms of agreement. However, if he was just bluffing to extract economic concessions from Japan, then discovery of this document is irrelevant.¹²²

Among ideational theories there is a stipulation that states with high or growing levels of economic interdependence may be more likely to compromise in their disputes in order to increase trade or investment. There is some truth here. Yeltsin and Gorbachev both sought to secure Japanese investment by promising a resolution of the territorial problem. "The essence of the Kremlin's policy is to extract the largest possible amount of material and technical aid in exchange for vague promises of a resolution to the territorial problem."¹²³ Thus, I assume that at least part of the compromise in late 1980s and early 1990s was in desire to gain economic benefits. However, since there is evidence that this was a bluff, it is uncertain whether there really was any real desire to compromise. Additionally, economic interdependence hardly existed between Russia and Japan, presenting itself as a goal more than a factor in this case.

In the realist camp there is the argument that states should most likely use force when they can seize the disputed land at an acceptable cost or impose a favourable settlement on their adversary. There is also an explanation that a state will use force in a territorial dispute not because of the importance of the land being contested but because of the need to invest in a general reputation for toughness, as well as to challenge a rival. Only the rivalry explanation has some relevance here, which is when Japan and China signed the Peace and Friendship Treaty in August of 1978. This is when the USSR escalated by sending troops to the disputed islands instead of compromising. My theoretical approach would predict compromise, but since compromise did not occur, the only relevant explanation is one which falls within the framework of the Soviet rivalry with the United States.¹²⁴ As stated earlier, the Sea of Okhotsk became a bastion of Soviet nuclear submarines. It was thus important to occupy the islands irrespective to how Japan might react, since the United States and China were a much more pressing threat.¹²⁵ This is one alternative theory that does have validity in this case, and is worth recalling in conclusion.

¹²² Ibid., 47-50.

¹²³ Mikhail Krupyanko, "Eritsuin Seiken to Nichiro Kankei," *Okayama Daigaku Bungakubu kenkyuso* (1993): 40.

¹²⁴ Khrushchev, "Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes," 89.

¹²⁵ Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 22.

Finally, a neo-classical realist camp would argue that as territorial disputes are among core interests of states, they provide an issue over which leaders may rally a society to achieve other goals, and there is evidence that Yeltsin did just that, as he refused to go 'all the way' due to fears that he will end up being unpopular like Gorbachev.¹²⁶ Nationalism was a potent force in Russia and Yeltsin did not dare to enflame it against himself. In effect, this alternative explanation may then best explain Yeltsin's bluffing, who may have wanted to compromise with Japan, but did not dare to do so due to the 'rallied society' that was watching him.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47-50.

6 Sino-Soviet Border Conflict



The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China inherited their territorial dispute from previous dynasties. The PRC claim referred to hundreds of thousands of square miles of the Soviet controlled territory which China complained was annexed by the Russian Empire through unfair treaties, which China had to sign during the Opium Wars as it was very weak.¹²⁷ Although the Soviet Union did nullify many of these treaties signed by former "bourgeoisie" Russian government, there was little ability for China to hold talks with the USSR due to Chinese civil war.¹²⁸ Only after Communist China consolidated power have the two countries dealt with the dispute before they managed to resolve final issues in July of 2008. The dispute over the border, covering 4,500 miles, passed periods of great tension and hostility, yet managed to be resolved, which is why it is worthy of study. It thus presents a dynamic where the two countries experienced both peaceful relations and internal, as well as external threats. Both countries are also great powers, with many resources at their disposal, and for that reason there is a natural control mechanism for confounding variables, such as economic dependency. Today, Russia and China enjoy a positive relationship, but understanding the nature of this dispute is vital, since the dispute itself played a key role in

¹²⁷ Krista E. Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 227.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

exacerbating tensions between the two countries, and for a long time the dispute presented “one of the most explosive international boundaries in the world”.¹²⁹

6.1 Value of the Land

The border dispute between Russia and China (excluding territorial disputes which non-Russian Soviet Republics inherited) was primarily a problem over location of the boundary in the rivers, whether it ran along the deepest channels (Thalweg principle), one shore line or the other, or the middle of the river. Naturally, the dispute covered around seven hundred islands, including Damansky/Zhenbao Island and Bolshoy Ussuriysky/Heixiazi Island, two islands which proved to be very difficult to resolve. Regarding the salience of the land, Fravel rated it as 5 out of 12 points, thus belonging to low-medium category.¹³⁰ However, Hensel and Mitchell ranked the salience of the Sino-Soviet border only as 3 out of 12.¹³¹ The reasoning behind this rank is as follows. First, economically the islands have no natural resources. There are very few people living there to provide much of a farming value. The only limited economic value are the rivers which provide shipping access to the Pacific Ocean from the northern parts of Manchuria. Locally, however, Heixiazi (Bolshoy Ussuriysky) Island did provide drinking water for the second largest Russian city in the region and it has been a location for family gardens of its citizens.¹³² The most commonly cited value of the islands was its strategic location during the Sino-Soviet split, where having an upper hand over the control of the border was a way of containing the opponent.¹³³ However, militarization of the border only has an endogenous value, as the border only gained strategic value due to Sino-Soviet split. Therefore, one can conclude that value of the disputed area has been fairly low to the Russian regime.

6.2 Tracing the Negotiations

From 1949 until 1960s, China and the Soviet Union had a positive, friendly relationship, and thus they chose to ignore that they even had a territorial dispute.¹³⁴ Only in September of 1960 China finally approached the Soviet Union to hold talks over one sector of the disputed border in Central Asia due to 1956 confrontations over grazing areas northeast of the Boziaigeer Pass in Xinjiang’s

¹²⁹ Tai Sung An, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 13.

¹³⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 48.

¹³¹ Paul R. Hensel and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, "Issue Indivisibility and Territorial Claims," *GeoJournal* 64, no. 4 (2005).

¹³² Jyotsna Bakshi, "Russia-China Boundary Agreement: Relevance for India," *Strategic Analysis* 24, no. 10 (2001); Jyotsna Bakshi, *Russia-China Relations: Relevance for India* (Dehli, India: Shipra, 2004).

¹³³ V. Vorobyev, "Treaty of 2001 and Russian-Chinese Border Settlement Talks," *International Affairs* 57, no. 5 (2011).

¹³⁴ An, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute*, 58; Alexander Lukin, "Perceptions of China Threat in Russia and Russian-Chinese Relations," (Brookings Intitute, Washington, 2001).

Atushi (Artux) Country.¹³⁵ These confrontations resurfaced several times in the 1960 which increased the necessity to resolve the issue as soon as possible.¹³⁶ On September 21 1960, the Chinese Foreign Ministry sent a diplomatic note to the Soviet Embassy in Beijing suggesting that the two sides negotiate over this sector. China at this time was facing ethnic instability in Tibet, and therefore it agreed to withdraw its herders from the area in order to minimize any future tensions.¹³⁷ The Soviet Union responded by stating that no dispute existed, and it followed this stance until late 1963 when border clashes could no longer be ignored.¹³⁸ Chinese cattle herders were crossing the border into the Soviet Union by thousands, allegedly by the order or encouragement of Chinese officials who intended to provoke the Soviets.¹³⁹

As soon as the Soviets acknowledged that the boundary was a problem after all, in April of 1963, China moved to open comprehensive boundary talks while the relationship between the two communist states continued to deteriorate.¹⁴⁰ For example, in response to border violations by China, Khrushchev remarked in December of 1962 that Hong Kong and Macao were remnants of colonialism that remained untouched on the Chinese territory.¹⁴¹ In March of 1963, the Chinese retaliated by publishing in *People's Daily* editorial a discussion regarding unequal treaties in which the Qing had ceded vast tracts of land to tsarist Russia. Soviets saw this as a potential violation of past agreements between the two countries and Chinese attempts to reinitiate a dispute.¹⁴² In fact, subsequent Chinese policy of mass Chinese settlement in the disputed region proved that the Soviets were right.¹⁴³ Chinese opened the dispute due to a deteriorating relationship with the USSR, and only by opening the dispute could China militarize the border without provoking a Soviet attack.¹⁴⁴ Despite this deteriorating relationship, Soviets accepted to hold talks, or more specifically, they were willing to engage in a limited discussion about specific problems on the border without

¹³⁵ "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China, May 24, 1969," ed. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Report (1969).

¹³⁶ Meng Zhaobi, *Xinjiang Tongzhi: Junshi Zhi [Xinjiang Gazetteer: Military Affairs]* (Wulumuqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1997), 338; He Ji-hong, *Kezilesu Keerkezi Zizhizhou Zhi [Kezilesu Kyrgyz Autonomous Region Gazetteer]* (Wulumuqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2004), 1091; Tsien-hua Tsui, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute in the 1970s* (Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press, 1983), 33.

¹³⁷ Shen Bingnian, *Xinjiang Tongzhi: Waishi Zhi [Xinjiang Gazetteer: Foreign Affairs]* (Wulumuqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1995), 284-85.

¹³⁸ Tsui, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute in the 1970s*, 33.

¹³⁹ George Ginsburgs and Carl F. Pinkele, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute, 1949-1964* (New York: Praeger, 1978).

¹⁴⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 120.

¹⁴¹ Dennis J. Doolin, *Territorial Claims in the Sino-Soviet Conflict: Documents and Analysis* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1965), 28.

¹⁴² Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 120.

¹⁴³ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 234.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

encompassing the entire boundary.¹⁴⁵ The Chinese pressed for the entire border to be discussed, but the Soviets stuck to their stance. With these positions set, the two sides started negotiations on February 23 of 1964 in Beijing.

1964 negotiations are considered the first mutual desire to try and solve at least some territorial disputes between the USSR and China. Many analysts claim that talks between the two sides deteriorated into polemics because the Soviets refused to acknowledge that the Qing dynasty signed unfair treaties, as the Chinese wanted to discuss discrepancies created by the implementation of those treaties.¹⁴⁶ But even though they disagreed on questions of principle, the two sides exchanged maps and reached a verbal consensus on the eastern sector of the border.¹⁴⁷ According to both Russian and Chinese sources, the draft of 1964 agreement was almost identical to the one reached in 1991.¹⁴⁸ Russia gave most of the concessions in this agreement, allocating some 600 square kilometers to China. Only two areas in the eastern sector were not resolved by this draft agreement, the Black Bear island (Heixiazi), where both sides disagreed on the direction of the main channel at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri rivers, and the Abagaitu Shoal, where changes in the direction of the Argun River created ambiguity over the location of the boundary.¹⁴⁹ Despite the verbal agreement, Moscow did not initial this draft treaty because of the disagreement over these two islands that the USSR occupied.¹⁵⁰ As well, the territorial dispute in the Western sector around the Pamirs was not resolved, even though China offered to accept Soviet control over the Pamir Mountains in exchange for two islands in the eastern sector.¹⁵¹ The talks finally collapsed by the summer of 1964, after Mao questioned the Soviet right to the Kuril Islands and Eastern Europe, which Moscow viewed with alarm, believing that China might be making sweeping territorial claims.¹⁵² The two sides agreed to take a temporary break and resume negotiations in Moscow on

¹⁴⁵ Li Lianqing, *Lengnuan Suiyue: Yibo Sanzhe De Zhongsu Guanxi [Hot and Cold Times: The Twists and Turn of Chinese-Soviet Relations]* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1999), 323-24; Taiping Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiao Shi, 1957-1959 [Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China, 1957-1969]* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998), 254.

¹⁴⁶ Tang Jiaxuan, *Zhongguo Waijiao Cidian [Dictionary of China's Diplomacy]* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2000), 725; Tsui, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute in the 1970s*; Ginsburgs and Pinkele, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute, 1949-1964*, 101.

¹⁴⁷ Genrikh Kireyev, "Demarcation on the Border with China," *International Affairs* 45, no. 2 (1999): 100.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 99-100; Lianqing, *Lengnuan Suiyue: Yibo Sanzhe De Zhongsu Guanxi [Hot and Cold Times: The Twists and Turn of Chinese-Soviet Relations]*, 323-24; Jiaxuan, *Zhongguo Waijiao Cidian [Dictionary of China's Diplomacy]*, 725; Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiao Shi, 1957-1959 [Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China, 1957-1969]*, 254-55.

¹⁴⁹ Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiao Shi, 1957-1959 [Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China, 1957-1969]*, 255.

¹⁵⁰ Kireyev, "Demarcation on the Border with China," 100.

¹⁵¹ Lianqing, *Lengnuan Suiyue: Yibo Sanzhe De Zhongsu Guanxi [Hot and Cold Times: The Twists and Turn of Chinese-Soviet Relations]*, 323-24; Jiaxuan, *Zhongguo Waijiao Cidian [Dictionary of China's Diplomacy]*, 725; Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 122.

¹⁵² William E. Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-1965* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967).

October 15, but by then Khrushchev fell from power and negotiations never did resume.¹⁵³ However, failure to resolve the border dispute led to the deployment of troops on both sides of the border.¹⁵⁴

By 1966 the Sino-Soviet split was at its worst, which led to a threefold increase in the number of troops deployed on both sides of the border.¹⁵⁵ Incursions were frequent and the Chinese even opened fire on Soviet ships.¹⁵⁶ Newly deployed Soviet divisions were ordered to rebuff any Chinese, even peasants, which attempted to land on the disputed islands,¹⁵⁷ including the islands which were allocated to China based on the consensus reached in 1964. In 1967 Mao started urging the Chinese to increase their combat preparedness as part of critical preparations for an offensive attack.¹⁵⁸ Mao's plan was to put pressure on the Soviets. As number of incidents increased involving the Soviet troops and Chinese citizens, the Chinese government began to increase its own number of armed patrols (which would subsequently ambush the Soviets).¹⁵⁹ This move caused the USSR to block Chinese navigation to the north and east of the disputed Heixiazi Island. At the beginning of 1968, eighteen confrontations occurred over the Qiliqin Island. The Soviets were always superior in these incidents, which gave them the stronger claim strength.¹⁶⁰ As the next winter came, freezing the rivers, China attempted to reassert its claim over islands on the Chinese side of the river, and in February of 1969 the Soviets responded by using live ammunition.¹⁶¹ On February 19, the Central Committee in China, GSD, and MFA approved the Heilongjiang MD plan, which instructed a Chinese surprise attack on the Soviet border troops on Zhenbao (Damansky) Island, in an attempt to teach the Soviets a "bitter lesson" about the dangers of armed confrontations over disputed areas.¹⁶² In March 1969, elite Chinese troops ambushed a Soviet patrol on the island, representing a drastic change in the Chinese policy of how to settle its border dispute with the Soviet Union. This violent move by China produced high tensions between the two states, including venomous verbal attacks

¹⁵³ Wang, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Waijiao Shi, 1957-1959 [Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China, 1957-1969]*, 255.

¹⁵⁴ Tsui, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute in the 1970s*.

¹⁵⁵ Directorate of Intelligence, "Military Forces Along the Sino-Soviet Border, Sr-Im-705 [Top Secret]," (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1970); *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 12.

¹⁵⁶ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 236.

¹⁵⁷ Sergei Goncharov and Victor Usov, "Kosygin-Zhou Talks at Beijing Airport," *Far Eastern Affairs*, no. 4-6 (1992): 98.

¹⁵⁸ , *Current Background*, no. 892 (October 1969): 50.

¹⁵⁹ Li Ke and Hao Shengzhang, *Wenhua Dageming Zhong De Renmin Jiefangjun [the People's Liberation Army During the Cultural Revolution]* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1989), 317.

¹⁶⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 207.

¹⁶¹ Xu Yan, "1969 Nian Zhongsu Bianjie De Wuzhuang Chongtu [the 1969 Armed Conflict on the Chinese-Soviet Border]," *Dangshi yanjiu ziliao*, no. 5 (1994): 2-13.

¹⁶² Ke and Shengzhang, *Wenhua Dageming Zhong De Renmin Jiefangjun [the People's Liberation Army During the Cultural Revolution]*, 319; Yang Gongsu, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Reapproachment," *Cold War History* 1, no. 1 (August 2000): 21-52.

and even a Soviet threat to use its nuclear weapons.¹⁶³ Luckily, a few months later, Zhou Enlai met with Premier Alexey Kosygin in Beijing and formal talks started, mostly to manage the crisis instead of solving it.¹⁶⁴ Incidents continued throughout the 1970s while conflict management prevented any further escalation.

During the 1980s tensions between the two sides were managed due to a Sino-Soviet détente, although as a precaution both sides deployed nuclear weapons on their side of the border in response to incidents which continued until the 1985.¹⁶⁵ Only after Gorbachev took unilateral steps to re-approach China, with the formula “close the past, open the future”¹⁶⁶, China finally agreed to genuinely negotiate. First round of talks took place in February of 1987, when the two sides agreed to focus on the eastern sector, basing their negotiations on the 1964 consensus.¹⁶⁷ By August, the two sides agreed to establish the median line as the river boundary. They also established a joint working group of experts who were to draft a boundary delimitation agreement.¹⁶⁸ However, there was still some disagreement between the two sides. Namely, China wanted a comprehensive settlement of all disputed areas (which would increase its leverage over the complex disputes in the western sector), while the Soviet Union only wanted to discuss the eastern sector.¹⁶⁹ Second round of talks was held in October of 1988 and an understanding was reached on most of the eastern sector of the border, which acknowledged prior agreements on river boundary.¹⁷⁰ Where they failed to agree was the same issue as in 1964, namely the Heixiazi Island at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri rivers, and Abagaitu Shoal in the Argun river. Soviets occupied these islands, but the Chinese maintained that both islands were on their side of the river. Apart from that, Soviet Union finally accepted to start discussions on the western sector, particularly the Pamir Mountains, and to conduct a joint aerial survey.¹⁷¹ Therefore, there was no major breakthrough, although the bilateral relationship between the two states began to improve in many other areas.

¹⁶³ Thomas W. Robinson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict," in *Diplomacy of Power: Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, ed. Stephen S. Kaplan (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1981); An, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute*.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas W. Robinson, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development and the March 1969 Clashes* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corp., 1970), 265-313.

¹⁶⁵ Gerald Segal, *Sino-Soviet Relations after Mao* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1985); Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 240.

¹⁶⁶ Vorobyev, "Treaty of 2001 and Russian-Chinese Border Settlement Talks," 97.

¹⁶⁷, *Associated Press* 23 February 1987; Vorobyev, "Treaty of 2001 and Russian-Chinese Border Settlement Talks."

¹⁶⁸, *Xinhua* 21 August 1987.

¹⁶⁹ Xing Guangcheng, "China and Central Asia: Towards a New Relationship," in *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders: Chinese and Russian Perspectives of the Central Asia Conundrum*, ed. Yongjin Zhang and Rouben Azizian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 46.

¹⁷⁰ "China, Soviet Union Agree on Part of Eastern Border," *Reuters* 31 October 1988.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Gorbachev visited Beijing in May of 1989 to normalize Soviet relations with China. It was an opportunity to sign the agreement based on the consensus reached in 1988, which was stalled due to the Chinese insistence to resolve all territorial issues, including the aforementioned islands. At the fourth round of negotiations in 1989, China finally dropped the demand for a comprehensive package settlement. Thus, China agreed to sign sector-specific deals, leaving the two islands under Soviet control to be discussed in the future.¹⁷² With the consensus reached, negotiators moved to sign the agreement. Then in June 1990, vice-foreign ministers decided to affirm existing areas of agreement in a legal document, a decision that produced the 1991 eastern sector agreement.¹⁷³ It was officially on May 16, 1991 that Qian Qichen and Soviet foreign minister Alexander Bessmertnykh signed a boundary agreement for the eastern sector.¹⁷⁴ The agreement established the deepest river channel as the official border in the east. Russia also conceded 700 islands and 1,500 hectares of land while China dropped further claims in Russia's Far East region. This resolved 98% of the dispute.¹⁷⁵

Even though the Soviet Union disintegrated, the agreement was ratified. Demarcation began in late 1991, and a demarcation commission was formed in June of 1992. The actual demarcation of the eastern sector started in 1993.¹⁷⁶ A detailed delimitation of the border was finished in November of 1997.¹⁷⁷ The reason why this process took several years was due to local opposition in Russia to the way border was demarcated.¹⁷⁸ This required additional agreements for joint use of islands for farming. Some smaller islands also ended up being divided equally even though original agreement was supposed to have transferred these islands to China.¹⁷⁹ Overall, the disputed territory was divided almost evenly between the two sides, with China receiving approximately 53% of the share.¹⁸⁰ A minor dispute remained outside of the eastern sector, namely a stretch of land between Mongolia-Russia-China tripoint and the Kazakhstan-Russia-China tripoint (the 'western sector'), comprising only a 55 km stretch.¹⁸¹ An agreement over this area was finalized during a series of meetings held by working groups in 1994.¹⁸² By September of 1994, Qian Qichen and Andrei Kozyrev

¹⁷² Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 140.

¹⁷³ Tian Zengpei, *Gaige Kaifang Yilai De Zhongguo Waijiao [China's Diplomacy since Reform and Opening]* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993), 328.

¹⁷⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 140.

¹⁷⁵ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 240.

¹⁷⁶ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 142.

¹⁷⁷ Kireyev, "Demarcation on the Border with China," 108.

¹⁷⁸ Williams, *Resolving the Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Hokkaido-Sakhalin Relations*, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Kireyev, "Demarcation on the Border with China," 106.

¹⁸⁰ George Ginsburgs, "The End of the Sino-Russian Territorial Disputes?," *The Journal of East Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1993): 267; Yakov Zinberg, "The Vladivostok Curve: Subnational Intervention into Russo-Chinese Border Agreements," *Boundary and Security Bulletin* 4, no. 3 (1996): 78.

¹⁸¹ Rajan Menon, "The China-Russia Relationship: What It Involves, Where It Is Headed, and How It Matters for the United States," *A Century Foundation Report, The Century Foundation* (2009): 10.

¹⁸² Bakshi, "Russia-China Boundary Agreement: Relevance for India," 1848; Vorobyev, "Treaty of 2001 and Russian-Chinese Border Settlement Talks."

signed the western sector boundary agreement. Demarcation of this sector was completed in 1999.¹⁸³

All that was left from the original dispute were the three islands which were stumbling points in history of Sino-Soviet border negotiations, namely the Heixiazi (Bolshoy Ussuriysky) Island, Yinlong (Tarabarov) Island and the Abagaitu Shoal, which remained disputed until Putin's visit to China in October of 2004, despite protests by local Russians. This is when he and Jiang Zemin signed a supplemental boundary agreement for the eastern sector. In this document China and Russia agreed to divide the three islands equally.¹⁸⁴ Russia gave Yinlong Island to China, and divided the other two equally.¹⁸⁵ However, there are indicators that this decision to compromise was reached already in 2002.¹⁸⁶

6.3 Changing Factors

As mentioned, in 1964 the USSR and China managed to change the status-quo by reaching a verbal agreement on the eastern sector of the border. Although the two sides did not sign any documents, the important factor here is that the Soviet Union was willing to give up some of its territorial claims. The reasoning behind such cooperation can be found in the Soviet desire to establish friendly and cooperative relations with its neighbours, at the time when it faced serious nuclear threats from the United States. As my hypothesis would predict, the Soviet Union acted to gain international supporters while facing this particular threat. This was particularly important since China strained its relationship with the USSR by escalating the dispute, namely, by seeking to reclaim the territory that the Soviet Union occupied. This only furthered the Sino-Soviet rift.

Shortly after, the two countries found themselves almost at war. Some sources state that it was the USSR who started the initial escalation due to the 1968 Brezhnev doctrine to intervene in the affairs of other socialist states.¹⁸⁷ However, the evidence does not support this claim as the Brezhnev doctrine was declared in the context of the 1968 Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia. However, Chinese believed it was also directed against them.¹⁸⁸ They also believed that Soviet violations of China's airspace and massing troops on the border were deliberate acts. Nonetheless, in 1969 Chinese brought the conflict to the fore by attacking Soviet border troops, an action which can

¹⁸³ Kireyev, "Demarcation on the Border with China," 108; Bakshi, "Russia-China Boundary Agreement: Relevance for India," 1851.

¹⁸⁴ Zhang Lijun, "Building Peaceful Borders," *Beijing Review* 49, no. 25 (June 2006): 10.

¹⁸⁵ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 241.

¹⁸⁶ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 143.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸⁸ Richard Wich, *Sino-Soviet Crisis Politics: A Study of Political Change and Communication*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 41-74; Menon, "The China-Russia Relationship: What It Involves, Where It Is Headed, and How It Matters for the United States."

be seen in the broader context of the Sino-Soviet rivalry, where the two sides since Stalin's death began to differ on many policy issues, from economic policies to the Cuban missile crisis and the Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁹ It was Mao's goal to turn the tables against the Soviet Union by putting pressure on it, and a border dispute was a perfect 'pawn' to use in this strategic game.¹⁹⁰

For purposes of this research it is important to understand that what led the Soviet Union to escalate the conflict was its loss of territorial claim strength due to the Chinese policy of settling Chinese citizens in the border areas, as well as the American re-approachment with China. The Soviet Union thus felt that it needed a stronger bargaining position to preserve its claim, even risking a possible war.¹⁹¹ Yet interestingly it was the Soviet Union that was eager to negotiate, and when the Chinese refused, Soviets threatened an imminent military invasion deep into China to destroy nuclear weapons installations.¹⁹² Further evidence of the Soviet desire to cooperate is the offer to give in to some of the Chinese territorial claims.¹⁹³ Evidence points out that these concessions were offered in order to improve the Sino-Soviet relations and to undermine improving US-China relations.¹⁹⁴ Soviet offers continued throughout the 1970s.¹⁹⁵

This combination of escalation and cooperation is interesting for this theoretical framework. Escalation is explained by the tenets of the preventive war theory, namely that use of force occurs when the relative claim-strength of a state is declining (also when it coincides with an internal/external threat), as was the Soviet claim strength after it became challenged by the Chinese illegal immigrants. Why compromise occurred under the same conditions represents a carrot that the Chinese would receive for helping the Soviet Union consolidate its international position against the increasingly powerful US. Cooperative behaviour in response to a threat fits the theory of omnibalancing. However, the combination of cooperation and escalation at the same time is not predicted by my hypotheses, which presents a weakness of the theoretical framework used in this research.

The re-approachment in the late 1980s can be understood as a consequence of Russia and China facing a lot of internal threats to their political stability.¹⁹⁶ Gorbachev was first to recognize the need

¹⁸⁹ Menon, "The China-Russia Relationship: What It Involves, Where It Is Headed, and How It Matters for the United States," 4-6.

¹⁹⁰ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 255-61.

¹⁹¹ Lukin, "Perceptions of China Threat in Russia and Russian-Chinese Relations."

¹⁹² Robert G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Policy: Development after Mao* (New York: Praeger, 1986); Tsui, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute in the 1970s*.

¹⁹³ R. K. I. Quested, *Sino-Russian Relations: A Short History* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Tsui, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute in the 1970s*.

¹⁹⁶ Vorobyev, "Treaty of 2001 and Russian-Chinese Border Settlement Talks."

to re-approach China in order to halt a decline in the Soviet international position.¹⁹⁷ Thus, good relations with other socialist states became more important. Not surprisingly, he took the initiative to normalize relations, first in 1986 and then again in 1991. It was here that he unilaterally offered to reduce Soviet troops on the border with China.¹⁹⁸ Of course, by 1991, not only did Russia face competition with the United States, but it also faced an economic collapse, which urged Gorbachev to end a second arms race with the United States.¹⁹⁹ For this reason it was costly for the Soviet Union to maintain a territorial dispute with China by keeping 600,000 troops on the border. Gorbachev basically pressed to appease both China and the US and that way arrest Soviet Union's declining international position.²⁰⁰

In terms of progress on the border dispute, Gorbachev offered to follow 'the mid-point' at every location where a river was the border, which was a concession to previous Soviet claims that the border ran along the Chinese bank.²⁰¹ Gorbachev was, in effect, accepting the 1964 consensus over the eastern sector. Gorbachev's behaviour therefore fits well with the theory of omnibalancing, which stipulates that Russia would indeed compromise when it faced threats. Cooperation on border demarcation continued through the 1990s which culminated in the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership of 2001, termed "The Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation", perhaps resembling a strategic alliance, as the purpose of such an alliance was to "stem support for a unipolar world with the United States as the only superpower".²⁰² As I mentioned in the theory section, a state declining in power will form coalitions to arrest its decline, and coalition with China, including the border settlement, can be seen in this context. Such a deal was favourable to China as well, since the American President George W. Bush labeled China as a "strategic competitor."²⁰³

Other internal threats also played a role in shaping Russia's desire to finalize the territorial cooperation in 2004. The long land border with China is 4,250 kilometres long, and naturally it is very porous, especially to Chinese immigrants and their subsequent economic influence. Since the Russian Far East is sparsely populated, with steadily declining six million Russians, the number of Chinese living there (estimated to be from 200,000 to 450,000) could easily grow to several million.²⁰⁴ Thus,

¹⁹⁷ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 272.

¹⁹⁸ Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, *The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987).

¹⁹⁹ Bakshi, "Russia-China Boundary Agreement: Relevance for India," 1848.

²⁰⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 137.

²⁰¹ Kireyev, "Demarcation on the Border with China," 100.

²⁰² *East Asian Strategic Review*, (Tokyo, Japan: The National Institute for Defense Studies, 2002), 185.

²⁰³ Morris, "Japan, Russia and the Northern Territories Dispute: Neighbors in Search of a Good Fence," Kindle location 1558-69.

²⁰⁴ Yevgeniy Verlin, "Black Cash and Yellow Danger," ed. FBIS Doc. ID DEP20020404000316 (trans. FBIS, Moscow Ekspert, 18 March 2002).

Russia had an interest to solve the border issue with China before the 'Sinofication' problem gets bigger, which could implicate China's leverage and renew the territorial dispute.²⁰⁵ This is why Putin pursued a quick resolution to the territorial dispute.²⁰⁶ In 2004 he gave away most of the territory on the three remaining disputed islands, which was allegedly done to ease China's potential anger regarding Putin's decision to build a pipeline to Japan (rather than China), but also to help persuade China to support Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization.²⁰⁷ Putin's move proved to be beneficial, as bilateral relations between the two former adversaries further improved, including record amounts of trade and investment, military sales, joint research and development, and a common stance on many international issues.²⁰⁸ Thus, the incentive to cooperate was not only due to internal threats that Russia faced, but also the potential ones. In this way, my theoretical framework can be expanded to include both potential and existing threats.

6.4 Alternative Theories

Alternative theories have a rather limited explanatory power in this dispute as well. First, for ideational theories, analysis of democracies does not apply to Russia, as Russian democracy is seen as being semi-authoritarian. Although Yeltsin did compromise during a brief democratization period, the Soviet Union also compromised in 1964, when it was nowhere near democratic ideals. Similarly, analyzing alliances in this territorial conflict is also invalid since Russia and China, even as initial communist partners, very quickly became rivals. As for the presence of a norm against conquest that would make states more likely to offer concessions or pursue a status-quo, such a norm would be difficult to defend when China and the Soviet Union experienced many episodes of escalation. Furthermore, economic interdependence and a desire to increase trade or investment did not prevent the two countries from escalating in the 1960s when they needed to recover their economies and one way of doing that could have been through economic cooperation.²⁰⁹ As such, economic interdependence might only apply when two countries have removed all obstacles to such a relationship. This has happened with Putin's finalization of the territorial dispute with China by offering concessions on the three remaining islands. His incentive was to secure the border against illegal Chinese immigrants but also to improve the bilateral relationship between the two states and

²⁰⁵ Lukin, "Perceptions of China Threat in Russia and Russian-Chinese Relations."

²⁰⁶ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 149.

²⁰⁷ Leszek Buszynsky, "Oil and Territory in Putin's Relations with China and Japan," *Pacific Review* 19, no. 3 (2006).

²⁰⁸ Pallavi Iyer, "China, Russia and Border Dispute," *Hindu* (July 22 2008), <http://www.hindu.com/2008/07/22/stories/2008072260091300.htm>.

²⁰⁹ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 252.

thereby reduce any potential tensions.²¹⁰ Therefore, economic interdependence only has a limited explanatory power.

In the realist camp there is the argument that states should be most likely to use force because they can seize disputed land at an acceptable cost or impose a favourable settlement on their adversary. This argument continues that a state will also use force in a territorial dispute not because of the importance of the land being contested but because of the need to invest in a general reputation for toughness, as well as to challenge a rival. These arguments can explain one occasion, and that is the Soviet escalation during the 1960s when the US and China established better relations. The Soviet Union used force during this episode to reaffirm its claim strength and to force China to negotiate since China sought to maintain the tensions by conducting a policy of conscious and systematic violations of the frontier between the two countries.²¹¹ Of course, the Chinese motive to bring up the territorial dispute reflected difficult bilateral relations.²¹² These difficult relations began at the end of the 1950s with Sino-Soviet disagreements over several issues: their military strategy and cooperation, détente with the US, economic models, and other issues.²¹³ In fact, previous research shows evidence that the Chinese never intended to resolve the dispute as a separate issue, but rather to put pressure on the Soviet Union.²¹⁴ As such, the rivalry argument seems to hold some validity. However, even as rivals, the Soviets were offering to concede some of their territory to China while also applying pressure, indicating that the rivalry cannot explain why one strategy would be used over the other. Even rivals apply different strategies.

Finally, the neo-classical realist camp would argue that as territorial disputes are among core interests of a state, they provide an issue over which leaders may rally a society to achieve other goals. There is some evidence that China may have played this card.²¹⁵ The Soviet leaders also may have occasionally used the border dispute to gain domestic support, but such evidence is lacking. Moreover, if the USSR had initiated the border dispute with China to gain domestic support, shouldn't it have done so at time of its greatest need to rally the domestic society, namely, during the collapse of the USSR? Yet it is precisely at this time that most cooperation occurred, when the risk of an internal coup was the greatest. As well, shouldn't a state rally the society around disputes which it is likely to win, thus please the society, not around difficult disputes such as this? Evidence for this argument is difficult to find.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 274-7.

²¹¹ Ginsburgs and Pinkele, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute, 1949-1964*, 14.

²¹² An, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute*, 13.

²¹³ Segal, *Sino-Soviet Relations after Mao*.

²¹⁴ Ginsburgs and Pinkele, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute, 1949-1964*, 18.

²¹⁵ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, & Settlement*, 247.

7 Mixed Results with the Baltic States



The term ‘Baltic States’ commonly refers to modern-day Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. These three republics gained independence as modern nation-states in the aftermath of World War I. As newly established states, they concluded peace and border treaties with the Soviet Russia in 1920. However, in World War II, significant changes to the borders took place after these three states were occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union. Certain changes favoured the Russian SFSR, which has become the source of political tensions after the dissolution of the USSR.²¹⁶ Particularly, Estonian and Latvian governments raised the question of their borders, while Lithuania has not (since it has gained a lot of territory from Poland). Thus, the focus here will be on the former, with a particular focus on Estonian-Russian dispute as it is the unresolved dispute of the two. Even with partial success, the region has been relatively free from clashing territorial interests.²¹⁷ The Baltic case is significant for this research because it presents a form of a least-likely test. Namely, the power difference between Russia and these states is vast; Russia would have no trouble maintaining or increasing its claim strength, if it wanted to, since the Baltic States have little leverage to threaten Russia. Secondly, this

²¹⁶ *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 21.

²¹⁷ L. Hedegaard, B. Lindström, and B. Lindstrom, *The Nebi Yearbook: North European and Baltic Sea Integration* (Springer Verlag, 1998), 437.

case presents two very similar states that ended up with a different outcome in the territorial dispute with Russia, yet neither entailed Russian compromise over the territory. It is thus interesting to discover the reasons behind such a difference.

7.1 Value of the Land

Alexander Sergounin has assessed that this territorial issue is not very important, although it can be a source of dangerous tensions.²¹⁸ The land claimed by Estonia is very small and is mostly populated by Russians, although there is a small Setu minority. There is one railway junction, as well as a famous monastery in the area.²¹⁹ Whatever agriculture used to be there, it has mostly fallen apart, and enterprises are underdeveloped. Many villages are empty, except for the elderly people. Infrastructure is poor, and unemployment high.²²⁰ This is perhaps the clearest reason why the Estonians have changed their original stance from incorporating this area back into Estonia to leaving it with Russia. It would be economically costly to incorporate it, and it would only invite more Russian immigrants.

As for the Aberne/Pytalovo area, which Latvia claimed, it is also small as it contains 20,000 people, mostly rural-based elderly. The area itself also lacks industry. However, the principal reason for the Soviet interest in this territory was Aberne's close connection to the Estonian Petseri district, and the role these areas played in Estonia and Latvia's contingency plans for the initial defense against any Soviet invasion.²²¹ In other words, its value was somewhat strategic, by denying the opponent any advantage it may want to use. Of course, one can also add the symbolic value of the land. Namely, in the Russian historiography, the Western borders of Russia, including the Baltic rim, are referred to as the "old Russian land", or "our west".²²² However, the symbolic value has tended not to be emphasized compared to other disputed territories, and for this reason I assume a relatively low value of this disputed land.

²¹⁸ Alexander A. Sergounin, "The Russian Dimension of Nordic Security: Hard Choices and Opportunities," in *Visions of European Security: Focal Point Sweden and Northern Europe*. (Stockholm: The Olof Palme International Center, 1997).

²¹⁹ Hedegaard, Lindström, and Lindstrom, *The Nebi Yearbook: North European and Baltic Sea Integration*, 440.

²²⁰ Indrek Jääts, "Ethnic Identity of the Setus and the Estonian-Russian Border Dispute," *Nationalities Papers* 28, no. 4 (2000): 660.

²²¹ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 102.

²²² *Ibid.*, 99.

7.2 Tracing the Negotiations

7.2.1 Estonia

As the World War II was coming to an end, the Soviet Union occupied and annexed Estonia in 1940, moving the boundary between Russian and Estonian Soviet Republics in the north of Lake Peipus 12 kilometers westward, situating it along the Narva River. The boundary south of the Lake Peipus was also moved westward, although by 25 kilometers, while the boundary that used to run in the middle of Lake Peipus remained the same. Overall, 2000 km² changed hands, including the following locations: Ivangorod (Jaanilinn), Pechory (Petseri), areas around Izborsk (Irboska), Lavry (Laura), and Rotovo (Roodva), as well as the island Kilpino (Kulkina). This area then became part of the Russian Pskov oblast.²²³ The rationale behind these border changes was to include Russian-populated areas within Russia and the Baltic people into the Baltic States (as was done with Lithuania).

The territorial dispute with Estonia stemmed from the fact that Estonia, in its constitution, only recognized the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920 as a valid border treaty between Estonia and Russia.²²⁴ Estonian stance became visible already in 1991 when Estonia pleaded its case under international law to have the interwar borders restored.²²⁵ During the same time Russia and Estonia signed the Basic Principles of Mutual Relationship. Not to be mistaken, the relationship between the two countries was rather chilly and in July of 1992 Estonian government issued a statement calling on Russia to withdraw her border guards back to the boundary established in the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920. Russia retaliated by threatening economic sanctions but agreed to engage in talks. However, after one year of bilateral talks produced no solutions, Russia acted unilaterally by fixing the borderline.²²⁶ It started the demarcation operation under directives of the President Yeltsin, who visited the border and declared that not a single inch of the Russian land will be given away. The Estonian government protested and hopelessly appealed to international organizations such as the OSCE for help. This naturally hampered Russian-Estonian relations.²²⁷

However, change of government in Estonia occurred in the late 1994, when under the leadership of Prime Ministers Andres Tarand and Tiit Vahi, an agreement with Russia was sought. This led to an informal agreement in 1995 that there are no territorial claims and that the current

²²³ Jääts, "Ethnic Identity of the Setus and the Estonian-Russian Border Dispute," 656.

²²⁴ Eiki Berg, "Deconstructing Border Practices in the Estonian-Russian Borderland," *Geopolitics* 5, no. 3 (2000): 92.

²²⁵ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 98.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

²²⁷ Hedegaard, Lindström, and Lindstrom, *The Nebi Yearbook: North European and Baltic Sea Integration*, 440.

border will be preserved. However, there was no agreement on principles upon which this agreement was based. Namely, the Estonians stressed that the Tartu Peace Treaty's legal value should be the starting point for negotiations; Russians did not recognize the legal value of that treaty. From the Russian perspective, its position only made sense, as recognizing this old treaty would leave doors open for subsequent claims of damages caused by the occupation, and this would also implicate the question of minorities. Russian fears later came true with Latvia.

However, from 1996 onward Estonia softened up. When Foreign Ministers Yevgeniy Primakov and Siim Kallas met in Petrozavodsk, the two parties announced that they were close to solving the dispute, as Estonia was more willing to drop its claim and any references to the Tartu Treaty.²²⁸ The proposed border itself differed only slightly from the de facto border (as there were some inconsistencies in the respective maps of the parties) but this was not seen as a problem for Russia.²²⁹ However, Russia did surprise everyone by refusing to sign any agreement without including the question of the Russian minorities.²³⁰ Despite this initial refusal, Russo-Estonian border treaty was signed in Moscow on 18 of May, 2004, followed by ratification in Estonia, but not in Russia. The reason behind Russia's reluctance to ratify the treaty is that Estonia's internal treaty ratification legislation passed by the parliament mentioned the Treaty of Tartu. The Treaty of Tartu affected historical legitimacy of the USSR because it specified that the USSR "occupied" the Baltic States.²³¹ Soon after, on September 2004, Russia withdrew her signature from the 'Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Estonia on the Russian-Estonian State Border'.²³² This border dispute has not gained much attention since then.

7.2.2 Latvia

Just like Estonia, the Latvian Soviet Republic also lost 1300 km² of land in the northeast of the country to the Russian Soviet Republic, which contains one town of Pytalovo (Aberne) and six rural districts – Kacenu, Upmales, Linavas, Purvmalas, Ugspils, and Gauru.²³³ Shortly after the break-up of

²²⁸ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 105.

²²⁹ "1997," *Postimees*; Jääts, "Ethnic Identity of the Setus and the Estonian-Russian Border Dispute," 658.

²³⁰ , *The Baltic Times* 1997b.

²³¹ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 107.

²³² *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 24; Vladimir Socor, "Moscow Refuses to Ratify Border Treaty with Estonia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2, no. 122 (June 23, 2005), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=30572&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=176&no_cache=1.

²³³ *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla*

the USSR, in 1992, the Latvian Supreme Council adopted a resolution “on the non-recognition of the annexation of the town of Abrene and its six oblasts.” This was in reference to the 1920 Riga Peace Treaty with Russia. The Russian government officially rejected the Latvian resolution.²³⁴ However, a year later the two sides signed an agreement on cross-border movement. Shortly after that, Latvian foreign minister, Valdis Birkavs, advocated rapprochement with Russia by introducing a temporary borderline until a permanent solution is found.²³⁵ Already in 1997 the two parties have drawn up a draft treaty on the border location.²³⁶ Such rapid success is partially explained because the Latvian government coordinated its policy with Estonia on their territorial dispute with Russia, which effectively meant that Latvia would follow Estonia in giving up its claim.

Expectations were that the draft treaty would be signed in 2005. However, the Latvian opposition (led by Abrenian Union) lobbied for nationwide referendum on this treaty. Latvian government ruled out the referendum, and instead issued a declaration stating that Latvia was occupied by the USSR and that it requires material compensation for duration of the occupation period. Russia suspended the treaty in response, with Vladimir Putin declaring that Latvian behaviour defies modern European spirit.²³⁷ However, on March 2007, after the Latvian parliament approved the treaty and dropped references to the occupation period, the two sides managed to reconcile and sign an agreement on the location of the border, which has not changed.²³⁸ The Russian response to the agreement has been positive but reserved.

7.3 Changing Factors

7.3.1 Estonia

Relations between post-communist Estonia and Russia started with strong rhetorical accusations. Disagreements over the border led Russians to unilaterally demarcate the border in 1994, so one can say that the Russians attempted to increase their claim strength in face of Estonian rhetorical escalation. The Estonians responded that the Russian move was a technical equivalent of war.²³⁹ This

Island, 22; Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 101.

²³⁴ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 105.

²³⁵ D. Bungs, "Seeking Solution to Baltic-Russian Border Issues," ed. RFE/RL Research Report 3:13 (1 April 1994), 25.

²³⁶ Laura Sheeter, "Latvia, Russia Sign Border Deal," *BBC News* 27 March 2007.

²³⁷ *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 24.

²³⁸ Russia Today, "Latvia Agrees to End Border Dispute with Russia," (08 February 2007).

²³⁹ Hedegaard, Lindström, and Lindstrom, *The Nebi Yearbook: North European and Baltic Sea Integration*, 440.

way Estonia sought to keep up in maintaining its own claim strength. Some of the Estonian protests have been rather dramatic, but Russia has maintained that the Tartu Peace Treaty is not in force, and that Estonians are showing an unjustified hostility towards Russia. What Estonian protests show is that Estonia had little physical leverage over Russia, which is why it attempted to assert international pressure onto its bigger neighbour. Therefore, from the perspective of my theoretical premises, this episode can only be understood as Russian escalation in face of Estonian attempts to re-claim the disputed land. The theory of preventive warfare is thus confirmed. Yet the theory of omnibalancing stipulates that a state will not cooperate while a) losing claim strength and b) facing internal or external threats. Since Russia was in the midst of a possible civil war and economic chaos, it can be understood from the theory of omnibalancing that Russia believed Estonia was trying to exploit its weakness, and therefore no cooperation occurred.

Once the new government in Estonia chose to cooperate, the two parties managed to agree on the border but the debate was much more complex. Russia continued insisting that the present borders between Russia and the Baltic States are inviolable, despite the fact that millions of ethnic Russians live in Estonia and Latvia. So even though it could have, Russia did not increase its claim, because it faced a war in Chechnya and thus there was an internal threat which would have escalated had Russia conceded territory to Estonia (Chechen separatists could use the Estonian case as a precedent). So the outcome here is a perverse logic of my theoretical framework. Namely, when facing an internal threat, Russia desired to cooperate, but not by changing borders, as this would have exacerbated the internal threat. In this way, logic of the theory of omnibalancing fails.

Later phases of negotiation, when Estonia cooperated and success seemed most likely, caused a surprise because Russia withdrew her signature. Thus, cooperation suddenly failed. Such behaviour only increased the Baltic States' beliefs that Russia is using Russophone minorities and the border dispute as tools of Russia's 'neoimperial aims'. Namely, as soon as Estonia chose to cooperate, Russia began protesting over the treatment of Russians inside of Estonia and Latvia, not over the territorial claims.²⁴⁰ Even once they overcame this issue, Russia's main protest shifted to the Estonian validation of the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920. Specifically, Russia objected to the preamble which was presented to the Estonian parliament for the ratification of the agreement because it made reference to the legal continuity of the Estonian state proclaimed in the 1918 and its constitution (which are based on the Tartu Peace Treaty).²⁴¹ Therefore, Russian behaviour was indeed unpredictable. Jääts has concluded his reasoning behind Russia's reluctance as follows, "the Russian side is attempting to tie

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 439; Pami Aalto, "Revisiting the Security/Identity Puzzle in Russo-Estonian Relations," *Journal of Peace Research* 40, no. 5 (2003): 576.

²⁴¹ Socor, "Moscow Refuses to Ratify Border Treaty with Estonia."

the signing of the border treaty to the larger issue concerning the rights of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia, and has been delaying signing the treaty, referring to technical issues.”²⁴² Thus, where Estonian fears were correct was that Russia indeed was only using the territorial dispute for other purposes.

However, linking different issues is a common practice in diplomacy and it is wrong to believe that this was aimed only against Estonia. By stalling in whatever way possible, Russia was fighting a greater geopolitical game, namely attempting to prevent NATO expansion into the Baltic region.²⁴³ This is not to say that the Russian minorities did not matter, but simply that the border dispute, minorities’ question, or any other issue mattered less than other strategic objectives such as NATO expansion. Levinsson correctly observes that “Russia has postponed ratification of the agreement... until other contested issues.... are resolved”.²⁴⁴ I do not go into depth why states preserve status-quo, but it seems from the perspective of the theory of omnibalancing that when Russia faced NATO expansion (and other issues it deemed important) we ought to have seen cooperation with Estonia, in order to gain support for its position against NATO. Yet Russia did not compromise. Instead, it only sought to irritate Estonia further, hoping that NATO would back off. It did not work, and again, the logic of the theory of omnibalancing fails, unless of course, one considers this instance as falling outside the scope of the theory because Estonia had nothing to offer to Russia in return for a stable border. However, it would hardly be the case that Estonia could not offer anything to Russia, as other Baltic states faced similar issues as Estonia, yet managed to solve the border dispute with Russia. Either way, Russia never had to give up any of its claimed land to Estonia, nor was its claim ever threatened, and for this reason it actually remains surprising that Russia never offered some land to Estonia in return for some Estonian support, as my theoretical framework would predict.

7.3.2 Latvia

Despite the success of signing and ratifying a border treaty with Latvia, Russia has remained rather cautious towards Latvia, stating that the Latvian government must step up to solve the issue of Russian ethnic minorities.²⁴⁵ The reason then why Russia changed from a status-quo strategy to resolving the dispute with Latvia can be understood in what Levinsson observes to be the Russian desire to have its western borders officially recognized, in order to achieve visa freedom for its

²⁴² Jääts, "Ethnic Identity of the Setus and the Estonian-Russian Border Dispute," 659.

²⁴³ Socor, "Moscow Refuses to Ratify Border Treaty with Estonia."; Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 98; T. Diez and S. Stetter, *The European Union and Border Conflicts: The Power of Integration and Association* (Cambridge Univ Pr, 2008), Kindle location 1878-85.

²⁴⁴ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 98.

²⁴⁵ "Latvian-Russian Border Treaty Comes into Effect," *RIANovosti* 2007.

citizens travelling within the EU.²⁴⁶ In addition to that, the EU has urged Russia to solve its territorial disputes with the Baltic States.²⁴⁷ Since the Russian claim strength was growing and/or remaining stable, my theoretical framework would predict compromise. Russia did compromise, but only to resolve the dispute. It actually did not have to give up any of the disputed territory. For this reason the case of Latvia, just like with Estonia, is simply a continuation of the status-quo. Opportunities for cooperation did exist, such as the time when Russia faced many internal problems or the NATO expansion, but interestingly, it was during those times that Russia was least willing to cooperate. For this reason, the theory of omnibalancing remains weak in this case, although as mentioned, due to influence of the EU and NATO on the Baltic States, this case is the least-likely case to fit the theory.

7.4 Alternative Theories

Alternative theories have some stronger validity in this case as this is the least-likely test and has stronger confounding variables. Once again, the democratic peace theory does not apply. However, the fact that each side had domestic opponents (who were not jailed) meant that any agreement had to take into account such opposition. As Moshes and Vushkarnik stated, even if the agreement between Russia and the Baltic states was signed, it would have probably not been ratified.²⁴⁸ Their prediction failed, but only because the EU and NATO played a strong role in pushing for border disputes to be resolved, yet another confounding variable which could relate to 'norms'.²⁴⁹ Mechanisms of alliance also do not apply; however, Latvia's congruence with Estonian decisions reflects some level of a strategic partnership. Their special relationship therefore must be taken into equation. Next, economic interdependence of the Baltic States with Russia certainly was an important factor for them to seek the EU and NATO membership, thus to move away from dependence on Russia.

All these alternative theories seem to have affected the Baltic States, but since my focus is on Russia, I find realist approaches more applicable as alternatives. Namely, as I discovered, given the Russian preoccupation with the NATO expansion at its borders, rivalry seems to have some validity in Russian calculations how to deal with this territorial dispute. In this way, Russian pressure on Latvia and Estonia can be compared to Khrushchev's pressure on Japan when he unilaterally revised the Joint Declaration in response to a revision of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Cooperation and Security.

²⁴⁶ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 99.

²⁴⁷ Diez and Stetter, *The European Union and Border Conflicts: The Power of Integration and Association*, Kindle location 1785-90.

²⁴⁸ A. Moshes and A. Vushkarnik, "Russia and the Baltic States: Between Coexistence and Cooperation?," *Wallisellen Institut für wirtschaftspolitische Studien* 1(1997).

²⁴⁹ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 99.

Finally, Boris Yeltsin's negative reaction to Estonia's demand that Russia withdraw its border guards demonstrates that Boris was at that time also trying to consolidate his power base at home, therefore, using the border issue to rally domestic nationalist support.

8 Russo-Ukrainian Dispute over the Tuzla Island

8.1 Value of the Land

The Island of Tuzla refers to a spit island, a sandy islet of approximately 27,865 hectares in the middle of the Strait of Kerch between the Crimean Kerch Peninsula in the west and the Taman Peninsula in the east. It used to be part of the Taman peninsula, but due to a major storm in 1925, the spit was split, forming the island. The importance of the area is that it is a key shipping gateway between the Azov Sea and the Black Sea, having rich fishing resources as well. The Russian delegation, during negotiations in 2007, stated that 70% of all cargo shipments were made in Russia's interests across the Kerch Strait.²⁵⁰ According to other experts, the importance of the Russo-Ukrainian land and sea border delimitation can be understood through importance of the Azov Sea's potential natural resources, as there are more than 100 oil and natural gas deposits discovered at the bottom of the sea.²⁵¹ Strategically, however, the strait is also important for the Russian fleet travelling through the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Overall, my judgement is that the island has medium value for Russia, mostly in terms of sea resources and its strategic location.

8.2 Tracing the Negotiations

As for the source of the dispute, in 1941, the USSR transferred the island to the Crimean Oblast, which in 1954 became part of the Ukrainian SSR.²⁵² When the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine established a maritime border with Russia based on the Soviet-era administrative border between the two republics. In other words, Ukraine claimed ownership over the island. According to reports, however, Russia has denied the existence of Soviet administrative borders along the internal sea area and called for a shared use of the Kerch Strait.²⁵³ The two sides did sign an accord in 1994, declaring that any construction or development in the Kerch region was to be approved by both sides. However, the issue exploded into diplomatic conflict when Russia started construction of a dike from the Taman Peninsula to the Tuzla Island in 2003.²⁵⁴ Ukraine then accused Russia of encroaching on its territory, fearing that it would lose authority over the Kerch straight which runs from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea, and on to Turkey and the Mediterranean. The Russian response was that Tuzla was once a spit from the Russian mainland which ought to be rebuilt to protect coastal farms and

²⁵⁰ "Russia Set to Resolve Azov-Kerch Sea Border Dispute with Ukraine," *Ria Novosti* 25.01.2007.

²⁵¹ Jeremy Bransten, "Russia Ignores Ukraine's Concerns in Border Dispute," *ISN* 16.10.2003.

²⁵² *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island*, 34.

²⁵³ Andrei Mosienko, "Ukraine-Russia Dispute over Kerch Strait Unresolved - Yanukovich," *RIA Novosti* 29.11.2010.

²⁵⁴ "Tuzla Island Will Be Wiped Away by the Sea," *Pravda* 19 November 2003.

beaches.²⁵⁵ Fearing loss of its position, Ukraine threatened to seek international arbitration if no agreement was reached, and it immediately deployed its troops to the island. However, Russia suspended the dam project while Ukraine agreed to withdraw its troops from the Tuzla Island. Two sides then created an agreement on cooperation in the use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, stating that sea areas are historically internal waters of both Russia and Ukraine and that the area will be shared between them.²⁵⁶

Negotiations did take place, and by 2005, a third round was complete, with Russia declaring recognition of Ukraine's ownership of the Tuzla Island.²⁵⁷ Specifically during this round, the two sides discussed the issue of demarcation of the Azov Sea and the Black Sea. Russia insisted on demarcating lines on the sea floor of the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait, but Ukraine preferred to draw the border line on the water surface, as is the practice in international law.²⁵⁸ In 2007, Russia stated that it was determined to work with Ukraine to resolve the dispute, but that the issue is advancing slowly and will not be delimited quickly and easily. Russia also accused Ukraine of unilaterally establishing the border in 1999.²⁵⁹ Ukrainian President Yushchenko during his mandate said that Ukraine was willing to resolve the Kerch Strait issue if Moscow recognized the Soviet-era administrative borderline as the state border. Ukraine also proposed changing the status of the Azov Sea from territorial to international waters, but Russia said this violated the 2003 agreement.²⁶⁰ Overall, Ukraine simply wants a clear division of the territory/sea in accordance to the international regulations, while Russia wants a shared use because then it can get access to the Ukrainian side, where fish and oil seem to be more abundant. Ukraine is ready to collaborate on many issues with Russia, such as the environment and defense, but only after the border is clearly established.

In 2010, the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, during the meeting with the speaker at the Russian Federation Council, stated that there are discussions on the issue, but proposals don't meet interests of either side.²⁶¹ For Ukraine, resolution of this issue is important for visa-free travel of Ukrainians into the EU. A year later, signs of tensions resurfaced when Ukraine, for the first time, demanded a fee for the passage of Russian Black Sea Fleet.²⁶² Despite the ongoing dispute of the

²⁵⁵ , *Reuters* 18.11.2003.

²⁵⁶ "Ukraine Ratifies Border Demarcation Agreement with Russia," *RIA Novosti* 08.07.2012.

²⁵⁷ "Russia Recognizes Ukraine's Ownership of Tuzla Island," *Xinhua* 14.07.2005.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ "Russia Set to Resolve Azov-Kerch Sea Border Dispute with Ukraine."

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Mosienko, "Ukraine-Russia Dispute over Kerch Strait Unresolved - Yanukovich."

²⁶² "Tuzla-2: Ukraine Demanded the Russian Warship Paid for Passage on the Kerch Channel," *BakuToday* 09.09.2011.

territory, there has been an agreement signed to create a natural park and a monastery on the island.²⁶³

8.3 Changing Factors

As the issue was only really brought to the fore in 2003, to test the theory, one has to understand why Russia changed its status-quo strategy at that moment and not earlier or later. First, as the political analyst Jan Maksymiuk explains, Russian plans of dam construction are only an episode of a bigger political issue, namely the delimitation of the sea border between Ukraine and Russia, whereby Russia wants to leave the Azov Sea for joint use, while Ukraine wants a clear division (as joint use would give Russia greater access to resources such as oil).²⁶⁴ However, Russia also escalated the issue because Ukraine imposed duties on the Russian ships travelling through the strait.²⁶⁵ Second, the escalation itself was initiated most likely by local Russian officials hoping to build a direct road link to Crimea.²⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the Kremlin immediately took the responsibility as there are a lot of stakes for Russia in the dispute. Therefore, it may very likely be that Russia took over the issue and then intentionally stalled in order to gain concessions in other areas, particularly to achieve joint use of the Sea of Azov.²⁶⁷ This is further supported by the fact that Russia escalated the issue in 2003 at the time when pro-Western forces in Ukraine condemned the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States.²⁶⁸ Russia has always been opposed to strong Western influence in Ukraine, considered a cradle of the Russian nation. In other words, Russia has used the dispute over the Tuzla Island to achieve either shared use of the Sea of Azov or to maintain an upper hand over the Western influences there. All this points out towards a simple conclusion, namely that Russia escalated the issue and kept it at the forefront because Russia desired concessions in other areas. This rejects my hypothesis on escalation, which would stipulate that Russia would only escalate if it was losing the claim (or facing a threat while also losing a claim). Russia has not been losing the claim any more in 2003 than in 1999 when Ukraine unilaterally demarcated the border. In fact, in 2004-05, when pro-Western forces took power in the Ukraine, Russia should have felt even more threatened, but at that time, it only preserved the status quo. The theory of preventive warfare, in other words, fails to explain the case of this escalation. Up to today, the issue remains unresolved.

²⁶³ *Territorial Disputes of Russia, Including: Kuril Islands Dispute, Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, Karelian Question in Finnish Politics, Territorial Changes of the Baltic States, Sixty-Four Villages East of the River, Sarych, Tuzla Island.*

²⁶⁴ Bransten, "Russia Ignores Ukraine's Concerns in Border Dispute."

²⁶⁵ Valery Khomyakov, "Tuzla Conflict: Both Sides Refuse to Compromise," *RIA Novosti* 10.06.2005.

²⁶⁶ Bransten, "Russia Ignores Ukraine's Concerns in Border Dispute."

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Taras Kuzio, "Behind the Tuzla Island Controversy," *Kyiv Post* 2003.

8.4 Alternative Theories

Alternative theories can apply as follows. Using a dispute for rallying of domestic support has some explanatory power as Putin faced elections in the early 2004, thus, appearing tough and nationalistic has helped him secure more votes, particularly because launching territorial claims over Tuzla is not a very risky strategy, as the island is very small.²⁶⁹ Theories on rivalry also have some support, as the Western expansion of its influence into Ukraine, especially through the NATO and Orange revolution, played an important role for Russia as Russia took into account Ukraine's western trajectory. Namely, the NATO has always supported Ukraine on this issue.²⁷⁰ Other alternative explanations lack supportive evidence. For example, economic interdependence did not prevent escalation, nor did it encourage cooperation in this case. Russia is utilizing its relative strength to try and coerce Ukraine, but its relative capability is rather limited, as Russia was willing to back down in 2003 after Ukraine deployed its military forces to the Tuzla Island.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ "2003: The Year in Review: A Tiny Island in the News: The Dispute over Tuzla," *The Ukrainian Weekly* LXII, no. 2 (January 11, 2004).

9 Soviet-Turkish-Iranian Territorial Claims

9.1 Value of the Land

Soviet relations with Turkey and Iran are an important case study which resulted in the Russian cooperation, and therefore, these cases compose an important test of the hypotheses on cooperation, namely, the expectation is that Russia should have faced internal threats when it chose to cooperate. The lands in these cases were historically of great economic and strategic importance both to the USSR and the West, including the use of rivers, and oil wells of Baku. As a matter of fact, Western colonies and empires have always worked to deny Russia access to these rich southern areas.²⁷¹ For this reason, these cases should demonstrate particularly easy test case of the Soviet reluctance to cooperate. However, cooperation did occur on many occasions, and therefore, it is important to analyze why.

9.2 Tracing the Negotiations

9.2.1 Turkey

As far as Turkey is concerned, Bolsheviks renounced all interests in Turkey already in 1917. In 1921, an agreement was signed between the Soviet regime and Turkey in Moscow. The Soviet Union surrendered Tsarist claims, as well as the outstanding 1877-78 war indemnity from Turkey, and agreed to return to Turkey the provinces of Ardahan and Kars, parts of Russia from 1878 to 1918, and it also allowed Turkey free use of the port of Batum.²⁷² Soon afterward, in 1925, the USSR and Turkey signed a treaty of neutrality and non-aggression, which led to final demarcation of their frontier in 1926. These compromises were made at the time when the Soviet Russia was still battling remains of the Tzarist influence, and therefore, it was highly vulnerable. It is then safe to conclude that the Soviet behaviour is strongly in line with our predictions on cooperation.

Nonetheless, in mid 1930s, the relationship between the two states started deteriorating as the USSR demanded that Turkey sign a protocol to the effect of closing the Dardanelles to all non-Black Sea countries. The Soviet argument was that these seaways had been used by the Western powers to attack Russia's southern flank, which was significant as by 1939 Germany had already established itself in the Balkans. As soon as the Second World War was over, in 1945, Stalin denounced the 1921 treaty, instead re-installing pre-1921 Tsarist claims.²⁷³ These claims included a large section of the

²⁷¹ R. Rahul, "Russia's Other Boundaries," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 11, no. 1 (April 1965): 38.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 27; Office of the Geographer, "International Boundary Study: Turkey-Ussr Boundary," (Washington DC: Department of State: Bureau of Intelligence and Research, February 24, 1964), 5.

²⁷³ Geographer, "International Boundary Study: Turkey-Ussr Boundary," 4.

Turkish territory, which included former parts of the Russian Empire but also additional territory. A year later, the Soviet Government demanded USSR's association in the defence of the straits as the basis for a proposal for a fresh treaty in the place of one denounced. However, Turkey rejected these proposals.²⁷⁴ Yet in 1953, a year after Turkey joined the NATO, Soviet Union dropped its claims in Turkey. Commonly it is understood that these claims were dropped due to the Soviet competition with the United States, and therefore disputes with Turkey became more costly to pursue.²⁷⁵ Facing a strong external threat, the Soviet cooperation is clearly in line with the theory of omnibalancing. Interestingly, Russia decided to cooperate and give up territorial claims on the land which is very valuable.

9.2.2 Iran

As for the analysis on the Soviet-Iranian border dispute, I have to go back to the First World War, when Persia was greatly irritated by foreigners fighting battles on its soil. In 1919, at the Peace Conference, Persia claimed parts of the Caucasus including Erevan, Derbent, Baku, Tekes territory, Marv, and Khiva within her boundaries.²⁷⁶ However, the Soviet Union in 1921 signed a treaty of friendship with Persia in Moscow, by which the Soviet Russia abandoned all 'imperialistic encroachments' and financial advantages in Persia, and it also re-established the Russo-Persian boundary according to the 1881 treaty line. The Russians also renounced their claim to the island of Ashurada in the south Caspian and returned the frontier town of Firuza to Persia.²⁷⁷ In 1926 they also signed a treaty on utilization of the frontier rivers and waters from the Hari Rud to the Caspian Sea. In 1927 the two parties agreed to appoint five frontier commissioners to prevent any frontier incidents from occurring along the entire common border. Just like with the case of Turkey, young and vulnerable Soviet regime seemed to have been signing treaties with many of its disputants, including Iran, which presents further evidence in support of my hypothesis on cooperation.

Despite this early cooperation, during the World War II, Iran was occupied due to the British-Iranian-Soviet tripartite Treaty, and the Soviet Union established an autonomous republic in the northwestern Iran.²⁷⁸ However, in 1954 the Soviet Union agreed to demarcate the border with Iran, making boundary changes in Iran's favor.²⁷⁹ In May of 1957, Iran and the USSR agreed in principle to sign a boundary agreement for settling the many border disputes in the Bojnurd area over questions of border crossing, pasturage, etc. A few months later, they also concluded an eleven article treaty in

²⁷⁴ Rahul, "Russia's Other Boundaries," 29.

²⁷⁵ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 19.

²⁷⁶ Percy Sykes, *Persia* (London 1922).

²⁷⁷ Rahul, "Russia's Other Boundaries," 33.

²⁷⁸ Office of the Geographer, "Interational Boundary Study: Iran-Ussr Boundary," (Washington DC: Department of State: Bureau of Intelligence and Research, February 28, 1978), 5.

²⁷⁹ Rahul, "Russia's Other Boundaries."; Geographer, "Interational Boundary Study: Iran-Ussr Boundary," 5.

Teheran on the joint utilization of the fifty per cent of all water and power resources of the frontier rivers Aras and Atrak.²⁸⁰ In 1970, a supplementary protocol was signed in Moscow to clarify the boundary along the water reservoirs. Overall, just like with Turkey, the Soviet Union in 1950s seemed determined to clear any costly territorial disputes as it faced competition with the United States.²⁸¹ At such a time, Iran was an important player that the USSR attempted to bring into its own orbit of influence, however, even with such attempts, Iran signed a bilateral defence agreement with the US, effectively deeply straining its relationship with the Soviets. Yet even then, no territorial disputes were re-established.²⁸²

9.3 Alternative Explanations

Among the alternative explanations which have some validity in these two cases, only the rivalry theory has some support. Namely, many decisions which the Soviet Union made in regards to Turkey and Iran were based on the Soviet rivalry with the United States. However, even with rivalry in mind, the Soviet Union did not pursue only one strategy. Fravel correctly pointed out that even rivals adapt different strategies. In this case, the Soviet Union cooperated, and cooperation fits in with the theory of omnibalancing. However, the rivalry only applies to post-WWII cooperation. During the early cooperation, namely after the First World War, there was no rivalry, and Soviet cooperation at that time was equally relevant, and can only be explained by numerous threats that the early Soviet regime faced: international support for the Tsarist regime and the civil war itself. All other alternative theories face numerous counter-evidence or they do not apply at all, such as the democratic peace theory or the theory on cooperation between alliance members.

²⁸⁰ Rahul, "Russia's Other Boundaries."

²⁸¹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 19.

²⁸² Rahul, "Russia's Other Boundaries," 33.

10 Russian and Kazakh Border Agreement

10.1 Value of the Land

Russia's land border with Kazakhstan is 7,500 kilometres long, the second longest border in the world. Areas of northern Kazakhstan, populated by ethnic Russians, contain some valuable resources such as major coal deposits, gold, and hydro plants. The area is also heavily used for agriculture.²⁸³ Although Russia already contains a vast territory of its own unexploited resources, there is a high resource value in this area compared to the other disputed cases in this research. Also, as the area is populated by the ethnic Russians, who form the majority of population in the north of the country, there is the ethno-cultural value of the land, as long as the population remains there. Overall, one can give medium importance to the land bordering Russia and Kazakhstan.

10.2 Tracing the Negotiations

Shortly after the Soviet Union disintegrated, in 1991, Kazakh president insisted on expanding the CIS to include all members of the former Soviet Union.²⁸⁴ A few months later, Russia rewarded Kazakhstan's stance during the signing of bilateral treaties on economic co-operation. Namely, Kazakhstan was given a clause guaranteeing its territorial integrity. This was Russian acknowledgement that no dispute existed between the two neighbours. This might be considered an irrelevant case for this study, but as Stephen Page states, this was not an insignificant reward for Kazakhstan, where a large concentration of Russians in the north of Kazakhstan presented a significant force.²⁸⁵ In 1992, the Treaty on Collective Security was signed by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Armenia. In 2002 the two sides began working together to clarify disputed areas of the border.²⁸⁶ Finally, in 2007, the actual demarcation of the border began, which will take about 10 to 15 years.

10.3 Changing Factors

It was in Moscow's best interest to deal with the potential causes of conflict before they escalate. The threat from Kazakhstan was a psychological one, fearing potential immigration and economic encroachment. After all, Kazakhstan was an economic burden for Russia, and thus Russia actually wanted a greater level of separation while Kazakhstan desired greater integration.²⁸⁷ For this

²⁸³ *The Times Concise Atlas of the World*, Eleventh ed. (London: Times Books, 2009; reprint, 2010), 61.

²⁸⁴ Stephen Page, "Creation of a Sphere of Influence: Russia and Central Asia," *International Journal of Comparative Criminology* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 789.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 793.

²⁸⁶ "Russia, Kazakhstan to Mark Vast Shared Border," *RIA Novosti* 30.04.2009.

²⁸⁷ Page, "Creation of a Sphere of Influence: Russia and Central Asia."

reason, Russia needed Kazakhstan as a friendly or a neutral power, but distant enough not to be a burden. Kimura believes that in 2004 and 2005, the matter to demarcate the border was urgent for Putin.²⁸⁸ This is unlike Japan, which has not presented any threat to Russia. Therefore, border demarcation with Kazakhstan in 2005 has been resolved by the 50-50 formula, the same formula used in solving the Russo-Chinese territorial dispute.²⁸⁹ Overall, depending how high of a potential threat Moscow saw in Kazakhstan, the Russian compromise in 1991 is in line with my hypothesis on cooperation. Russia emerged from communism in a fragile condition, and it sought good relations with Kazakhstan, not only in terms of the border resolution, but in other areas as well. By 2005, given the imaginary threat of immigrants and a potential Islamic influence, Russia again cooperated. What is interesting, however is that the level of threat from Kazakhstan, especially in 2005, can be ranked as rather low, and while Russia compromised according to my expectations, I also have affirmed that Russia has not compromised in other cases where the level of threat was higher.

10.4 Alternative Explanations

From alternative explanations one can gather that alliances matter. Namely, Russia affirmed Kazakh territorial integrity only a few months after Kazakhstan initiated an expansion of the CIS, something which Russia welcomed as it realized that security in the area will continue to be under Russian control.²⁹⁰ This can also apply to economic interdependence, where we have two countries in a close economic relationship (closer than Russia wanted), and such a relationship made cooperation easier. Other theories do not apply. However, the case of Kazakhstan firmly refutes some apparent observations made in other cases – namely, that Russia would exploit a border issue in order to rally domestic support. As Russia has a large Russian minority in the northern Kazakhstan, it could have exploited the issue the way it did with Estonia and Latvia, but this has never happened. Thus, the claim that states will exploit a territorial issue to rally domestic support now has dubious supporting evidence.

²⁸⁸ Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 149.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁹⁰ Page, "Creation of a Sphere of Influence: Russia and Central Asia."

11 Conclusion

Dispute	Year	Value of the Land	Strategy	Affirmation of the Hypothesis	Supported Alternative Explanation
Kuril Islands Dispute	1905	Low	Compromise	Yes	
	1945	Medium	Escalation	Yes	
	1955	Medium	Compromise	Yes	
	1960	High	Escalation	No	Rivalry
	1978-9	High	Escalation	No	Rivalry
	1991	Medium	Compromise	No	Norms; Rallying Domestic Support
Sino-Soviet Border Dispute	1964-1980	Low	Compromise	Yes	Rivalry
	1964-1980	Low	Escalation	No	Rivalry
	1986-1991	Low	Compromise	Yes	
	2001	Low	Compromise	Yes	
	2004	Low	Compromise	No	Theory must be expanded; economic interdependence
	Estonian-Russian Border	1994	Low	Escalation	Yes
1996-2004		Low	Status-quo	No	Perverse logic on cooperation; norms; rivalry
2004		Low	Escalation	No	Norms; rivalry
Latvian-Russian Border	1997	Low	Compromise	No	Perverse logic on cooperation; norms
	2005	Low	Escalation	No	Perverse logic on escalation; norms; rivalry
	2007	Low	Compromise	No	Perverse logic on cooperation; norms
	2003	Medium	Escalation	No	Rivalry; Rallying Domestic Support
Turkish-Soviet Border Dispute	1921-5	High	Compromise	Yes	
	1953	High	Compromise	Yes	Rivalry
Iranian-Soviet Border Dispute	1921-6	High	Compromise	Yes	
	1954-7	High	Compromise	Yes	Rivalry
Russo-Kazakh Border	1991	Medium	Compromise	Yes	Alliance; Economic Interdependence
	2004-5	Medium	Compromise	Yes	Alliance; Economic Interdependence
Totals:		Low: 12 Medium: 6 High: 6	Escalation: 8 Compromise: 15	Yes: 13 No: 11	Rivalry: 10 Norms: 6

The purpose of this research was to answer the question why there is varied behaviour by countries when they deal with their territorial disputes. Two theories have been selected for testing, a theory of omnibalancing and a theory of preventive warfare. The former focuses on rationale behind compromise, while the latter focuses on coercion/escalation. Overall, the following argument was tested. First, the lower the value of land, the more likely that a state will compromise over it, as the land with lower value should be easier to give away in return for something else. Second, a state is more likely to compromise when it faces a threat (internal or external) to its security (unless this coincides with a decline in its own claim strength over the disputed land – in which case escalation/coercion is more likely). Third, a state is more likely to escalate/coerce when its relative position in a dispute is declining. A state is also more likely to escalate/coerce if it has a weak claim already, but suddenly and temporarily receives an opportunity to improve its position. Russia has been selected as a case study because it has a rich history of territorial disputes, many of which contain more than one strategy out of the three analyzed in this research (cooperative behavior, coercive/escalatory behavior, and status-quo preservation). In total, eight different disputes were looked at using a wider context (from domestic to international perceptions). The table above summarizes phases of each dispute and how those phases ended, as well as whether the outcome of each phase is supported by my hypotheses.

First, it is worth addressing alternative explanations presented in the literature review section. As mentioned, Russia re-emerged in 1991 with a quarter of its border unrecognized. Any compromise over its territory was seen as risky and had the potential to set off a precedent across Russia.²⁹¹ Even so, Russia has compromised. Despite some evidence that Russia was investing in a general reputation for toughness, the question then becomes why Russia cooperated on some cases but not on others? If not only to appear tough, is the use of force by Russia also a result of greed or insecurity? The timing of Russia's agreements, public statements by the Russian officials and academic analysis explains why and when Russia pursued compromise or escalation. First, the explanation that Russia was driven by greed, or that it seized the land in order to exploit its relative capabilities holds no water. During numerous territorial disputes, Russia faced a weaker competitor, such as Iran after the World War II, yet Russia compromised when it could have done otherwise. Second, the democratic peace theory cannot be applied to Russia except during Yeltsin's rule, when Russian behaviour varied from dispute to dispute.

A slight support exists for the explanation that countries use territorial disputes to rally the domestic support. Yeltsin, if one is to assume that he was bluffing in negotiations with Japan, in 1991 sought cooperation (as Russia emerged weakened after the Soviet collapse), but fell short of

²⁹¹ Levinsson, "The Long Shadow of History: Post-Soviet Border Disputes—the Case of Estonia, Latvia, and Russia," 104.

compromise in order to appease potent nationalist forces at home which were seeking to oust him from power. Also in response to Estonia, Yeltsin publicly stated that he will not give an inch of Russia's land, again a move to appease the domestic opposition. Putin also utilized a territorial dispute to rally the domestic support just before the Presidential elections of 2004, whereby Russia attempted to coerce Ukraine over the Tuzla Island dispute.

Similarly, slight evidence exists for theories on economic interdependence. Putin in 2004 compromised to China by giving away most of the remaining disputed territory, not because Russia faced a threat, but because Russia had a good economic relationship with China, which it wanted to continue. Compromise was a way of strengthening that relationship. Slight evidence also exists for a theory on cooperation among allies. In particular, this can apply to the Russian willingness to reward Kazakhstan for its commitment to the expansion of the CIS. Overall, the evidence on these alternative explanations appears to explain a few deviant cases, but in many other cases alternative explanations occur in congruence with the hypotheses of this research.

More frequent support is found with the rivalry theory, namely in ten out of twenty-four cases. It applies to the case of Khrushchev's coercion of Japan in 1960 in response to Japanese-American cooperation, as well as Khrushchev's coercion in 1970 in response to the Sino-Japanese cooperation (when China at the time was improving its relationship with the US). Rivalry also played an important role for Russia's calculations in solving its territorial dispute with China, the Baltic States and Ukraine. Yet even though rivalry is an alternative explanation, in some cases it complements my hypothesis that countries facing a threat will cooperate. One can see this in the case of Iran and Turkey, where a rivalry was the external threat which led the Soviet Union to compromise. In such a way, the approach presented here and the rivalry approach can sometimes complement each other. However, even though rivalry is sometimes the main driving force behind a particular strategy, I have also discovered that rivals tend to change their strategies, as Soviet Union did towards China.

Alternative explanations focusing on the role of norms also have a more frequent support, with six cases showing strong supportive evidence. This evidence comes from Yeltsin's cooperation with Japan in 1991, despite the discovery of evidence that Japan had the legal claim over the islands. He chose to cooperate because he had already established norms of cooperation just a few months earlier. In the case of Russia's dispute with the Baltic States, Russia utilized norms to stall any border agreement, by calling into question the treatment of Russian minorities and the historical role of the Soviet Union. However, by observing the table above one can see that these explanations of norms have never occurred in isolation as the only explanation. The only way norms can have significance is when they occur with other factors, but never alone.

Despite alternative theories receiving some support, my hypotheses based on the theory of omnibalancing and the theory of preventive warfare receive the most support, namely, in 13 out of

24 cases there is supportive evidence. In some cases my hypotheses are the only explanation, as is visible in the case of the Sino-Soviet border dispute in 1991, when the Soviet Union sought to gain international support (and limit expenses on border forces) as it was in the midst of collapse. Many other cases, however, show support of my hypotheses together with alternative explanations, such as the case of Russo-Kazakh border, where Russia compromised both because of the internal threats it faced but also because Kazakhstan was very supportive of Russia, thereby reflecting importance of alliances. Only in eight cases it appears that my hypotheses are the only explanation supported by evidence, which is exactly one third of all cases.

It seems that whenever the logic of my theoretical approach fails, namely, when states choose to escalate or they suddenly fail to cooperate, as was the case with the Kuril Islands and Estonia, one can claim that the USSR/Russia had nothing to gain from cooperation. After all, Fravel states that the scope of the theory for cooperation cannot include states which have nothing to offer. Perhaps Japan and Estonia had nothing to offer in return for the stable border, and indeed it seems unlikely that either one of them would sacrifice their alliance with the Americans for the land of low/medium value. Perhaps, if the land was more valuable, Russia could have offered a better deal. However, the Soviet/Russian behaviour is not consistent enough to confirm that countries drifting into rival's sphere of influence have nothing to offer. The reason is that the Soviet compromises to Turkey and Iran demonstrate the Soviet cooperation as they also drifted into the Western camp. In the first instance, therefore, the USSR/Russia was uncompromising, which does not fit my theoretical approach, but in the case of Turkey and Iran, Soviet/Russian actions fit the logic of the theory. Therefore, whenever the Soviet/Russian leaders changed their strategy in regards to a particular dispute, it was not always in consistency with the theory, even when cases seem to fall within the scope defined by Fravel. Variation of Russia's behaviour then reflects multiple theories, but again, my theoretical approach holds the strongest explanatory power.

The case of the Baltic States is one which least fits my theoretical approach, and while it undermines my hypotheses, certain provisions can be made why this is so. As I discovered, the Baltic States were pushed to engage Russia by the European Union, which in order to grant membership to the Baltic States, demanded resolution of all border disputes. This has pushed the Baltic States to seek compromise with Russia, without Russia having to sacrifice anything on its part. In fact, one can see that Russia has utilized the Baltic States' desire for border resolution to address other bilateral issues, as well as other geopolitical concerns, such as the NATO expansion. One can then note that the case of Baltic States presents a lot of perverse logic. For example, Russia desired to cooperate not by conceding territory, but simply by signing a border agreement. Evidently, Yeltsin's statements show that he was not willing to give an inch of the Russian territory while the war in Chechnya

progressed. As such, the most evident conclusion from the dispute with the Baltic States is that Russia always linked the dispute to other issues: norms (the issue of Russian minority) and rivalry (preventing the EU and NATO expansion). Similar conclusion also follows from the dispute over the Tuzla Island, where the issue is not so much sovereignty over the island, but other issues in Russo-Ukrainian bilateral relationship.

Three changes must be made to the theory of omnibalancing and the theory of preventive warfare in order to make them more suitable to the case of Russia. First, one needs to address bluffing. Every political leadership sometimes tends to bluff, as Yeltsin might have, and therefore a certain element of uncertainty will always exist, which is also the reason why Yeltsin's actions have been portrayed here as both cooperative and bluffing. Second, I have discovered cases of simultaneous escalation and cooperation, as Russia has used this strategy against China from 1964 until the late 1970s. Namely, Russia offered to cooperate, as is predicted by my theoretical framework, but it also sought to punish Chinese non-cooperation. In such a way, strategies of cooperation and escalation are not mutually exclusive, as Fravel has applied them, but rather they can complement each other to adopt a tougher bargaining position. Third, cooperation between Russia and China over the last remaining few islands in 2004 can only be explained by Putin's desire to compensate China (since he built the oil pipeline to Japan instead of China). This means that the theory of omnibalancing must include cooperation, not only to deal with threats, but rather any issue that can be part of a bargaining process (for example, sharing of resources, protection of ethnic minorities, and even historical arguments). Adding this premise to the theory would strengthen its explanatory power in the few cases which cannot be confirmed by the hypotheses.

Apart from the results based on the theory of omnibalancing and the theory of preventive warfare, the first hypothesis receives no support. In other words, results show that Russia is not more likely to threaten or use force over more valuable land, while compromising over less valuable land. What my research has discovered is quite an even mixture of strategies in each dispute, regardless the value of the territory. For instance, data in the above table shows almost identical ratio of instances of 'cooperation to escalation' among low value land and high value land cases. Low value territories experienced 7 instances of cooperation to 4 instances of escalation, while high value territories experienced 4 instances of cooperation to 2 instances of escalation. The rationale behind this finding is simple. The intrinsic value of a territory does not change frequently, but its relative value does. Think of the case of Kuril Islands. Its physical territory has not changed much in past few hundred years. However, due to the ideological clash between the USSR and the US, Sea of Okhotsk became of extreme importance for the Soviets to be able to target US cities in a nuclear strike. For this reason, the Kuril Islands suddenly experienced high relative value. Yet the relative value can also

drop very fast, as it did for Kuril Islands as soon as the Soviets developed technology to move their submarines to the Barents Sea. Rapid advancements in technological development, regime changes, and relations among states make the relative value of any territory prone to high fluctuations.

In the introduction, I mentioned that there are some indirect contributions of this research. First, I have hoped to establish an understanding as to what a conducive international environment for resolving territorial disputes might look like. It appears that a state (if one is to generalize beyond Russia and China) will seek to cooperate when it feels two conditions a) it is facing an issue that can be bargained over; b) it believes that the opponent can offer something in return for the land. Second, this research has also established that any forceful seizure of land will likely see an escalation in conflict because territory is too valuable of a bargaining issue to be given up. In all cases of forceful seizure in this study, the result has been years of non-cooperation and even tension, if not outright retaliation. Third, this research has discovered that distinct categories of cooperation/escalation/status-quo are problematic in research of this type as sometimes states apply different strategies at the same time. Fourth, practitioners in the fields of international relations, politics, diplomacy and international business can now understand that the biggest risks coming from any territorial dispute are sudden changes in claim strength of either/both disputant(s), or a deteriorating bilateral relationship. Deteriorating bilateral relationship usually makes disputed land a more valuable bargaining item, making cooperation less likely. The biggest opportunities to cooperate occur when the opponent has something of value to offer in return for the territory. Fifth, I have now finally gathered an answer to the question whether Russia is more of an aggressive or a cooperative player. Evidence points towards a more cooperative approach. Namely, Russia has escalated in only 1/3 of its territorial disputes, despite having the second most powerful military in the world. This would be a surprise to those who might believe that Russia still has imperialist ambitions.

Unfortunately, the conclusion of this research is not very strong, as 46% of the cases here face stronger evidence for competing or alternative explanations. In fact, this means that Fravel in his study on China was too ambitious by stating that his results apply globally. Further research should thus seek to reframe the theory following some of my suggestions as they help to incorporate non-confirmative cases in Russia, and then test the reframed theory with additional evidence. Also, few more cases can be added to territorial disputes of Russia, namely, the maritime disputes and unconventional territorial disputes (such as the Russo-Georgian conflict over Abkhazia and South Ossetia). There is no reason to believe that maritime disputes or disputes over unconventional territory should follow an entirely different logic. Maritime areas, as well as territories such as protectorate states, also have certain value and countries can use them to trade for certain

concessions. Finally, further research should especially focus on testing this theoretical framework beyond Russia. Since this theory has so far been tested on China, and now on Russia, it would be interesting how the theory fares with less similar states. This will help answer questions such as does this theoretical framework only apply to states similar to Russia and China (such as non-democratic great powers)? Or can this framework apply globally to less similar countries, such as the Costa Rica?

In a way, this last point shows limitations of this research. First, one cannot yet make these findings generalizable to all countries. This is especially so because the theoretical framework selected here does not have as strong support in Russia as it does in case of China. Second, I had to make an intelligent choice on many facts and arguments which are historically disputed. Certainly historians may change the validity of many of these facts and arguments, but for now, I accepted the most plausible evidence. Finally, many alternative explanations were looked at, but their role is not very clear, since they sometimes appear in support of my hypotheses, and at other times they appear independently. Further research should delineate and clarify the relationship between this theoretical framework and alternative explanations.

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