Abstract
Inadvertent Expansion in World Politics
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Why do great powers adopt expansionist foreign policies? Despite its great variety, much of the existing literature shares a common characteristic: that of seeing expansion as the centrally-driven and strategic extension of the state’s territorial domain. However, many important historical instances of great power expansion do not comport with these expectations, showing expansion to be far more peripherally driven and far less strategic than they would expect. In this dissertation, I make a distinction between centrally-driven “strategic expansion” and peripherally-driven “inadvertent expansion,” and I explain inadvertent expansion in the modern history of great power politics. I make three central arguments. First, inadvertent expansion is a surprisingly general phenomenon, occurring in approximately one-in-four cases of great power territorial expansion. Second, inadvertent expansion is a manifestation of a principal-agent problem, being much more likely to occur when leaders in the capital have limited control over their agents on the periphery of the state or empire. Third, leaders will be more likely to engage in inadvertent expansion when the perceived geopolitical risks associated with doing so are relatively low. These arguments are supported with a mixed-methods research strategy. First, I present and analyze new quantitative data on great power territorial expansion, comprising 250 observations coded as either strategic or inadvertent from 1816 to 2014. Second, I lay out a series of paired qualitative case studies of great power inadvertent expansion (and non-expansion), including an introductory case of the United Kingdom in Sind (1843); the United States in Florida (1818-19) and Texas (1836-37); Russia in the Khanate of Kokand (1864-66) and the Ili Region (1871-81); France in Tonkin (1873-74, 1882-83); Japan in Manchuria (1931-32) and Italy in Fiume (1919-20); and Germany in East Africa (1885) and
Kenya and Uganda (1890). The arguments and evidence in this dissertation have important implications for the literature on territorial expansion and international relations theory more broadly.
Inadvertent Expansion in World Politics

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Acknowledgments

This is a dissertation about the ways in which leaders can lose complete control over important segments of the states and empires they are purportedly in charge of, producing foreign policy outcomes they hadn’t intended at all. Funnily enough, the process by which this dissertation came about, to some extent, reflects this basic theoretical insight. I didn’t set out to write a historical dissertation. And I didn’t intend to write a dissertation focused on empire. But a historical dissertation, focused, at least in part, on empire, is what I got.

I came to my dissertation topic as, I think, many graduate students in international relations do—by reading the work of Robert Jervis. In what I’d argue is his greatest book, *System Effects*, Jervis speculates in one very brief section that territorial expansion might be subject to positive feedback effects, with expansion itself helping to generate the conditions that drive future instances of expansion, which, in turn, generate still further expansion, and so on.¹ This 130-word section of his 300-page book began an intellectual and personal journey that would lead through various cities, libraries, university departments, academic conferences, and hundreds, if not thousands, of books, articles, and diplomatic documents.

This dissertation has been more years in the making than I care to admit. This means, not only that I’ve gotten older, but that I’ve accumulated an unusually large number of debts along the way. It began at Yale, where I got incredibly helpful advice and guidance very early on from Alex Debs, Emily Erikson, Philip Gorski, Adria Lawrence, Jason Lyall, Susan Hyde, Maggie Peters, Didac Queralt, James Scott, Ian Shapiro, and Elisabeth Wood. Robert Jervis was also kind enough to sit down with me at an early stage to, in his words, help me “wrestle this beast to the ground.” I also thank Pablo Brum for early inspiration. In the early stages of

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I've spent an inordinate amount of time in various libraries over the course of this project, and have benefited immensely from the hard-working staff at Sterling Memorial Library at Yale, Widener Library at Harvard, Gelman Library at George Washington, the Library of Congress, and in the UC Berkeley library system. Much of the writing of this dissertation took place during the COVID-19 global pandemic, and the staff at Sterling and Gelman libraries bent over backwards to provide me with as much access to library materials as they possibly could. Various aspects of this project have also benefited from many presentations over the years, including at George Washington, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, the IR Theory Colloquium (virtual), and various annual meetings of the American Political Science Association and the International Studies Association. My research has been generously supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Belfer Center at Harvard, and the Institute for Security and Conflict Studies at George Washington. I’d also like to acknowledge Barry Posen, whose truly great book *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* was the inspiration for this project’s title.

I was fortunate to have the best dissertation committee a graduate student could possibly hope for. Jack Snyder was generous enough to join the committee as an outside member, and the project has benefited immensely from his penetrating theoretical insights and encyclopedic knowledge of the modern history of great power politics. Frances Rosenbluth
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Colonies can be conquered by accident. This may at first appear unlikely when we contemplate the immense colonial empires that Europe once possessed—such elaborate constructions must surely be the product of a policy, of a design, of economic calculation. But if you believe that, you may well be deceiving yourself.”

—Douglas Porch

By the time Major-General Sir Charles James Napier arrived in the Sind region of the South Asian subcontinent in 1842, he was eager to reclaim some of his perceived past greatness. The sixty-year-old decorated veteran of the Peninsular War (1807-14) had spent the intervening thirty years in relative obscurity, holding a variety of military posts and moving between the Greek Islands, France, Australia, and England. A small, lean, short-sighted man, with penetrating eyes resting under a prominent brow, a thick, greying beard, and a beak-like nose, Napier had a reputation for combative ness, self-confidence, for holding radical political views, and for being cleverly expressive in speech and writing. This deeply-devout and rapidly-aging general was also known to bristle at authority, to be impatient with control, and to deeply distrust his political superiors. Napier had been appointed by the British East

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2 Contemporary Sindh Province, Pakistan.
India Company as the military commander with responsibility for Sind, and was to exercise Company authority over all relevant military and political matters in the area.

Napier was appointed to his station by the Governor-General of India, Edward Law, the 1st Earl of Ellenborough. Lord Ellenborough had himself only just arrived in Calcutta—having been appointed that very year—and though the two had never met, he and Napier shared a great deal in common. Like Napier, Ellenborough tended to favor military solutions to a variety of problems. Like Napier, Ellenborough too, was deeply distrustful of the political wing of the East India Company. And like Napier, Ellenborough was similarly looking to reclaim his own and his country’s prestige after recent, devastating losses in the Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42).

Sind itself, at this time, was a largely-autonomous region of roughly 125,000 km² on India’s northwest frontier. With nearly two million, predominantly Muslim, inhabitants, Sind had been ruled since the late 18th century by the Balochi Talpur clan. There were three power centers in the region led by three Amirs: one in the Upper Sindian city of Khairpur, and one in each of the two Lower Sindian cities of Hyderabad and Mirpur. The East India Company had been gradually penetrating Sind since the Talpur clan took over, though the territory remained formally independent of Britain. The Amirs, in fact, saw the Company as

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5 Moon, The British Conquest and Dominion of India, p. 565.


a useful counterweight against their nominal overlord, the Emir of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{9}

Unbeknownst to them, however, this friendly relationship with the Company would soon prove to be their undoing.

Though he was completely new to India, had no knowledge of local languages and customs, and had no previous diplomatic experience, Napier soon formed strong opinions regarding the moral standing of the Amirs, seeing them, in his words, as “tyrannical, drunken, debauched, cheating, intriguing, [and] contemptible…”\textsuperscript{10} He also wrote in an early journal entry, that the Amirs are “scoundrels, who are such atrocious tyrants that it is virtuous to roll them over like ninepins.”\textsuperscript{11} Napier quickly made up his mind as to what the situation called for. As he noted in an ominous late-1842 journal entry, “We have no right to seize Scinde; yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, useful, humane piece of rascality it will be.”\textsuperscript{12}

Ellenborough was soon leaning in a similar direction. He began to strongly suspect the Amirs of engaging in subterfuge, and he tasked Napier with uncovering any emerging plots.\textsuperscript{13} Napier soon acquired letters that supposedly contained damning evidence of a conspiracy against the Company at work. That the letters were of questionable authenticity, and that Napier, in fact, couldn’t read the language they were written in, seemed not to deter the Major-General.\textsuperscript{14} Ellenborough too, was not one to be dissuaded by such details. As he


\textsuperscript{10} Moon, \textit{The British Conquest and Dominion of India}, p. 567.

\textsuperscript{11} Moon, \textit{The British Conquest and Dominion of India}, pp. 566-567.

\textsuperscript{12} Huttenback, “The Annexation of Sind,” p. 236.


\textsuperscript{14} Moon, \textit{The British Conquest and Dominion of India}, p. 566.
wrote to Napier in November of 1842, “You are much more competent to decide on the spot as to the authenticity of the letters… than I am here, and I am prepared to abide by and support your decision.”

Ellenborough decided to push for a series of harsh new treaties to govern relations between the Company and the Amirs, and charged Napier with attaining the Amirs’ signatures on them, encouraging Napier to use whatever means he deemed necessary. As Ellenborough noted in a December 1842 letter to Napier, “I very much fear that until our force has been actually felt, there will be no permanent observance of the existing treaty or of any new Treaty we may make.” Napier took this advice to heart. After a brief foray into the desert, where he blew up an abandoned fort, Napier turned his attention toward Hyderabad. Based on rumors that the Amirs were gathering their forces there, Napier set out in late January 1843 with an army of 3,000. While these rumors were unfounded, news of Napier’s advance would convince the Amirs to mobilize, with Napier, effectively, generating the very threat that he believed he was going out to meet. As a Hyderabad official reported to his superiors after a scout saw Napier’s forces advancing, “The General is bent up on war, so get ready.”

As news slowly began to filter back to the capital as to what was transpiring in Sind, officials in London became deeply unsettled. The East India Company had been on a much shorter leash since the late 18th century, with a series of acts passed in Parliament to regulate


18 Huttenback, British Relations with Sind, p. 98-99.
its behavior. The East India Company Act of 1784, otherwise known as “Pitt’s India Act,” explicitly stated that “to pursue Schemes of Conquest and Extension of Dominion in India, are Measures repugnant to the Wish, the Honour, and Policy of the Nation,” and it prohibited the use of force or the pursuit of conquest without the expressed approval of home authorities. Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, who was then a powerful member of the House of Lords, informed Ellenborough that the cabinet was uneasy with the amount of discretion that Napier had been afforded. Lord Fitzgerald, the President of the Board of Control, sent a more desperate letter to Ellenborough in early February 1843, urging him to use extreme caution and to avoid hostilities in Sind. Fitzgerald also warned British Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel that if he did not intervene, he would likely “be awakened some fine morning by finding out that Lord Ellenborough has brought them into some new difficulty.” This, it turns out, is precisely what would occur.

Napier continued his march on Hyderabad in early February. A political officer of the Company was there, and was making good progress in negotiation with the Amirs. Yet Napier would have none of it, writing on 13 February, “I neither can nor will halt now. Their object is very clear and I will not be their dupe. I shall march to Hyderabad tomorrow… and attack every body of armed men I meet.” The following day, the Amirs relented and signed

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21 The civilian body that oversaw the British East India Company.

22 Huttenback, *British Relations with Sind*, p. 105.


24 Huttenback, *British Relations with Sind*, p. 102.
the treaties, yet Napier continued his advance. “I am in full march on Hyderabad,” he wrote on 15 February, “and will make no peace with the Ameers. I will attack them instantly whenever I come up to their troops, they need send no proposals, the time has passed…”

On 18 February, Napier’s army came upon and attacked the joint armies of the Amirs at Miani. Despite being outnumbered nearly four-to-one, it was a decisive victory for the Company’s forces, inflicting as many as six thousand casualties while losing only 63 killed and 193 wounded. Napier then marched on Hyderabad, quickly deposed and exiled the Amirs, and declared the Sind region to be under British control. Ellenborough, elated upon receiving news of the conquest, summarily declared Sind to be a province of the British Empire and appointed Napier as its Governor, all without consulting political authorities in London. In what would, disappointingly, turn out to be an apocryphal tale, Napier was widely reported to have informed Ellenborough of the acquisition by sending him a one-worded Latin message: “Peccavi” or “I have sinned.”

News of the annexation shocked and infuriated officials in London. The Council of Directors was absolutely livid, and passed a resolution condemning Ellenborough and Napier’s actions and calling for the restoration of the Amirs and the return of their

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26 The Amirs’ armies were estimated to be approximately 11,000. James, *Raj*, p. 103.

27 Huttenback, *British Relations with Sind*, p. 103; Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*, p. 573.


30 It turned out the clever pun was not attributable to Napier. Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*, p. 575; James, *Raj*, p. 105.

31 The East India Company’s leadership, based in London.
territories. Prime Minister Peel privately referred to Napier’s actions as “unconscionable folly” and said the whole affair was “disgraceful to the character of this country.” However, the prime minister and his cabinet were more circumspect in their public response. Though they would never have approved the Sind conquest beforehand, now that British blood had been spilt in its acquisition, they were hard-pressed to quickly call for its reversal. As William Gladstone, a cabinet member as President of the Board of Trade, later recalled, the cabinet was “powerless, inasmuch as the mischief of retaining it was less than the mischief of abandoning it, and it remains an accomplished fact.”

A key problem for the government in London had been the speed of communication. This was still the pre-telegraph era, as the first telegraph line between Britain and India would only be operational in 1865. Under these conditions, it took three months to receive a reply to a letter sent to-or-from Calcutta or London, and even responses to letters sent within India often took weeks. This greatly hampered central control, as was well understood by Prime Minister Peel, who noted that “Time—distance—the course of events

32 Moon, The British Conquest and Dominion of India, p. 575.


35 Moon, The British Conquest and Dominion of India, p. 575.


may have so fettered our discretion that we had no alternative but to maintain the occupation of Scinde."

Thus, during the British Empire’s acquisition of a territory the size of New York State, containing nearly two million inhabitants, the central government in London had virtually no knowledge of, or control over, the process, whatsoever.

**Puzzles & Questions**

This is a dissertation about inadvertent expansion in world politics. It addresses a number of puzzles and questions that are raised by the escapades of Napier and Ellenborough recounted above, and many others like them.

For one, *why* do frontier actors such as Ellenborough and Napier launch these unauthorized expansionist bids? Is it rooted in their personalities, with actors who are more aggressive, nationalistic, and insubordinate being more likely to independently claim foreign territory? Does it have to do with their capabilities, and the corresponding weaknesses of their adversaries across the frontier, with more powerful frontier armies being more likely to engage in unauthorized expansion? Or is it explained by the vast distances involved, the vagaries of rudimentary technology, and the difficulties associated with controlling such peripheral actors from the capital, with conditions of lower control being associated with more peripheral expansion?

Second, *why* do the leaders in the capital, such as Prime Minister Peel, accept these independent territorial claims in some cases, but not others? Does it have to do with the characteristics of the territory itself, with economically- or strategically-valuable territory

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being more difficult to turn away? Is it a function of the foreign policy stance of the leaders, with expansionist leaders being more prone to these temptations? Or is it explained by the security environment surrounding these territorial claims, with geopolitically-risky conditions being associated with rejection, and geopolitically-safe conditions being associated with acceptance?

Third, how common are such inadvertent forms of territorial expansion as the British experienced in Sind? Was it—as much existing international relations theory would lead us to believe—a one-off? An unexpected blip amid the broader and more predictable patterns of great power politics, attributable to the contingency of real-world international relations and the “messiness” of history? Or is inadvertent expansion a regular feature of the history of great power politics, displaying patterns of behavior and a regularity of occurrence that suggest it is a general phenomenon befitting its own theory?

These are the central questions I will tackle in this dissertation, and in doing so, I will put forward a theory of inadvertent expansion.

**Territorial Expansion in International Relations**

Much of the international relations literature has not addressed inadvertent expansion directly. In debate and discussion over what explains the tendency for great powers to expand territorially, scholars have given a wide variety of answers, focusing on the gains of conquest,\(^\text{40}\) anarchy and the search for security,\(^\text{41}\) the offensive or defensive nature of

\[^{40}\text{Robert Gilpin, } War \& Change in World Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Ch. 3; Peter Liberman, } Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998).\

\[^{41}\text{John J. Mearsheimer, } The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, Revised ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2014), Ch. 2.\]
technology or geography,\textsuperscript{42} commitment problems and the presence of “buffer states,”\textsuperscript{43} state institutional capacity,\textsuperscript{44} and the revisionist intentions of leaders.\textsuperscript{45} However, despite their great variety and value, all of these arguments share a common tendency: that of seeing expansion as a largely strategic activity, dependent upon decisions made by leaders in the capitals of powerful states.

As a clear example of this sort of thinking, in \textit{War and Change in World Politics}, Robert Gilpin argues that “a state will seek to change the system through territorial, political, and economic expansion until the marginal costs of further change are equal to or greater than the marginal benefits.”\textsuperscript{46} Another examples comes from John Mearsheimer, who, in laying out his theory of offensive realism, explicitly assumes that states are “rational actors” and argues that “conquering and controlling territory” is their “paramount political objective.”\textsuperscript{47} Tanisha Fazal similarly points to the “strong incentives” states have “to take over the buffer states that lie between themselves and their opponents.”\textsuperscript{48} And Dan Altman, focusing on modern conquest, unpacks the “calculated risk” that leaders engage in when making forcible


\textsuperscript{46} Gilpin, \textit{War & Change in World Politics}, p. 106.

\textsuperscript{47} Mearsheimer, \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics}, pp. 31, 43.

\textsuperscript{48} Fazal, \textit{State Death}, p. 38.
territorial gains.49 In short, a centralized and strategic conception of territorial expansion pervades much of the existing literature.

The strategic nature of territorial expansion is relaxed in certain cases, with scholars focusing on the biases associated with domestic political regime type,50 the influence of financial and capitalist elites,51 leader psychology,52 status-seeking,53 domestic-political logrolling and nationalist mythmaking,54 and a “cult of the offensive” in military doctrine and strategy.55 However, even with these theories, while the motives driving expansion make the activity less-than-wholly strategic or rational from the perspective of the state or empire as a whole, expansion still tends to be rooted in decisions made by the leaders in the capital. For instance, Bueno de Mesquita and his coauthors argue that “leaders of small winning-coalition systems”—in effect, autocrats—will be “more inclined to seek territorial expansion” than


their large winning-coalition counterparts.56 Similarly, Jeffrey Taliaferro argues that when “leaders perceive themselves as facing losses relative to their expectation level, the pursuit of relatively risky strategies in the periphery becomes more likely.”57 Thus, even many of the non-unitary and non-rational theories of territorial expansion tend to explain expansion decisions by reference to state leaders.

There are two recent exceptions to these broader trends in the literature. The first is research by Peter Krause and Ehud Eiran on territorial expansion by small, non-state groups and organizations—what they refer to as “radical flank groups.”58 Krause and Eiran argue that modern constraints on territorial expansion by states are not equally binding on non-state actors, and, in fact, can be used to their advantage. They test their arguments by focusing on Israeli settlement of the West Bank from 1967 to the present, and find that, in fact, these radical flank groups established a majority of all settlements in this period. This is important research, and it shares a great deal of theoretical affinity with my own. However, there is a lot of variation left unexplained in their arguments, such as when and where “radical flanks” are more or less likely to claim territory, and when leaders in the capital are more or less likely to accept or reject it. My own arguments, in contrast, aim to account for these behaviors and decisions, and thereby provide a more comprehensive explanation of periphery-driven expansion in world politics.

56 Bueno de Mesquita, et al., The Logic of Political Survival, p. 414.

57 Taliaferro, Balancing Risks, p. 48.

The second exception to the leader-centrism of the broader literature is research by Paul MacDonald on “autonomous expansion” in colonial empires. MacDonald argues that the unique governance structures of colonial empires—with chains of delegation running from the capital, to the imperial proconsul, to the local intermediary—predispose these empires to expand autonomously from metropolitan leadership. MacDonald shows that various forms of instability in these hierarchical governance structures can prompt a number of forms of autonomous expansion. These arguments are illustrated with various examples from the history of the British in India and Sub-Saharan Africa. MacDonald’s contributions are also important, pushing research on territorial expansion in a very positive direction. And while his arguments also have a great deal of affinity with my own, they are intended to apply only to circumstances of organized European imperialism—situations where there are formal proconsul positions as well as local imperial officials. In contrast, I aim to explain a broader set of cases—standard imperialism, as well as the extension of state territory, wartime expansion, and the like.

In sum, with just two recent exceptions, much of the international relations literature relies heavily upon leader-centric explanations for why great powers engage in territorial expansion. While these arguments may account for many, perhaps even most, cases of great power expansion, there is a relatively-large subset of cases that they have a difficult time making sense of. Documenting and explaining these cases are the primary aims of this dissertation.

The Argument in Brief

The process of inadvertent expansion tends to unfold in two basic steps—“unauthorized peripheral expansion” and “subsequent central authorization.” In the first step, unauthorized peripheral expansion, state or non-state actors on the periphery of states and empires plan, execute, and in most cases fully carry out instances of territorial expansion, without the aid, authorization, or foreknowledge of leaders at home in the capital. This might consist of the military or colonial army engaging in armed conquest, diplomats or colonial officials annexing territory, or merchants and other private actors seizing territory. Whatever the case may be, what is crucial at this stage is that the leaders in the capital with responsibility for national or imperial security policy are not involved in the planning or execution of the expansion.

I argue that this first step is largely the result of inadequate central control over the periphery. It is a manifestation of what is known as a “principal-agent problem”—a situation in which one actor (the principal) delegates decision-making authority to another actor (the agent), yet the agent makes decisions that differ from those the principal would make if it were present. In this first stage of unauthorized peripheral expansion, the principal is the central leadership of the state or empire, and the agent is a state or non-state actor on the periphery, and the problem is that the agent has just acquired foreign territory without the necessary permission or authority to do so.

Principal-agent problems are exacerbated by a lack of central control over the periphery, typically in the form of the ability to monitor the behavior of peripheral agents. When and where leaders in the capital have difficulty monitoring, and thereby controlling, their peripheral agents, unauthorized peripheral expansion is more likely to occur. In contrast, when and where leaders in the capital are better able to monitor and control their peripheral
agents, unauthorized peripheral expansion is less likely to occur. In the history of great power territorial expansion, the ability to monitor and control the periphery is crucially determined by the state of transportation and communications technology, with rudimentary technology hindering central control and advanced technology enabling it. However, it is not the only determinant. In a number of important cases, weak civilian control over the military, and even the fog of a major war, can hamper civilian or central control to an extent that unauthorized peripheral expansion becomes more likely. In short, we should expect the incidence of unauthorized peripheral expansion to vary inversely with the amount of central control over the periphery—when central control is weaker, we should see more, and when it is stronger, we should see less.

However, there is a second step in the process of inadvertent expansion, which I refer to as subsequent central authorization. In this step, the peripheral agents present their principals in the capital with the partly or wholly acquired territory as a *fait accompli*. This initiates a deliberative process in the capital that results in a decision among central leaders to either reject the *fait accompli*, leaving their peripheral agents to fend for themselves, or to accept the *fait accompli*, completing the process of inadvertent expansion.

It is important to recognize that the very act of unauthorized peripheral expansion changes “the facts on the ground” and thereby alters the strategic calculus of the leaders in the capital. It creates a set of incentives for these leaders to consider retaining the territory in question, and it does so for three basic reasons. First, unauthorized peripheral expansion often dramatically drives down the costs of territorial acquisition. Second, unauthorized peripheral expansion tends to generate domestic political pressure on the leaders in the capital to support their own agents and nationals. And third, unauthorized peripheral expansion tends to engage the national honor and prestige of the leaders in the capital in a
way they simply weren’t engaged before, making withdrawal significantly more difficult. Thus, for reasons of reduced costs, domestic political pressure, and national honor, leaders often have pretty strong incentives to subsequently authorize the territorial claims of their wayward agents.

However, despite these incentives, leaders in the capital still have one other crucial consideration: the geopolitical risk associated with acquiring the territory in question. When leaders perceive few significant geopolitical risks associated with acceptance of the *fait accompli*, they are significantly more likely to subsequently authorize the acquisition. In contrast, when leaders perceive significant geopolitical risk associated with acceptance of the *fait accompli*—such as crippling economic isolation, a costly regional conflict, or major power war—they will be far less likely to subsequently authorize the acquisition.

In sum, inadvertent expansion is most likely to occur when leaders in the capital lack adequate control over their peripheral agents, and when there are few perceived geopolitical risks associated with acceptance. To put it simply, inadvertent expansion is most common in low control, low stakes contexts. Even in cases where the leaders don’t positively “want” the territory in question, the incentives generated by unauthorized peripheral expansion are often enough to force their hands and encourage subsequent central authorization, leading to inadvertent expansion.

**Importance**

Inadvertent expansion is a surprisingly general phenomenon. Far from being an unusual and highly-contingent outcome—a curiosity to be pondered by historians of particular empires in particular time periods—it was, in fact, a regular feature of great power politics right up to the 1930s. To preview the findings of Chapter 3, between 1816 and 2014, nearly one-in-four
instances of territorial expansion among the great powers are inadvertent in nature. Inadvertent expansion occurs regularly over the course of more than a century and is experienced by all but two (Austria-Hungary, China) of the nine great powers. It occurs in all regions of the world with the exception of Europe, and a wide variety of territories are acquired in this manner, from remote islands in the South Pacific, to topographically-forbidding central-African kingdoms, to densely-populated regions of East and Southeast Asia (see Figure 1.1, below). In short, inadvertent expansion is a regular feature in the modern history of great power politics, which international relations theory and research has just barely begun to grapple with.

![Figure 1.1: Modern states whose territory experienced inadvertent expansion, 1816-2014](image)

**Contributions**

This dissertation makes three central contributions to the literature on territorial expansion and to international relations theory more broadly. First, I put forward the concept of inadvertent expansion, a phenomenon that has been largely ignored in the international

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60 Map created using MapChart.net (2021). Available at: [https://mapchart.net/](https://mapchart.net/).
relations literature. As I show in the chapter that follows, while a few scholars have recognized that territorial expansion can vary in terms of its process or the form it takes, very few have discussed the radically-decentralized nature of inadvertent expansion. Recognizing the phenomenon of inadvertent expansion, clearly conceptualizing it in terms of its attributes, and observing it across dozens of cases is an important contribution to the literature I make in this dissertation.

Second, I present a new theory of inadvertent expansion. As shown above, few scholars have recognized, let alone tried to explain, the phenomenon of inadvertent expansion. Drawing on principal-agent theory, I construct a theory that applies to a broader set of cases, and a longer swath of time, than existing explanations for periphery-driven territorial expansion.

Third, I conduct the first-ever comprehensive accounting of inadvertent expansion in the post-1815 history of great power politics. I present new data comprising 250 observations of territorial expansion by the great powers, each of which is coded with respect to whether its expansion was inadvertent or strategic in nature. This allows me to show the broad patterns of inadvertent expansion across space and time, and provides a wide variety of historically-rich cases with which to illustrate how inadvertent expansion works in practice, ten of which are presented in the pages that follow.

In sum, this dissertation contributes to the international relations literature by putting forward a new concept, a new theory, and a great deal of new empirical evidence.

Roadmap

The pages that follow will present a theory of inadvertent expansion, and then test and illustrate it in the modern history of great power politics. I begin, in Chapter 2, by laying out
my theory of inadvertent expansion in two parts. The first part covers the unauthorized peripheral expansion stage of inadvertent expansion, drawing on principal-agent theory to explain when we should expect this phenomenon to be more or less common. The second part covers the subsequent central authorization stage of inadvertent expansion, showing how the perceived geopolitical risks associated with accepting the fait accompli can encourage or discourage acceptance. I close this chapter with a detailed discussion of the research design, the methods employed, and the case selection criteria that guide the empirical chapters that follow.

In Chapter 3, I present the broad patterns of inadvertent expansion among the great powers. I introduce new data on great power expansion between 1816 and 2014, and show how inadvertent expansion varies—and doesn’t vary—with a wide variety of important factors. In this chapter I also support the central claims of my theory of inadvertent expansion—that a lack of central control over the periphery and conditions of low geopolitical risk are associated with more inadvertent expansion. Using a linear probability model and the great power expansion data, I show that territorial expansion is significantly more likely to be inadvertent rather than strategic when the territory in question lacks a connection to the global telegraph network, and under conditions of relatively low geopolitical risk.

Chapters 4 through 8 present a series of paired case studies of inadvertent expansion (and non-expansion) in the modern history of great power politics. These are intended to show how the explanatory variables and outcomes in the cases vary in ways expected by the theory, to illustrate the mechanisms of the theory of inadvertent expansion at work in practice, and to demonstrate the generality of the theory by examining a wide variety of great power actors, regional contexts, and historical time periods.
Chapter 4 presents two U.S. cases. The first is the U.S.’s acquisition of Florida in 1819-19 and the second is the U.S.’s non-acquisition of the Republic of Texas in 1836-37. This pair of cases is useful, both methodologically and theoretically, in that the very same individual—Andrew Jackson—is the peripheral agent in the first case, as a U.S. Army Major-General, and is the leader in the capital in the second case, as president of the United States. This allows us to observe how dramatically perceptions can differ from periphery to center, even with the same individual.

Chapter 5 presents two cases of inadvertent expansion involving Russia on the Eurasian Steppe. The first case covers the Russian acquisition of parts of the Khanate of Kokand—the cities of Chimkent and Tashkent—from 1864-66. The second case examines Russia’s non-acquisition of the Ili Region from 1871-81. As the chapter shows, the lack of perceived geopolitical risk in Kokand, and its presence in the Ili Region, is important to explaining the varied outcomes across these two cases.

Chapter 6 presents two French cases. The first examines the French Empire’s non-acquisition of the Kingdom of Tonkin in 1873-74, and the second covers France’s ultimate acquisition of Tonkin in 1882-83. This pair of cases is also methodologically and theoretically useful due to the striking similarity of the two cases, involving the same great power, operating in the same region, dealing with the exact same territorial entity, separated by only a decade, and an almost-identical process of inadvertent expansion, leading to divergent outcomes—and for reasons explained by my theory.

Chapter 7 presents the only cross-great power comparison in the dissertation, examining the case of the Italian non-acquisition of the port city of Fiume in 1919-20, as well Japan’s acquisition of Manchuria in 1931-32. These two cases highlight the dilemma of inadvertent expansion—the difficult position leaders are put in when they are stuck between a domestic
public pushing for acceptance of the *fait accompli* and looming geopolitical risk associated with doing so. These two cases also differ from the rest in that they show the possibility of inadvertent expansion even in the presence of modern communications technology.

Chapter 8 concludes the empirical component of the dissertation by presenting a pair of German cases in East Africa. The first case examines Germany’s acquisition of what is now Tanzania in 1884-85. The second case focuses on Germany’s non-acquisition of an important part of what is now Kenya and Uganda in 1890. This final empirical chapter presents the dissertation’s only two cases of inadvertent expansion via *political annexation* (the previous chapters all consist of cases of armed conquest), showing how hampered central control and perceptions of geopolitical risk are also central to the process of inadvertent expansion in this other important form.

Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation. It reviews the arguments and central findings, and discusses the most important theoretical and policy implications of the research presented.
CHAPTER 2

A THEORY OF INADVERTENT EXPANSION

“We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind.”

—John R. Seeley

This chapter presents a theory of inadvertent expansion. A comprehensive understanding of inadvertent expansion requires answering at least two basic questions. First, under what conditions are inadvertent expansion opportunities most likely to arise? More concretely, under what conditions are actors on the periphery likely to present leaders in the capital with faits accomplis in the form of unauthorized territorial claims and acquisitions? Second, what explains variation in central leaders’ decisions when faced with these faits accomplis? Or, more plainly, why do leaders in the capital subsequently authorize this peripheral expansion and accept the territory in some cases, but not others? The theory presented in this chapter will directly address both questions and, with the help of a variety of illustrative examples, will lay out three primary arguments. First, that inadvertent expansion opportunities are most likely to arise when leaders in the capital have limited control over their agents on the periphery of the state or empire. Second, that the very act of these peripheral agents engaging in unauthorized expansion creates incentives for leaders in the capital to retain their territorial acquisitions, as a result of reduced costs, domestic political pressure, and the engagement of national honor. And third, that perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquiring the

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territory in question is a crucial factor determining when leaders accept, and when they reject, the territorial *fait accompli* presented by their peripheral agents.

I begin by clearly defining the outcome of interest—inaudvertent expansion—and differentiating it from related and existing concepts. Second, I introduce principal-agent theory, showing how a lack of control over the periphery is a crucial condition under which inadvertent expansion is likely to arise. Third, I explain why inadvertent expansion opportunities can often be so difficult for leaders in the capital to resist when they are presented with them. Fourth, I discuss the importance of geopolitical risk as a crucial factor driving leader decision making, followed by a discussion of the painful dilemma leaders face in certain cases. The chapter ends with a presentation of the alternative explanations that are considered throughout, as well as the research methods that guide the empirical chapters that follow, focused on research design, scope conditions, and case selection.

*Expansion, Strategic & Inadvertent*

The outcome I am seeking to explain, or dependent variable, is “expansion,” which I define somewhat narrowly as the coercive acquisition of foreign territory that is intended to be long-term or permanent for the expanding state. Expansion, as it is being used here, includes the gain of territory through armed conquest, political annexation, and coercive cession. This definition excludes largely-voluntary transfers of territory, such as when states engage in treaty-based territorial exchange or the adjustment of shared borders. It also excludes purchases or leases of territory that don’t include an important coercive component, such as
when the United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867.\(^2\) It excludes various forms of “domestic expansion,” such as territorial expropriation, ethnic cleansing, counterinsurgency, and other pacification campaigns. Finally, it excludes forcible acquisitions of territory that are intended to be temporary or provisional in nature, such as military occupations or, in its contemporary guise, what is known as “neotrusteeship.”\(^3\) Thus, expansion refers narrowly to lasting, coercive acquisition of foreign territory.

Others have conceptualized it more broadly. For instance, Fareed Zakaria defines expansion to include, not only imperialism, but also “an activist foreign policy that ranges from attention to international events to increases in diplomatic legations to participation in great power diplomacy.”\(^4\) The problem with such an inclusive definition is its conceptual clarity and precision: it has become so broad as to lose much of its meaning.\(^5\) A more circumscribed definition, such as the one employed here, helps mitigate this problem.

Expansion, as I am using it, is related to, but distinct from, a number of concepts in international relations scholarship with which it is often conflated. For instance, expansion is not identical with “imperialism,” as expansion can also consist of the extension of a state’s national borders, and it only covers the initial acquisition of foreign territory, not its ongoing

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administration. Expansion is also not the same thing as “war,” but often includes the use of force and regularly precipitates or follows from the occurrence of war. Expansion is not identical to “power-maximization,” as this concept doesn’t merely refer to extended territorial control, but also to a variety of other policies intended to increase the relative economic and military capabilities of a state. Finally, expansion is distinct from the somewhat opaque concept of “rise,” which most often refers to the secular increase in economic and military capabilities of one state relative to others.

As noted in the previous chapter, most international relations scholarship has tended to treat expansion as if it were a singular phenomenon: the largely-strategic and leader-directed extension of the state’s territorial domain. But not all have. For instance, Colin Elman draws a distinction between what he refers to as “manual and automatic expansion,” the former consisting of “conscious bids for hegemony,” and the latter, “incremental, localized attempts to expand, with a view to immediate opportunities… [not] with the deliberate purpose of becoming the dominant state in the international system.” Similarly, Randall Schweller argues that “we must distinguish between aggressive and nonaggressive expansion and

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between safe and risky expansion. All states… can be expected to engage in nonaggressive expansion as well as cheap, relatively safe expansion on the periphery.”¹¹ These are welcome distinctions, to be sure. But because the concepts aren’t thoroughly developed, we aren’t given much of an indication of when to expect one form over the other.¹² And more importantly for our purposes here, both forms remain largely leader-centric in nature.

The primary distinction I am drawing is between what I refer to as “strategic expansion” and “inadvertent expansion.” Strategic expansion is territorial expansion that is planned and ordered by the central leadership of a state or empire, and is executed in accordance with those plans. Thorough strategic planning for expansion by state leaders will include four considerations: where it will take place, when it will take place, how much territory to acquire, and how it will be acquired. Strategic expansion is exemplified in many cases of territorial expansion that are well-known in the historical record and in international relations scholarship, such as Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1905, the German invasion of Poland in 1939, and, as best we can tell, the Russian conquest of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

In contrast, inadvertent expansion is territorial expansion that is planned and executed by actors on the periphery of a state or empire, without the foreknowledge or involvement of central leadership in the capital. Inadvertent expansion is exemplified by the case that opened this dissertation—the British conquest of Sind in 1843—as well as those that populate later chapters (among many others), including the U.S.’s conquest of Florida in 1818-19, the Russian conquests of Chimkent and Tashkent in 1864-65, France’s conquest of


¹² Though, Schweller does posit that “democracies have little or no appetite for risky, aggressive expansion.” Schweller, Unanswered Threats, p. 113.
Tonkin in 1882-83, the German annexation of East Africa in 1884-85, and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931-32.

It is important to note that this idea of inadvertent expansion isn’t entirely new, particularly in the history of empire. In summarizing this literature, Michael Doyle refers to a whole category of theories as “peri-centric” which root the sources of imperialism in the periphery.\(^\text{13}\) In the history of the British Empire this includes foundational works by Gallagher and Robinson on the “Imperialism of Free Trade” and informal empire,\(^\text{14}\) John Galbraith on the “turbulent frontier” and the “man on the spot,”\(^\text{15}\) and David Fieldhouse on “colonial sub-imperialism.”\(^\text{16}\) In their footsteps have followed a number of historians who have taken a more interactionist view of the relationship between center and periphery in producing imperialism, such as Ronald Robinson,\(^\text{17}\) John Darwin,\(^\text{18}\) and Ronald Hyam\(^\text{19}\) — though, all still retaining an important role for the periphery.

In international relations specifically, the only other research adopting a similar concept is by Paul MacDonald on what he refers to as “autonomous expansion.” In MacDonald’s


terms, autonomous expansion is “political expansion of overseas empires without prior authorization or approval from officials in the metropole.”

This is virtually equivalent to inadvertent expansion, however, for two reasons I don’t simply adopt MacDonald’s terminology. First, the term “autonomous” has a number of meanings, including self-governing, independent, and operating without human control—none of which exactly capture what occurs in cases of inadvertent expansion. And having multiple meanings associated with the term can hinder conceptual clarity, leading readers to ask “autonomous in what sense?” Second, if the term autonomous applies to any party in these cases, it is to the actors on the periphery, as they are the ones acting autonomously, without direction from the center. Yet what, perhaps, most is interesting about inadvertent expansion is how little control those in power, the leaders in the capital, often have over the process. In contrast, the term “inadvertent” has fewer meanings—being defined as “not resulting or achieved through deliberate planning”—and it is geared toward the actors in the center, which I would argue makes it a more fitting term for the phenomenon.

**Principals, Agents, & Peripheral Expansion**

As will be detailed in Chapter 3, inadvertent expansion has been a regular feature of the modern history of great power politics, occurring dozens of times over the course of more than a century. However, despite the wide variety of actors involved, regions in which it occurs, temporal contexts, and territories acquired, at a basic level instances of inadvertent

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expansion typically involve three or four key actors and tend to follow a two-step sequence. The key actors are leaders in the capital, actors on the periphery, a foreign sovereign entity, and sometimes another great power whose interests might be threatened by the expansion. The leaders in the capital include the head of state or government—such as the president, prime minister, autocrat, or monarch—and the key members of his or her cabinet primarily responsible for national or imperial security policy, including the defense, foreign, and colonial ministers. The actors on the periphery consist of a variety of state and non-state actors, including members of the military, colonial armies, imperial officials, members of private-chartered companies, merchants, and explorers. The foreign sovereign entities are generally local kingdoms and empires, components of other states, and other foreign imperial holdings. And finally, the other great powers are those that are commonly and conventionally understood as such.23

The two basic steps of inadvertent expansion are what I refer to as “unauthorized peripheral expansion” and “subsequent central authorization.” In the first step of unauthorized peripheral expansion, the state or non-state actors on the periphery of a given state or empire plan, execute, and in many cases fully carry out an instance of territorial expansion, without the aid, authorization, or foreknowledge of the leaders at home in the capital.24 This unauthorized peripheral expansion can take the form of a military or colonial army engaging in armed conquest, such when French colonial forces invaded German

23 For more details on the coding of the “great powers,” see Chapter 3.

Cameroon in the opening months of the First World War, without orders from Paris.\textsuperscript{25} It can also take the form of diplomatic or colonial officials annexing territory, such as when Sir Stamford Raffles acquired Singapore on behalf of the British Empire in 1819, without prior authorization from London.\textsuperscript{26} It can also consist of members of private chartered companies and other economic actors seizing territory for economic gain, such as the German trader Adolph Lüderitz annexing territory without government authorization in what would become Germany’s first overseas colony of South West Africa.\textsuperscript{27} Despite their many differences, what these forms of peripheral expansion share in common is that they were not specifically ordered by authorities at home in the capital.

The first question that needs addressing, then, is under what conditions are peripheral actors more likely to claim foreign territory without authorization? In short, what explains unauthorized peripheral expansion? The best way to understand the first step of unauthorized peripheral expansion is as a particular manifestation of what is known as a “principal-agent problem.”\textsuperscript{28} Whenever one actor, known as the “principal,” delegates some


decision-making authority to another actor, known as the “agent,” the possibility for principal-agent problems arises. In the theory of inadvertent expansion, the principals are the leaders in the capital and the agents are the peripheral actors. In some cases, when the peripheral agents are state actors, such as members of the military or colonial apparatus, the delegation will be direct and explicit. In other cases, when the peripheral agents are non-state actors, such as private merchants or explorers, the delegation is far more implicit. In either case, what matters is that every act of delegation entails potential losses in terms of agency or control on the part of the principal, and this is what can pose problems.

There are two jointly-necessary conditions for principal-agent problems to occur. The first of these are information asymmetries in favor of the agent. Agents will typically possess, or have greater access to, information that is, or would be, of value to the principal. This can be due to the agent’s proximity to the task at hand, its expertise in a given issue-area, or the sometimes-exorbitant costs associated with monitoring the agent’s behavior. In cases of inadvertent expansion, these information asymmetries can be particularly severe. In many cases, we’re talking about relatively few people communicating over vast distances, often using 19th century transportation and communications technology. For instance, in 1850, when the explorer Gennadii Nevelskoi unilaterally annexed the Amur Basin to the Russian Empire, it took at least five months to get a reply to a message sent from St. Petersburg to


the Amur region.\textsuperscript{30} Similarly, in 1852, when Commodore George Lambert independently sparked the Second Anglo-Burmese War, leading to the British conquest of lower Burma, it took approximately four months to get a reply to a message sent from London to Rangoon.\textsuperscript{31} These conditions greatly exacerbated information asymmetries in favor of peripheral agents, and hampered central control by leaders in the capital. As British Colonial Secretary Hicks Beach told a colleague, shortly before a peripheral agent of his independently conquered Zululand in 1879, “I cannot really control him without a telegraph.”\textsuperscript{32}

However, the information asymmetries common in cases of inadvertent expansion are not simply a matter of vast distances and slow communications. Even distance-demolishing technologies such as the telegraph wouldn’t solve all problems in this regard—though, as I show in Chapter 3, they make a significant difference. For one, telegraph cables were rapidly connected to coastal regions throughout the world in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, yet communication with the interior of many regions would prove much more difficult to establish. Second, leaders in the capital still relied upon their peripheral agents to send information from the frontier, allowing these agents a great deal of artistic license in how they dealt with the facts.\textsuperscript{33} As one historian of the Russian Empire in Central Asia notes, the “real power which local officers wielded… [lay] in their monopoly of information. It was


\textsuperscript{33} McIntyre, \textit{The Imperial Frontier in the Tropics}, p. 381.
extremely difficult to resist the arguments for action which these officers pressed when the only information available came from them too.” And third, even when specific orders could get through to them in time, peripheral agents without representatives from the capital peering over their shoulders always had the opportunity to turn a blind eye. As the famed counterinsurgent of French Algeria Thomas Robert Bugeaud once declared, “In the face of the enemy, one must never accept any precise instructions or plans imposed from above… One should burn instructions so as to avoid the temptation of reading them.”

The second necessary condition for principal-agent problems to occur is a divergence of preferences between principal and agent. In delegating, the principal wants the agent to act exactly as the principal would if it were making the decisions itself, while agents will be tempted to make its own decisions, at least some of the time. There are many reasons why divergences of preferences can arise in delegated-agency relations, including agent self-interest, barriers to communication, varied perceptions, differing risk orientations, and divergent structural conditions facing principal and agent. In the theory of inadvertent expansion, the most important driver of preference divergence is the differing positions and associated perceptions of the leaders in the capital and their peripheral agents. And the most important issue on which preferences diverge is on national or imperial security policy, with peripheral agents often wanting to act quickly and aggressively, and leaders in the capital preferring to act slowly and cautiously.


These differences can be neatly summed up with the ideas of the “view from the capital” and the “view from the frontier.” The view from the capital is that which is typically held by the leaders in the capital. Their responsibilities are broad, being concerned with the interests of the state or empire as a whole. Their areas of concern are often global, including not only the territory at issue, but also adjacent territories, other important regional actors, relationships with the other great powers, and, of course, domestic politics at home. And the leaders’ distance from the frontier means that their sense of urgency to act in response to any given peripheral contingency is generally lower than that of the peripheral agents. From the perspective of the capital, the daily fluctuations of threats and opportunities presented by the periphery are seen as distant and abstract.

The view from the frontier, in contrast, is that which is held by peripheral agents. Their responsibilities are relatively narrow, being concerned, at most, with a portion of the state or empire. Their areas of concern are often local, being essentially limited to the territory at issue and, perhaps, some surrounding areas. And their proximity to the frontier means that their sense of urgency to act in any given contingency is often much higher than that of the leaders back in the capital. The threats and opportunities these peripheral agents regularly face, though often mild when considering the security of the state or empire as a whole, are immediate and very real. Thus, viewing a given problem from the capital or from the frontier can lead to highly divergent perceptions, and to corresponding differences in policy preferences.

This difference between the view from the capital and the view from the frontier is well articulated in a letter from the governor-general of India who was introduced in Chapter 1, Lord Ellenborough, to Queen Victoria, justifying the recent conquest of Sind. “Your Majesty will not have failed to observe,” Ellenborough wrote in October 1843:
“how very different a position the British Government stands in Europe from that which it is placed in India. In Europe peace is maintained by the balance of power amongst several states. In India all balance has been overthrown by our preponderance, and to exist we must continue to be supreme. The necessity of our position may often render necessary here measures wholly unsuited to the state of things which prevails in Europe. The least appearance of weakness or of hesitation would lead to a general combination of all against a foreign, and necessarily an unpopular, Government.”

Thus, a combination of information asymmetries and preference divergence will tend to produce principal-agent problems. The most important among these, for our purposes, is what is known as “moral hazard.” Given that the agent is acting at the behest of the principal, and given that it is generally the principal that is responsible for the outcomes in question, the agent may feel emboldened to make riskier, less-responsible choices than it otherwise would, potentially creating significant problems for the principal. In the case at hand, the most important manifestation of moral hazard is unauthorized peripheral expansion. Given that these peripheral agents are representatives of—or, at the very least, claim to be acting in the name of—a powerful state back home, they will often have a well-founded expectation that they will be supported by leaders in the capital, regardless of whether their actions were authorized or not.

36 “Ellenborough to the Queen, Allahabad, June 27, 1843” in Lord Colchester, ed., History of the Indian Administration of Lord Ellenborough, in his Correspondence with the Duke of Wellington: To Which is Prefixed, by Permission of Her Majesty, Lord Ellenborough’s Letters to the Queen During that Period (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1874), p. 101.

This is the first step in the process of inadvertent expansion. The question that needs addressing, then, is under what conditions peripheral agents are more likely to engage in unauthorized peripheral expansion. There are a wide variety of motives that drive individual peripheral agents to engage in unauthorized expansion. In some cases, the territory in question has intrinsic strategic or economic value, and an irresistible window of opportunity presents itself.\textsuperscript{38} In other cases, the agents are genuinely threatened by actors on the other side of the frontier, and expand for defensive reasons.\textsuperscript{39} In other cases still, these peripheral agents’ have more bureaucratic or parochial interests, such as promotion within the military or advancement in their organizations.\textsuperscript{40} Finally, in some cases they simply want the glory and prestige that is so often historically associated with territorial conquest.\textsuperscript{41}

Whatever their individual motivations may be, the crucial permissive factor enabling unauthorized peripheral expansion is the degree of control leaders in the capital have over these peripheral agents. When leaders in the capital have only limited control over their peripheral agents, unauthorized peripheral expansion is more likely. In contrast, when leaders in the capital have significant control over their peripheral agents, unauthorized peripheral expansion is much less likely. In line with principal-agent theory, “control” results from the ability to monitor the agents’ behavior, often coming in the form of advanced transportation and communications technology. However, there are other ways in which

\textsuperscript{38} For strategic considerations, see the case of Japan in Manchuria (Chapter 7). For economic motives, the German acquisition of South West Africa is a useful representative case: Esterhuyse, \textit{South West Africa}, 1880-1894, pp. 38-42, 46-62.

\textsuperscript{39} Galbraith, “The ‘Turbulent Frontier’ as a Factor in British Expansion.”


central control can break down. For instance, in cases of weak civilian oversight of the military, control by leaders in the capital over their peripheral agents can be severely hampered, as the cases of Japan and Italy (Chapter 7) indicate.

*Peripheral Pulls*42

In sum, unauthorized peripheral expansion is most likely when control by leaders in the capital over their agents on the periphery is relatively low. It is a principal-agent problem driven by a combination of information asymmetries favoring peripheral agents, a divergence of preferences between the capital and the periphery, and moral hazard on the part of peripheral agents. This is the first step in the process of inadvertent expansion. But, as noted above, inadvertent expansion consists of two key steps: unauthorized peripheral expansion and subsequent central authorization. After claiming territory without authorization, the actors on the periphery present the leaders in the capital with their acquisitions as a *fait accompli*.43 In some cases, they directly contact their metropolitan bosses to notify them of their gains. In other cases, news filters back to the capital through other channels. In either case, knowledge of the acquisition among leaders in the capital initiates a deliberative process on whether to reject or accept the *fait accompli*. If leaders in the capital decide to reject the *fait accompli*, then they effectively cut these peripheral actors loose, instructing them to either return the acquired territories or to fend for themselves. In contrast, if the leaders decide to accept the *fait accompli*, as they have in dozens of cases in the


modern era, the territory then becomes part of the state or empire, thereby completing the process of inadvertent expansion.

The key question that needs addressing for this second step, then, is why leaders in the capital accept these _faits accomplis_ in some cases, but not in others? More simply, what explains subsequent central authorization? Before getting into what explains variation in leader choice, it is important to note that, for leaders facing these _faits accomplis_, there appears to be a bias in favor of acceptance. Across numerous cases of inadvertent expansion, leaders seem to come up with a variety of arguments for retaining these territories _ex post_ that it is difficult to imagine they would marshal in favor of their acquisition _ex ante_. The primary reason this is the case is that, by engaging in unauthorized expansion, the peripheral agents have changed “the facts on the ground,” altering the strategic calculus of the leaders in the capital. And for three central reasons, these changed facts tend to incentivize leaders toward acceptance.

First, unauthorized peripheral expansion will often drastically drive down the costs of territorial acquisition for leaders in the capital. Great powers, as a general rule, have a tendency to engage in territorial expansion, and the fact that one of their peripheral agents has mostly done it for them can make it all the more enticing. If we think of the costs of territorial expansion as being divided between current “acquisition costs” and future “governance costs,” unauthorized peripheral expansion has eliminated the first half of the equation.44 This tends to strengthen the arguments of pro-expansion hawks in the capital and to weaken the arguments of cost- or risk-conscious doves, inclining the leaders toward acceptance.

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44 I thank Mariya Grinberg for this formulation.
Second, leaders in the capital will often feel significant pressure to support their own citizens and subjects, regardless of “who started it” or how unscrupulous they may have been. This sometimes comes in the form of a sense of personal or professional responsibility on the part of the leaders to protect and defend their own subordinates or nationals. In other cases, the great power’s domestic public at large becomes aware of events on the periphery, rallies in favor of their co-nationals, and puts pressure on the government to support them as well. These effects can also be felt on the opposition in government. In cases where the leadership is supportive, but powerful opponents in the legislature are opposed, the opposition will often be muted out of a fear of looking unpatriotic or being accused of “siding with the enemy.”

In short, it is simply very difficult for leaders to deny their own citizens aid in times of need, incentivizing them toward acceptance of *faits accomplis*. As David Landes puts it, “imperialism was in large measure built on the *faits accomplis*… with the state almost always ready to pull its nationals’ chestnuts out of the fire.”

Third, unauthorized peripheral expansion engages the prestige, honor, and reputation of leaders in the capital, and the state or empire as a whole, in a way they simply weren’t engaged before. This can make relinquishing the territory and retrenching appear prohibitively difficult from the perspective of the leaders in the capital. These concerns are

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particularly potent in the colonial context, where great powers often have other territorial holdings in the area, and feel that their continued control rests heavily upon the maintenance of a reputation for resolve in the face of a challenge.\textsuperscript{48} These concerns for national honor are nicely illustrated by Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, who remarked, upon learning of the unauthorized annexation of the Amur Basin by one of his agents, “where once the Russian flag has been raised, never shall it be lowered.”\textsuperscript{49}

Thus, for reasons of reduced costs, domestic political pressure, and the engagement of national honor, leaders in the capital will often have strong incentives to accept their peripheral agents’ territorial \textit{faits accomplis}. And the peripheral agents often know this, and will use these very same forces to manipulate the leaders in the capital, further increasing their incentives toward acceptance. They do this, for instance, by making reference to cost-saving in their communications with the capital, in order to make these issues salient for these leaders. The peripheral agents can also help gin up domestic political support in favor of their cause through a variety of means, including waging press campaigns, engaging in pamphleteering, sending allied individuals and organizations on speaking tours, and directly lobbying members of the great power’s government. Some of their strategies are incredibly shrewd. For instance, in the process of his unauthorized acquisition of what would become Rhodesia in 1890, the famed British colonialist Cecil Rhodes made a point of recruiting young men from influential families for his column, so that the government in London


would have an extra incentive to intervene on their behalf if needed. Finally, peripheral agents also make regular reference to concerns of national honor and prestige in their communications with the capital. Many arguments of this variety are commonly put forth, such as that backing down would weaken the great power’s authority in the region and elsewhere, that it would only invite attack and encourage dissension, that the locals “respect only force,” that the other great powers “are watching,” and, more generally, about the need to support the great power’s important political and social mission, and to “honor the flag.” And the knowledge among peripheral agents that these incentives exist, and of their ability to manipulate them, only feeds the moral hazard that leads them to engage in unauthorized peripheral expansion in the first place.

Unauthorized peripheral expansion can also generate incentives for leaders in the capital to reject the territorial fait accompli, largely out of a desire to rein in the rogue peripheral agents and to reassert central control. However, this incentive often pales in comparison with the stronger domestic political pressures and honor concerns that leaders feel bound


52 Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire*, p. 240;


by, particularly in cases of successful peripheral acquisition, when the cost-saving motive will also be powerful. Once important segments of the public become aware of what has transpired on the frontier, and rally to the peripheral agents’ cause, it becomes very politically difficult for leaders in the capital to censure or punish their agents in any way. This, in important part, explains why the peripheral agents who engage in unauthorized peripheral expansion are so often, not only not punished, but rewarded for their insubordination. But perhaps more importantly, these are often deeply embarrassing experiences for leaders in the capital, threatening to make them look weak, incompetent, and out of control in front of their own populace and the world at large. A quick and tidy acceptance—along with an effort to cover the inadvertence up—is often a more appealing alternative than engaging in a long, drawn out, and very public process of rejection and retrenchment.  

Geopolitical Risk & Central Authorization

However, there is still variation that needs explaining. For there are instances in which leaders in the capital decide to deny their peripheral agents, and to refrain from subsequently authorizing the acquisition. With so many incentives pushing them toward acceptance of the \textit{fait accompli}, why would they ever choose to reject it? The modern history of inadvertent expansion shows a number of motivations for these decisions. When British Colonial Secretary Lord Glenelg rejected his agents’ claims of the Transkei region of South Africa in

1835, it was a combination of the perceived worthlessness of the territory and popular revulsion at the inhumane treatment of the locals that led to relinquishment. When French leaders rejected their peripheral agent Joseph Galliéni after his unilateral annexation of Senegal in 1881, it was due to the unacceptable terms of the annexation treaty he had negotiated. And when the United States declined to accept Hawaii in 1893 after a coup orchestrated, in part, by its own local consular official, the primary reason was that the incoming president, Grover Cleveland, was much less interested in the territory than the outgoing president, Benjamin Harrison. Thus, like any important decision in world politics, leaders are influenced by a variety of factors.

However, what stands out as the most important factor weighing on the minds of leaders in the capital when they decide to accept or reject the fait accompli of their peripheral agents is the degree of perceived geopolitical risk associated with doing so. The prospect of significant geopolitical repercussions is often enough to discourage leaders from authorizing their peripheral agents’ deeds. And the absence of these potential risks will usually clear the way for the incentives toward acceptance to take hold, and for leaders to accept the fait accompli and to engage in inadvertent expansion. While this is not the sole motivation driving decisions to accept or reject the agents’ claims, the quantitative evidence and the historical


case studies that populate the latter chapters of this dissertation will show that it is the most important determinant of this decision.

There are three key kinds of geopolitical risk that will give leaders pause and lead them to rethink the option of acceptance of the *fait accompli*. The first is the prospect of crippling international economic isolation. If leaders think that authorizing peripheral expansion will lead to international trade sanctions, substantial foreign economic disinvestment, or the cutting off of international aid, they will be far less likely to accept the *fait accompli*, as the case of Italy in Fiume (Chapter 7) illustrates. The second type of geopolitical risk is the prospect of armed conflict with a local regional power. The possibility of fighting a war with a distant, regional power—even one that is significantly inferior to the great power in question—will often lead leaders to hesitate to authorize the peripheral expansion, as the cases of the United States in Texas (Chapter 4) and Russia in the Ili Region (Chapter 5) show. The third, and perhaps the gravest risk, is the prospect of encroaching on the interests of one of the other great powers to the point of risking a major crisis or even war. Leaders will be highly reluctant to accept the offerings of their peripheral agents when the consequence could be this grave, as the cases of France in Tonkin in 1873 (Chapter 6) and Germany in Kenya and Uganda (Chapter 8) illustrate. In contrast, the absence of such perceptions of geopolitical risk clears the way for the incentives toward acceptance to take hold, and leaders will be significantly more likely to accept the *fait accompli*, as the cases of the U.S. in Florida (Chapter 4), Russia in the Khanate of Kokand (Chapter 5), and Germany in East Africa (Chapter 8) all illustrate.
A skeptical reader might point out, however, that leaders risk economic isolation and war for territorial gain all the time.\textsuperscript{62} We need look no further than the U.S.’s annexation of Texas in 1845, not to mention Japan and Germany’s expansion in the late 1930s, to see that leaders can be highly risk acceptant when pursuing territorial gains. What makes inadvertent expansion different? The key difference between inadvertent expansion and strategic expansion in this regard is, quite simply, central planning and preparation. Territorial expansion is among the highest-risk and least-certain foreign policy initiatives a state can undertake. While it can promise the acquisition of strategic territory and valuable resources, it also risks overburdening the state with obligations, creating new enemies on the frontier, and impinging upon the interests of other great powers. Thus, when it comes to strategic expansion, leaders will generally carefully consider where to expand, when to do so, how much territory to take, and how to do so. And leaders will conduct their campaigns in ways that aim to minimize adverse consequences, or at the very least to prepare themselves to weather them. In contrast, inadvertent expansion is thrust upon leaders in the capital unwittingly. They have had no control over what territory was taken, when it was taken, how much was taken, and the mode by which it was taken. And they have also had little opportunity to try to avoid adverse consequences or to dig in and bear them. Given these differences, leaders will usually be hard-pressed to face significant risks for policies that they have had no control over.

A final important point on geopolitical risk is to emphasize that this is a \textit{perceptual} variable—it is geopolitical risk \textit{as perceived} by leaders in the capital at the time. And leaders are

human beings: they can vary considerably in their perceptions, their risk propensities, and their views of the appropriate policy to any given problem. These facts are borne out in many of the case studies in the chapters ahead, where different leaders in the capital have divergent views on the geopolitical risk associated with their situation—most commonly, with defense ministers tending to see less risk in any given situation, and foreign ministers, more. And leaders can also get this wrong, misperceiving the risk associated with territorial acquisition, as France’s leaders did in Tonkin in 1883 (Chapter 6) and Japan’s leaders did in Manchuria in 1931 (Chapter 7). Thus, while there clearly are important objective indicators of geopolitical risk, which I’ll introduce in Chapter 3, it is equally important to examine this variable at the level of the perceptions of individual leaders.

**The Dilemma of Inadvertent Expansion**

To sum up, the second step of inadvertent expansion—subsequent central authorization—is explained by two key factors. First, leaders in the capital will often have incentives pushing them in favor of acceptance of the *fait accompli*. This is due to the way peripheral expansion changes the facts on the ground and alters the strategic calculus of leaders in the capital, by reducing costs, generating domestic political pressure, and engaging the national honor. Second, the degree of geopolitical risk associated with acceptance will importantly influence the ultimate decisions these leaders make, with the absence of perceived geopolitical risk making acceptance more likely, and the presence of such risk making it less likely.

It is worth noting that the two forces present at this second stage of subsequent central authorization can often push in opposite directions. On the one hand, there are incentives for leaders to accept the territory due to reduced acquisition costs, domestic political pressure, and honor concerns. On the other hand, leaders can perceive severe geopolitical
risk associated with doing so, discouraging them from accepting the *fait accompli*. The confluence of these countervailing forces can periodically put leaders in a deeply-unenviable position. On the one hand, they may face a nationalistic public rallying for acceptance, an opposition in government urging them to defend the national honor, and, in extreme cases, the risk of a coup or assassination for appearing to look weak. On the other hand, leaders may face the risk of crippling economic isolation, conflict with a regional power thousands of kilometers from home, or a territorial dispute with another great power, possibly escalating to all-out war. This veritable minefield of decision-making for leaders in the capital is what I refer to as the “dilemma of inadvertent expansion.”

Thankfully, for the leaders involved, these situations are relatively rare. In most cases, leaders in the capital are presented the territorial *fait accompli* by their peripheral agents with few significant risks associated with acceptance, and acceptance is the result. In other cases, metropolitan leaders face significant risks associated with acceptance, yet the public is not fully engaged or the government is divided on the issue, giving leaders a safe off-ramp to reject the *fait accompli*. However, in rare cases—such as the U.S. in Florida (Chapter 4), Russia in the Ili Region (Chapter 5), Japan in Manchuria, and Italy in Fiume (Chapter 7)—these two potent forces come together. In these circumstances, leaders effectively have to weigh the costs and risks associated with making one decision or the other. In some cases, such as the U.S. in Florida, leaders deem the geopolitical risk as manageable enough for them to tentatively accept the *fait accompli*. In others—such as Russia in Ili, Japan in Manchuria, and Italy in Fiume—the perceived geopolitical risks are deemed too great, and leaders aim to rein in their wayward peripheral agents.

To sum up the argument in its entirety and to be crystal clear: the outcome I’m seeking to explain, or dependent variable, is inadvertent expansion. It occurs in two basic steps:
Unauthorized peripheral expansion and subsequent central authorization. The most important explanatory variable for unauthorized peripheral expansion is the degree of control leaders in the capital have over their agents on the periphery, with low degrees of control being associated with an increased likelihood of unauthorized peripheral expansion. Once this occurs, the very act of unauthorized peripheral expansion tends to generate incentives for leaders in the capital to accept the territory being offered, due to reduced acquisition costs, the emergence of domestic political pressure, and the engagement of national honor. Yet at the second step of subsequent central authorization, leaders in the capital also need to consider the degree of perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquiring the territory, with lower perceived risk being associated with an increased likelihood of authorization. Thus, we should expect to observe most inadvertent expansion when leaders in the capital have relatively low control over their peripheral agents, and when there are few perceived geopolitical risks associated with expansion into a given territory.

**Figure 2.1** (below) sums up the theory in its entirety.

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**Alternative Explanations**

There are three alternative explanations that I consider alongside my own theory in examining the evidence that follows. The first, and most obvious, is what I’ve referred to as “strategic expansion,” the large body of theories introduced in Chapter 1 that see expansion

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as a strategic activity and as directed by the leaders of powerful states. For the purpose of this dissertation, I remain fairly agnostic as to what exactly causes strategic expansion in any given case—be it opportunity, threat, domestic-political institutions, or individual-level factors. Rather, my interest here is in the extent to which a given observation of expansion can be reasonably classified as strategic or inadvertent. If many expansion observations occur due to decisions made by actors on the periphery, without the prior authorization of leaders in the capital, this will indicate that existing explanations embracing a strategic expansion concept are missing something important, which my theory will account for.

I also have two additional alternative explanations that apply to each of the two stages of inadvertent expansion. The first, focused on unauthorized peripheral expansion, is state institutional weakness. Perhaps states with relatively weak institutions will have less control over their agents and populace, and this will make unauthorized peripheral expansion more likely. While control issues based on technology or civil-military relations can, in practice, be difficult to distinguish from the state’s institutional capacity, the quantitative evidence presented in Chapter 3 will allow the examination of the broad patterns of territorial expansion with respect to the strength or weakness of the state’s institutions. The second additional alternative explanation, focused on subsequent central authorization, is about

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64 On state institutional strength and expansion, see: See: Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power.*
leader interests.65 Perhaps leaders, faced with territorial *faits accomplis* presented by their peripheral agents, simply accept the territories they want and reject those they don’t. If there are cases in which leaders want territories that they can’t have, due to geopolitical risk, or cases in which leaders don’t want territories that they end up with, due to domestic political pressure or honor concerns, this would be evidence against a simple interests-based argument for subsequent central authorization. These alternative explanations will be considered alongside the theory of inadvertent expansion in the empirical chapters ahead.

However, it is important to clarify the relationship between my theory and these existing explanations. I am not putting forth a general theory of territorial expansion that should be tested across all of world political history in a “three-cornered fight” against rival explanations.66 While some existing explanations clearly capture more of the evidence than others, my claim is not that the existing literature “gets territorial expansion wrong” in each and every case. My more modest claim, rather, is that there is an important subset of cases of territorial expansion that strategic expansion theories cannot fully account for, and that these instances display patterns of behavior that indicate a general phenomenon befitting its own theory. Proposing, illustrating, and testing such a theory is the central purpose of this dissertation.

**Methods**

65 On interests and expansion, see: Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit.”

In the chapters that follow, the theory of inadvertent expansion will be illustrated with, and tested against, both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Defining the relevant counterfactual of inadvertent expansion is no simple task. If the outcome of interest is inadvertent expansion, is the relevant counterfactual strategic expansion, with the most important variation being between forms of expansion? Is it considered-but-not-executed territorial expansion? Is it non-expansion? Or is it what might be termed inadvertent non-expansion; essentially, unauthorized peripheral expansion with leaders in the capital rejecting the fait accompli at the subsequent central authorization stage? A further complication is that some of these counterfactuals, particularly considered-but-not-executed expansion and inadvertent non-expansion, are not easily observable in the empirical record. For most historians and in most histories, these are essentially “non-events.” Thus, given the subject matter of this project, defining and observing the relevant counterfactual poses serious challenges.

What I’ve decided upon is to examine two counterfactuals. The first, which I examine in Chapter 3, is variation between forms of expansion: strategic and inadvertent. This helps deal with the problem of the non-observability of the counterfactual condition, and gives the reader a sense of what is distinctive about inadvertent expansion within the broader universe of cases of territorial expansion by the great powers. The second counterfactual, which I

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68 This is the approach Zakaria takes. See: Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, pp. 54-55.

69 Zakaria gets around this by examining a single great power over the course of 43 years. See: Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, pp. 54-55.
examine in Chapters 4 through 8, is variation between inadvertent expansion and inadvertent non-expansion. This is much closer to the specific variation explained by the theory, giving the reader a stronger sense of what explains leaders’ choices when faced with similar inadvertent expansion opportunities.

This is a mixed-methods study of inadvertent expansion, making use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component, which is confined to Chapter 3, presents and analyzes new data on all instances of great power territorial expansion from 1816 to 2014. Each expansion observation is coded as to whether it is inadvertent or strategic, and this variation provides the primary basis for comparison. The purposes of the quantitative component are three-fold. First, to give the reader a sense of the generality of the phenomenon of inadvertent expansion by presenting the entire universe of cases. Second, to present basic descriptive statistics regarding inadvertent expansion, and to illuminate some of the broad patterns the phenomenon displays over space and time. And third, to analyze the data using statistical modeling techniques, in order to show support for some of the claims made in the theory of inadvertent expansion laid out above. The quantitative component mainly shows what is distinctive about inadvertent expansion within the universe of great power territorial expansion observations.

The qualitative component, which is presented in Chapters 4 through 8, consists of a series of paired theory-testing case studies of inadvertent expansion (and non-expansion) by the great powers between 1818 and 1932. Each of Chapters 4 through 8 includes a detailed case of inadvertent expansion, as well as a “negative” case of inadvertent non-expansion.

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Including cases of both expansion and non-expansion helps mitigate the risk of selection bias that might result from including only one or the other.\textsuperscript{71}

With the historical cases, I implement two staples of qualitative social-scientific methods: the comparative method and process tracing. First, the inclusion of five pairs of cases allows me to engage in a controlled comparison across cases.\textsuperscript{72} This is accomplished by comparing cases of inadvertent expansion with cases of inadvertent non-expansion, in order to show that the outcomes covary with the key explanatory variables highlighted by the theory.

Second, in each case I also engage in process tracing, providing ground-level evidence of the argument and its causal mechanisms at work in practice.\textsuperscript{73} While the controlled comparison provides evidence that the causes and outcome vary in the manner specified by the theory, process tracing shows that the outcomes are produced for the \textit{reasons} specified by the theory.\textsuperscript{74} While this qualitative component provides evidence for all parts of the theory, its primary value-added is in addressing the question of why leaders in the capital agree to accept the territorial \textit{fait accompli} of their peripheral agents in some cases, but not others.

Finally, a few words on scope conditions and case selection. I focus solely on the great powers from 1816 to the present. This is not to suggest that minor powers haven’t or don’t engage in inadvertent expansion, as they most certainly have and do.\textsuperscript{75} But as I detail in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} George and Bennett, \textit{Case Studies and Theory Development}, chs. 3, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{75} On Israel, see: Gershom Gorenberg, \textit{The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977} (New York: Times Books, 2006); Peter Krause and Ehud Eiran, “How Human Boundaries Become State Borders:
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Chapter 3, I have limited the empirical scope to the great powers because they do most of the territorial expansion, their expansion is most consequential, and the historical record for these actors is most complete. I have also limited my temporal scope to the post-Napoleonic (1816-) international system. This is similarly not intended to suggest that inadvertent expansion is a strictly modern phenomenon. In fact, given the importance of weak central control over the periphery to inadvertent expansion, it is likely to be more common the farther back we go in time. However, for reasons of empirical tractability and to build off of existing data collection efforts, I focus only on the post-1815 period.

In terms of the actual cases, they were selected with two broad goals in mind: to generate a broad and representative sample, and to facilitate controlled comparison across cases. First, I include ten cases, as well as at least one from each of the seven great powers that have experienced inadvertent expansion. The inclusion of this many cases both increases the representativeness of the sample selected, and helps illustrate the generalizability of the theory. In the appendix to this dissertation, I include the results of a balance test between the cases selected and the broader population of inadvertent expansion observations, which

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77 Eleven, if the illustrative case of the United Kingdom in Sind in Chapter 1 is included.

78 The United States (Chapter 4), the United Kingdom (Chapter 1), France (Chapter 6), Germany (Chapter 8), Italy (Chapter 7), Russia (Chapter 5), and Japan (Chapter 7).

79 Though, this obviously involves a trade-off of breadth for depth. On the value of increasing the number of cases included, see: King, Keohane, and Verba, *Describing Social Inquiry*, ch. 6; Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, pp. 165-171, 181-183.
shows that the sample is relatively well-balanced on most important variables.\(^{80}\) The cases included, furthermore, cover over a century of history,\(^ {81}\) occur in five of six world regions,\(^ {82}\) and show considerable variation in terms of the great power’s domestic political regime type,\(^ {83}\) its continental- or maritime-orientation,\(^ {84}\) its relative power,\(^ {85}\) and whether the expansion itself is an extension of state borders or overseas empire.\(^ {86}\) All of this variation should boost our confidence that the theory, and the phenomenon of inadvertent expansion more broadly, is not simply the product of a particular actor or a particular context.\(^ {87}\)

Second, cases were selected to facilitate controlled comparison and to highlight important aspects of the theory.\(^ {88}\) Each of Chapters 4 through 8 consists of a pair of highly-comparable cases. For instance, Chapter 4 includes a pair of U.S. cases in which it is the same great power, operating in the same region, in roughly the same time period, but with divergent

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\(^{80}\) See: Table A2.1. For full details regarding variable definitions and operationalizations, see Chapter 3.

\(^{81}\) From the U.S. in Florida (1818) to Japan in Manchuria (1932).

\(^{82}\) The Western Hemisphere (Chapter 4), Europe (Chapter 7), Sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 8), South and Central Asia (Chapter 5), and the Asia-Pacific (Chapters 6 and 7).

\(^{83}\) Including the reasonably-democratic France; the mixed-regime United States, United Kingdom, and Italy; and the autocratic Germany, Japan, and Russia.

\(^{84}\) Including the United Kingdom and Japan as maritime powers and Russia and the (early) U.S. as continental powers.

\(^{85}\) Including the mid-19th century United Kingdom, at the peak of its power, as well as the “barely-great” early-19th century United States, interwar Italy, and early-1930s Japan.

\(^{86}\) Including Russia, the United States, and Italy for the extension of the state’s borders, and the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan for overseas empire.

\(^{87}\) This is what McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly refer to as an “uncommon foundations” research strategy: Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 81-83. See also Paul Musgrave and Daniel H. Nexon, “Defending Hierarchy from the Moon to the Indian Ocean: Symbolic Capital and Political Dominance in Early Modern China and the Cold War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 2018), pp. 604-605.

outcomes. What is notable about these U.S. cases is that it is also the very same individual—Andrew Jackson—that is the peripheral agent in one case (Florida) but the leader in the capital in the other (Texas). This allows us to control, to some extent, for any potential idiosyncrasies associated with the United States, the earlier-19th century, America’s southern frontier, or with Jackson himself (of which there are many). Having Jackson figure prominently in both cases also well-illustrates the notion of the “view from the frontier” and the “view from the capital,” showing how it manifests in the very same individual in both positions. Chapter 5 consists of a pair of Russian cases in which it is the same great power, operating in the same region, separated by only five years, and, notably, nearly all of the same leaders in the capital across the two cases, yet with divergent outcomes. Chapter 6 includes a pair of French cases that also involve the same great power, operating in the same region, dealing with the very same territorial entity (Tonkin), separated by only a decade, and an almost-identical process of peripheral expansion, yet leading to divergent outcomes. Chapter 6 is, in some ways, a pair of comparative cases, yet in other ways, a single longitudinal case.89 Chapter 7 involves the only cross-great power comparison, presenting one Japan case and one Italy case, but they are very well matched on many important factors—such as relative power, time period, domestic political regime type, and the proximity of the expansion to their respective capitals. And Chapter 8 includes a pair of German cases involving the same great power, operating in the same region, separated by only five years, and, in these cases, involving the very same peripheral agent across the two cases, but with variation in the outcomes. This, again, allows us to control for a number of potential confounds by effectively holding many factors constant.

89 On longitudinal control techniques, see: Bennett and Elman, “Case Study Methods,” p. 176; George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, pp. 166-167 & ch. 9.
It is finally worth noting that, while the quantitative data presented in Chapter 3 includes both armed conquest and political annexation, the qualitative component is primarily focused armed conquest, with only a single chapter—Germany in East Africa (Chapter 8)—including cases of annexation. This is partly because these cases tend to be the most consequential, but primarily in order to facilitate comparisons across cases. In short, the cases were selected and structured to enable a “most similar” comparison within each chapter, and a “most different” comparison across the chapters. The within-chapter comparisons increase our confidence that the variation in outcomes is explained by the factors specified by the theory, and the across-chapter comparisons help indicate the generalizability of the theory.90

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In this chapter, I have introduced the phenomenon of inadvertent expansion and put forth a theory that explains its occurrence in the modern history of great power politics. What remains is to examine the theory in light of an abundance of quantitative and qualitative evidence. It is to this task that I now turn.

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CHAPTER 3

PATTERNS OF INADVERTENT EXPANSION, 1816-2014

This chapter discusses the broad patterns of strategic and inadvertent expansion over the course of the past two centuries. The purposes of this chapter are three-fold. First, to give the reader a sense of the generality of the phenomenon of inadvertent expansion by presenting the entire universe of cases. Drawing on new data on great power territorial expansion from 1816 to the present, I show inadvertent expansion to be a surprisingly general phenomenon in the history of great power politics, occurring in almost one-in-four cases of territorial expansion. A second purpose is to present basic descriptive statistics regarding inadvertent expansion, and to illuminate some of the broad patterns the phenomenon displays over space and time. The data collected shows that inadvertent expansion exhibits considerable variation by great power actor, time period, region, and many other factors. The third purpose of the chapter is to statistically analyze the data in order to show support for some of the central claims made in the theory of inadvertent expansion laid out in Chapter 2. The analysis suggests that great power territorial expansion is more likely to be inadvertent rather than strategic under conditions of relatively low control by the capital over the periphery, and when geopolitical risk is relatively low. Overall, the chapter shows what is distinctive about inadvertent expansion within the broader universe of great power territorial expansion observations.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by introducing the data I collected on great power territorial expansion from 1816 to 2014. Second, I present some basic descriptive statistics to support the claim that inadvertent expansion is a general phenomenon. Third, I present and discuss the results of a linear probability model that supports the argument that
inadvertent expansion is most likely to occur under conditions of low control by the capital over the periphery, and low geopolitical risk. Finally, I conclude the chapter by reviewing its findings and previewing what lays ahead.

Data

In order to get a better understanding of the conditions under which inadvertent expansion occurs, I collected data on territorial expansion by the great powers between 1816 and the present. I made use of a wide variety of sources in compiling the data, including existing data on the topic, encyclopedias, historical dictionaries and chronologies, historical surveys, in-depth histories, and even primary source documents when necessary.¹

The most detailed and comprehensive existing data on territorial expansion is the Correlates of War’s (COW) “Territorial Change Data,” collected by Jaroslav Tir, Philip Schafer, Paul F. Diehl, and Gary Goertz.² Despite the immense value and important contribution of the Territorial Change data, I didn’t simply take it “off the shelf” and rely on it for two reasons. First, some opacity in the data itself made it difficult to identify each-and-every observation of expansion in the data, and therefore to build off of their coding, even when relying upon the same source material. And second, in the course of research I came across a number of observations that, as best I could tell, aren’t included in the Territorial

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¹ An online appendix accompanying this dissertation includes the full list of observations, brief narratives for each observation, coding justification for key variables, and citations of all the sources relied upon. See the author’s website: https://campuspress.yale.edu/nickanderson/data/.

Change data, and therefore the data presented here provides a more complete picture of the history of great power territorial expansion.

The unit of analysis for the data is the great power expansion observation. So, for instance, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in May 1936 is considered a single observation. In Chapter 2, I defined expansion as the coercive acquisition of foreign territory that is intended to be long-term or permanent for the expanding state. In accordance with this definition, expansion observations had to meet five criteria to be included in the data set.

First, the expansion observations had to be coercive in nature. Thus, voluntary purchases, transfers, and trades of territory are not included in the data. Second, the territory acquired had to be foreign at the time of acquisition. Various forms of domestic expansion—such as expropriation, counterinsurgency campaigns, and territorial pacification—are therefore not included in the data. Third, the territory had to be inhabited or claimed by another political entity. Genuine *terra nullius* claims are not included in the data. Fourth, the territorial acquisition had to be non-temporary, at least in its intent. Cases of temporary military occupation are not included in the data. Finally, the expansion observation had to be carried

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3 This is hardly surprising, given that the Territorial Change data covers the entire globe, whereas I focus narrowly on the nine great powers.

4 Cases such as the U.S. purchase of Alaska in 1867 are not included on this basis.

5 Cases from the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the 19th century are not included on this basis, as the territory had been formally ceded to Russia by Persia in 1828.

6 Claims of various uninhabited small islands and reefs, as well as territorial claims in Antarctica, are not included on this basis.

7 Cases such as the joint Anglo-French occupation of the Saar Basin after World War I are not included on this basis.
to its full fruition. Cases where expansion was attempted-but-not-completed, as well as those where it was considered-but-not-attempted, are not included in the data.\(^8\)

This fifth and final criterion suggests that a more accurate term for the unit of analysis would be the *successful* great power expansion observation. On the one hand, only including successful cases introduces the risk of “selection bias” in the quantitative data, since the cases in which expansion succeeds may differ in important ways from those where it fails (or is not even attempted), and therefore may not be representative of the phenomenon as a whole.\(^9\) On the other hand, the data collection effort was already substantial, involving traversing the histories of nine great powers over the course, in some cases, of two hundred years. And given the difficulties of observing “attempted” and “considered” expansion discussed in Chapter 2, I think this is simply a problem to be aware of, and in light of which the results should be interpreted, not one that can be readily solved. Five unsuccessful cases of inadvertent expansion—where *faits accomplis* were presented by peripheral actors but rejected by leaders in the capital due to perceptions of geopolitical risk—are given detailed qualitative examination in Chapters 4 through 8.

I have restricted the empirical scope of the data to the great powers from 1816 to the present. I limit my focus to the great powers for three reasons.\(^10\) First, the great powers do

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\(^8\) Cases such as the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 are not included on this basis.


\(^10\) I use the Correlates of War’s (COW) State System Membership data on “Major Powers” to indicate the identity and the tenure of the great powers, with a few modifications. Correlates of War Project. 2017. “State System Membership List, v2016.” Available at: [http://www.correlatesofwar.org/](http://www.correlatesofwar.org/). The great powers are defined as follows (modifications are underlined): USA (1816-2014), UK (1816-1945), France (1816-1940),
most of the territorial expansion. According to the Territorial Change data, great powers account for 67 percent of all conquest, annexation, and conflict-related cession observations. Second, territorial expansion by the great powers tends to be more consequential. As just one possible indicator of “consequence,” the Territorial Change data suggests that great power expansion accounts for 72 percent of the territorial area gained and 45 percent of the population gained through conquest, annexation, and coercive cession. And third, the empirical record is most complete for the great powers, and reliably coding expansion as inadvertent or strategic often requires a great deal of in-depth historical research.

Altogether, I collected 250 observations of territorial expansion by the great powers between 1816 and 2014. For each observation I include a set of variables with basic information about the event in question. For the purpose of this dissertation, the most important of these is *Inadendent*—a dichotomous variable indicating whether the expansion observation is inadvertent or not (and therefore, implicitly “strategic”). As outlined in Chapter 2, I consider an expansion observation to be inadvertent when it is planned and executed by actors on the periphery, without the knowledge or authorization of leaders in the capital. My basic coding procedure for each observation was to seek out information on who specifically ordered the territorial acquisition in question. When I found evidence in the historical record that the acquisition was ordered or authorized by leaders in the capital—the chief executive or key members of the security apparatus, including the foreign minister,

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Prussia/Germany (1816-1945), Austria-Hungary (1816-1918), Italy (1860-1943), Russia/Soviet Union (1816-2014), China (1950-2014), Japan (1868-1945).

11 This is how Goertz and Diehl operationalize the importance of a given piece of territory. See: Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, *Territorial Changes and International Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 66-67.
defense minister, or colonial minister—I considered the observation strategic.\textsuperscript{12} When I found at least two sources indicating that the territory was acquired without the prior authorization of any of these leaders in the capital, I coded the observation as inadvertent.\textsuperscript{13}

For three reasons, who ordered a given territorial acquisition is often a surprisingly difficult piece of information to uncover. First, in writing on territorial expansion and empire in both history and political science, process tends to be brushed over in favor of causes and consequences.\textsuperscript{14} That is, scholars usually focus on why a piece of territory was acquired, or how it was governed after acquisition, but the actual process of acquisition tends to get far less attention. A second issue is the widespread personification of the state or empire, which is also common in both history and the broader social sciences.\textsuperscript{15} Frequent references to “Russia,” “Japan,” or “the British Empire” acquiring various territories obscure the nature of the specific actors involved, as well as the authorities under which they were operating. Relatedly, many scholars operate with implicit (or explicit) rational and unitary assumptions of the state, which can encourage post-hoc reasoning and reliance upon “revealed preferences”—they acquired the territory, so they must have wanted to. Third, the historical record on many of these cases is very thin. Cases of inadvertent expansion are often less dramatic than their strategic counterparts, and therefore tend to receive less attention in

\textsuperscript{12} In wartime, I also include the military high command among those whose orders make an observation “strategic.”

\textsuperscript{13} This “two-source standard” is met in all but three observations of inadvertent expansion. In many cases, I draw on considerably more sources in an effort to mitigate the risk of bias in individual historical sources. See: Ian S. Lustick, “History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias,” \textit{The American Political Science Review}, Vol. 90, No. 3 (September 1996), pp. 605-618.


historical research. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter 2, the leaders who experience inadvertent expansion often have incentives to cover these episodes up, so as to not appear incompetent or out-of-control, and may suppress, distort, or even destroy records of events. It seems likely, therefore, that inadvertent expansion is even more common than I have been able to uncover here.

Thus, coding expansion observations as either strategic or inadvertent is often both time-consuming and challenging. As a result, I’ve coded the vast majority, though not the entirety, of the great power expansion observations with respect to whether they were inadvertent or strategic. Table 3.1 (below) summarizes the completeness of the inadvertent expansion coding by great-power actor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Coded/Total Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1816-2014</td>
<td>12/12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>1816-1945</td>
<td>74/78 (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1816-1940</td>
<td>47/52 (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1816-1945</td>
<td>26/26 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1816-1918</td>
<td>3/3 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1860-1943</td>
<td>18/18 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1816-2014</td>
<td>33/34 (97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1950-2014</td>
<td>3/3 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1868-1945</td>
<td>24/24 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>240/250 (96%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides whether the expansion was inadvertent, each observation includes the Year and Month in which it took place, the identity of the gaining great power (Gainer), the territorial Entity acquired, and the Region in which the observation occurred.16 I also include the

---

dichotomous variable *Annexion*, which indicates whether the territorial entity was acquired via annexation or, by default, conquest. Following the Territorial Change data, and in line with international-legal definitions, I consider expansion to be annexation when territory is acquired primarily through diplomacy, and I consider expansion to be conquest when territory is acquired primarily through the use of military force.\(^\text{17}\)

The theory presented in Chapter 2 argues that inadvertent expansion should be more likely when leaders in the capital have low levels of control over their peripheral agents, and in situations where they perceive relatively low levels of geopolitical risk. In order to capture the concept of control over the periphery, I include the variable *Telegraph*, which is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the territorial entity acquired was connected to the global telegraph network at the time of acquisition.\(^\text{18}\) The idea here is that, if there was a telegraph station in the territory at the time of acquisition, this would allow leaders in the great power capital to rapidly communicate with any of their agents in and around the territory, and thereby better monitor and potentially control their behavior.\(^\text{19}\) Another variable included to get at the concept of control is *Extra_regional*, a dichotomous variable indicating whether the territorial entity acquired is outside of the great power’s own region.

The idea here is that, all else equal, agents within a great power’s own region are easier to


\(^{18}\) See the online appendix to this dissertation for full coding details. Much of the telegraph data is from: Bill Glover, “Cable Timeline: 1845-2018” in History of the Atlantic Cable & Undersea Communications (2021), Available at: [https://atlantic-cable.com/](https://atlantic-cable.com/); Anton A. Huurdeman, *The Worldwide History of Telecommunications* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), ch. 8, Appendix A.

control than those in other regions. A third, more granular, measure that I include along these lines is the *Distance* of the entity acquired from the great power’s capital.\(^{20}\) This, again, is on the assumption that, all else equal, actors in more distant territories should be more difficult to control than those in more proximate territories.

I also include two variables meant to capture the second factor, perceived geopolitical risk. While, according to the theory of inadvertent expansion, this factor mainly influences the second step of subsequent central authorization, it is worth seeing if there are broad differences between strategic and inadvertent expansion with respect to geopolitical risk. Building off of arguments made by Colin Elman and Randall Schweller, I construct the dichotomous variable *Risky*.\(^{21}\) I consider territorial expansion to be risky when it is onto: 1) the territory, at home or abroad, of another great power, 2) territory adjacent to a great power’s national borders, 3) the territory of a state allied with another great power,\(^{22}\) and/or 4) the territory of a regional power—a large and relatively powerful state that doesn’t meet the typical threshold of great power status.\(^{23}\) I also consider expansion to be risky when it is in violation of a prior agreement with another great power on the territorial integrity of the

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\(^{20}\) Distance refers to “Great-Circle” or orthodromic distance, measured in kilometers. It is measured using the “Measure distance” tool in Google Maps to ensure as accurate a measure between locations as possible. See: Google Maps (2021). [https://www.google.com/maps](https://www.google.com/maps).


\(^{23}\) Examples of regional powers include Mexico, Austria (post-1918), Spain, Romania, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, China (pre-1950), and Taiwan (post-1949).
entity in question. A related variable that I include is the dichotomous variable Conflict, which indicates whether the expansion observation is part of a broader conflict. I consider expansion to be part of a broader conflict when it is undertaken during, and as part of, a broader war, or when it took place in the immediate aftermath, and as a direct result of, a broader war.  

I also include a number of variables that can be thought of as controls for other plausible explanations for inadvertent expansion. First, I include two measures of the capacity of the state’s institutions. As noted in Chapter 2, it seems plausible that relatively-weak states may be more likely to experience inadvertent expansion, since they have smaller central state apparatuses and less capacity to monitor their agents at any distance from the capital. The first of these is the great power’s “information capacity” (Info_cap), an annual index that measures the state’s ability to collect and process reliable information about its population and territory. The second of these is the central government’s total revenue as a percentage of its Gross National Product (GNP, Rev_GNP). This is a measure of the state’s fiscal capacity, and is a standard measure of state institutional capacity in political science.  

24 For the purpose of this variable, I consider wars as being those conflicts included in the Correlates of War’s “Inter-state”, “Intra-state”, and “Extra-state” war lists. See: “COW War Data, 1816-2007 (v4.0).” Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Wayman, Resort to War: 1816 - 2007 (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2010). Available at: http://www.correlatesofwar.org/.  


Finally, I include two controls that are standard in the international relations literature. First, I include the dichotomous variable *Democracy*, which indicates whether the expanding great power has a Polity score of 6 or greater at the time of acquisition.\(^{27}\) There is an enormous literature in international relations pointing to the unique foreign policy behavior of democratic states. And it is at least plausible that, allowing more individual liberty for their citizens and being more subject to popular pressures, democracies may be more likely to experience inadvertent expansion. Second, I include the great power's Composite Index of National Capabilities (*CINC*) score, a standard measure of relative power.\(^{28}\) Again, many

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2: Great Power Territorial Expansion Data Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong> The year in which the expansion observation occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Month</strong> The month in which the expansion observation occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gainer</strong> The actor engaging in expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entity</strong> The territorial entity gained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong> The region in which the expansion observation occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inadvertent</strong> Indicates whether the expansion was inadvertent (1/0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annexation</strong> Indicates whether expansion took the form of annexation (1/0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telegraph</strong> Indicates whether the entity was connected to the global telegraph network at the time of acquisition (1/0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extra_regional</strong> Indicates whether the entity is in a region outside of the great power’s own region (1/0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance</strong> Distance (km) from the great power’s capital to the entity in question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risky</strong> Indicates whether the expansion involved significant risk (1/0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict</strong> Indicates whether the expansion took place as part of a broader conflict (1/0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Info_cap</strong> The great power’s capacity to collect reliable information about its population and territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rev_GNP</strong> State revenue as a percentage of its Gross National Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democracy</strong> Indicates whether the great power has a Polity2 score of 6 or greater (1/0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CINC</strong> The great power’s Composite Index of National Capabilities score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


theories in international relations point to relative power as an important explanatory factor for a variety of foreign policy outcomes, so it is accounted for here. All of these variables and their definitions are listed in Table 3.2 (above).

**Descriptive Statistics**

The data collected shows inadvertent expansion to be a surprisingly-general phenomenon. Of the 240 cases of great power territorial expansion that I've coded as either inadvertent or strategic, a total of 56—or 23 percent—are inadvertent. This point, I think, deserves emphasis: in the modern history of great power politics, approximately one-in-four cases of territorial expansion are the result of decisions made by actors without the authority to make them. Thus, in about a quarter of cases of territorial expansion by the great powers, there is a complete disconnect between the intentions of the leaders in charge and the states that they are supposedly in charge of. And the kinds of territories acquired in this manner run the gamut, from tiny islands in the South Pacific—such as France’s annexation of Tahiti in 1842—to large swathes of territory containing tens of millions of people—such as Japan’s conquest of Manchuria in 1932. All cases of inadvertent expansion are listed in Table 3.3 (below).
## Table 3.3: Cases of Inadvertent Expansion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Great Power</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Great Power</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Territory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1818/5</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td></td>
<td>1880/6</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1880/9</td>
<td>Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1818/6</td>
<td>Maratha Empire</td>
<td></td>
<td>1883/2</td>
<td>Southern French Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1819/2</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td></td>
<td>1883/8</td>
<td>Annam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1825/12</td>
<td>Upper Burma</td>
<td></td>
<td>1883/8</td>
<td>Tonkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1842/4</td>
<td>Chatham Islands</td>
<td></td>
<td>1893/4</td>
<td>Northern French Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1843/3</td>
<td>Sind</td>
<td></td>
<td>1894/8</td>
<td>Ubangi-Shari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1846/2</td>
<td>Eastern Punjab</td>
<td></td>
<td>1900/4</td>
<td>Chad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1847/12</td>
<td>Xhosa Territory</td>
<td></td>
<td>1904/6</td>
<td>Eastern Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1848/2</td>
<td>Orange River Territory</td>
<td></td>
<td>1914/8</td>
<td>Togoland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1849/3</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td></td>
<td>1916/1</td>
<td>Cameroon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1852/12</td>
<td>Lower Burma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1857/3</td>
<td>Keeling (Cocos) Islands</td>
<td></td>
<td>1884/4</td>
<td>South West Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1874/4</td>
<td>Western Peninsular Malaya</td>
<td></td>
<td>1884/5</td>
<td>Togoland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1874/9</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td></td>
<td>1885/5</td>
<td>East Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1878/7</td>
<td>Xhosa Territory</td>
<td></td>
<td>1885/5</td>
<td>Wituland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1879/9</td>
<td>Zulu Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1884/11</td>
<td>Papua (New Guinea)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1850/8</td>
<td>Amur Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1888/5</td>
<td>North Borneo</td>
<td></td>
<td>1852/summer</td>
<td>Ussuri Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1890/9</td>
<td>Rhodesia</td>
<td></td>
<td>1864/9</td>
<td>Chimkent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1900/1</td>
<td>Northern Nigeria</td>
<td></td>
<td>1865/6</td>
<td>Tashkent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1914/8</td>
<td>Togoland</td>
<td></td>
<td>1866/5</td>
<td>Khujand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1868/6</td>
<td>Khanate of Bukhara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Nosy Be</td>
<td></td>
<td>1876/2</td>
<td>Khanate of Kokand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1841/4</td>
<td>Mayotte Island</td>
<td></td>
<td>1884/3</td>
<td>Merv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1842/8</td>
<td>Tahiti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1843/6</td>
<td>Coastal Gabon</td>
<td></td>
<td>1876/2</td>
<td>Khanate of Kokand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1860/9</td>
<td>Senegal (part)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1914/10</td>
<td>Caroline Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1862/3</td>
<td>Obock</td>
<td></td>
<td>1914/10</td>
<td>Mariana Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1863/8</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td></td>
<td>1914/10</td>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1867/6</td>
<td>Western Cochinchina</td>
<td></td>
<td>1932/2</td>
<td>Manchuria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Besides being a regular occurrence, inadvertent expansion is a general phenomenon in other ways. First, there are cases of inadvertent expansion as early as 1818 and as late as 1932, though, notably, it tends to occur in earlier years than strategic expansion. As shown in Figure 3.1 (below), inadvertent expansion is a regular occurrence throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century, with a small cluster of observations during World War I. Strategic expansion, in contrast, is more common throughout, and sees increases in the late-19th century and during the two World Wars.29

Second, a majority of the great powers experience inadvertent expansion, though, again, it is important to note that they vary considerably in the extent to which they do. As Table 3.4 shows (below), France, the United Kingdom, and Russia top the list of great powers in terms of what percentage of their expansion is inadvertent. Japan, Germany, and the United States experienced moderate-to-low amounts of inadvertent expansion. And great powers such as Austria, Italy, and China have experienced none at all.

29 Data after 1945 are not included in the figure because there are so few (4) observations.
Table 3.4: Inadvertent Expansion by Great Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Inadvertent/Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>19/47 (40.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>20/74 (27.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>8/33 (24.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4/24 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4/26 (15.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1/12 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>0/3 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0/18 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>0/3 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>56/240 (23.3%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, inadvertent expansion occurs in almost all world regions, though some regions experience a lot more than others. As Table 3.5 (below) shows, Sub-Saharan Africa, South & Central Asia, and the Asia-Pacific see significant amounts of inadvertent expansion, whereas the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East & North Africa, and Europe see little-to-none.

Table 3.5: Inadvertent Expansion by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Inadvertent/Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>24/62 (38.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South &amp; Central Asia</td>
<td>10/26 (38.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>20/84 (23.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Hemisphere</td>
<td>1/7 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East &amp; North Africa</td>
<td>1/16 (7.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>0/45 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, inadvertent expansion occurs in nearly one-in-four cases of great power territorial expansion, a wide variety of territories have been acquired in this manner, it covers over a century of history, it is experienced by a majority of the great powers, and it occurs in almost all world regions. It is, therefore, a general phenomenon. However, the questions that primarily concern this dissertation are when and why it occurs. As noted above, I’ve argued that two factors are central to the process: control by leaders in the capital over their peripheral agents, and perceptions of geopolitical risk associated with acquisition. The key variables here are Telegraph and Risky. If the theory of inadvertent expansion is correct, with
respect to the telegraph, we should expect to see less inadvertent expansion in cases where there is a telegraph station in the territory at the time of acquisition, and more inadvertent expansion in cases where there is not a telegraph station in the territory at the time of acquisition. With respect to risk, we should expect to see less inadvertent expansion in cases that are risky, and more inadvertent expansion in cases that are not risky. **Figure 3.2** (below) presents two difference-in-means comparisons.

![Figure 3.2: The Telegraph, Risk, & Inadvertent Expansion](image)

As is clear, these theoretical expectations appear to be borne out. Starting with *Telegraph*, on the left-hand side, just shy of 10 percent of expansion observations are inadvertent in cases where there is a telegraph station in the territory at the time of acquisition. In contrast, whereas approximately 38 percent of observations are inadvertent in cases where there is not a telegraph station in the territory at the time of acquisition—a large and highly statistically-significant difference. A similar pattern is evident with respect to *Risk*, on the right-hand side. Just over 10 percent of expansion observations are inadvertent in cases that do involve
considerable risk, whereas approximately 34 percent of observations are inadvertent in cases that do not involve much risk—again, a rather large and statistically-significant difference.

The average differences in value between strategic and inadvertent expansion for all the remaining variables are presented in Table 3.6 (below). As is clear, some variables see much greater differences than others across the two types of expansion. Variables such as Year, Telegraph, Extra_regional, Distance, Risky, and Conflict show considerable differences between strategic and inadvertent expansion. Based on these figures, it appears that inadvertent expansion is more likely: in earlier years; when the territorial entity is outside the great power’s home region, and; at a greater distance from the great power’s capital. It appears that inadvertent expansion is less likely, in contrast: when there is a telegraph station in or around the territorial entity acquired; when there is significant geopolitical risk associated with expansion, and; when the expansion is part of a broader conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Ave. (strategic)</th>
<th>Ave. (inadvertent)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year*</td>
<td>1816-2014</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>-19</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gainer**</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region**</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annexation</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra_regional</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance (km)</td>
<td>206-18,817</td>
<td>5,367</td>
<td>6,948</td>
<td>1,582</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risky</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info_cap</td>
<td>0.13-0.9</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev_GNP</td>
<td>1.2-67.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINC</td>
<td>0.02-0.38</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Median reported.
** Count reported.

Other variables, such as Annexation, show only mild differences between strategic and inadvertent expansion. It appears that inadvertent expansion may be somewhat more likely to take the form of annexation, though the difference is quite small. For the final variables,
there is either little difference between forms of expansion or it is difficult to tell based on the data. Neither Democracy nor CINC show a meaningful difference between strategic and inadvertent expansion.

Particularly notable for its lack of variation is Information Capacity, the index measuring the state’s ability to collect and process information about its population and territory. In Chapter 2, I presented the state’s institutional capacity as a key alternative argument potentially explaining cases of inadvertent expansion. The fact that there is so little difference between these two forms of expansion with respect to information capacity should be seen as evidence against this alternative argument. And while at first glance it appears that there is a fairly large difference between strategic and inadvertent expansion with respect to Revenue as a percentage of GNP (\(\text{Rev}_\text{GNP}\)), for two reasons these figures are likely to be unreliable. First, there is a significant amount of missing data on this measure, with 25 percent of observations not included. Second, as a great deal of political science research has shown, revenue as a percentage of GNP is strongly correlated with time, increasing as the state institutions of the great powers increase their extractive capacities through the modern era.\(^30\) Thus, it is not at all clear that low state institutional capacity is associated with inadvertent expansion.

**Analysis**

These comparisons are certainly interesting, and even enlightening. But with the evidence presented so far, it is difficult to tell which factors most distinguish inadvertent and strategic expansion. Because some of these measures may be correlated with each other, and many are

likely correlated with time, it is necessary to observe the independent relationship of each while conditioning on the others. This is the task I turn to now.

As noted above, the unit of analysis is the great power territorial expansion observation and the outcome of interest is *Inadvertent*, a dichotomous variable indicating whether the expansion was inadvertent or not. Thus, the variation that is being analyzed here is between forms of expansion: inadvertent or strategic. In an ideal world, I would have data that includes all observations of inadvertent expansion as well as all cases of inadvertent non-expansion—cases in which peripheral agents present territorial *faits accomplis* that are later rejected by leaders in the capital. This would provide a much more complete picture of the broad conditions under which inadvertent expansion opportunities arise, as well as when leaders accept and when they reject the *fait accompli*. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, cases of inadvertent non-expansion are not easily observable in the historical record, making comprehensive collection difficult. As a result, this quantitative analysis examines variation between forms of expansion. The qualitative case studies in the chapters that follow will take up the question of variation between acceptance and rejection of the *fait accompli*.

The primary explanatory variables I include are *Telegraph* and *Risky*. One concern with the telegraph measure may be that it is simply a proxy for the passage of time, and inadvertent expansion is actually correlated with some other variable that is also associated with time. To try to deal with this concern, I include the *Year* in which the expansion observation occurred as a control variable. Another concern with the telegraph measure may be that it is simply a proxy for distance, since territories that are closer are likely to be telegraphically connected to the capital sooner than those that are more distant. To try to deal with this concern, I include *Extra_regional* as a control variable in the analysis.
As for geopolitical risk, one concern may be that it is simply picking up the difference between peacetime and wartime expansion. To try to address this concern, I also include Conflict as a control variable. I also assess the alternative argument of state institutional capacity presented in Chapter 2 by including Information Capacity as a control variable. Finally, I include Annexation, Democracy, and CINC as controls. The analysis is conducted using a linear probability model. In all cases, “robust” standard errors are reported in order to account for error heteroskedasticity. Table 3.7 (below) presents the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.7: Linear Probability Analysis of Inadvertent Expansion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inadvertent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| telegraph  
-0.185**  
(0.084) |
| risky  
-0.142**  
(0.068) |
| year  
-0.001  
(0.001) |
| extra_regional  
0.052  
(0.097) |
| conflict  
-0.003  
(0.077) |
| info_cap  
-0.064  
(0.236) |
| democracy  
-0.039  
(0.071) |
| gainer_cinc  
-0.495  
(0.362) |
| annexation  
-0.105  
(0.074) |
| Observations  
233 |
| Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |
As the results make clear, both the telegraph and geopolitical risk appear to be correlated with expansion being inadvertent rather than strategic, even when controlling for other factors, such as time, distance, and state institutional capacity. Even with these controls, observations of territorial expansion are almost 19 percent less likely to be inadvertent when there is a *Telegraph* in the territory acquired at the time of acquisition. Similarly, when the expansion observation involves considerable *Risk*, it appears to be 14 percent less likely to be inadvertent, even when controlling for these other factors. Both of these measures are statistically significant at conventional levels, and none of the other variables reach statistical significance.

As a whole, the analysis suggests that two factors are most importantly associated with expansion being inadvertent rather than strategic. The first is the absence of a connection to the global telegraph network in the territorial entity acquired at the time of acquisition. The second is the geopolitical risk associated with the expansion observation in question. The great power’s information capacity, notably, does not seem to be correlated with expansion being strategic or inadvertent.

I ran a number of tests to see how robust these results are to alternative model specifications and variable inclusions. First, I reran the analysis using logistic regression rather than a linear probability model. The results are mostly unchanged, though here *Telegraph* is only significant at the 0.1 level.\textsuperscript{31} Second, I reran the analysis including *Distance* rather than *Extra_regional* as the distance control. The results are, again, unchanged, and *Distance* is not statistically significant.\textsuperscript{32} Third, instead of using *Democracy* as the great power’s

\textsuperscript{31} See: Appendix Table A3.1.

\textsuperscript{32} See: Appendix Table A3.2.
regime-type measure, I reran the analysis including an *Autocracy* indicator, a simple *Polity2* score, and a Varieties of Democracy *Polyarchy* score for electoral democracy. The results are unchanged, and none of the alternative regime-type measures reach conventional levels of statistical significance. In sum, the results are fairly robust. The presence or absence of rapid, modern communications in the form of a telegraph station, as well as relatively-low geopolitical risk, are strongly associated with whether territorial expansion is inadvertent or strategic.

**Discussion**

These results provide strong, though partial, support for the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2. First, the argument that inadvertent expansion is more likely when leaders in the capital lack adequate control over their agents on the periphery is supported by the analysis. The strongest predictor of when expansion is inadvertent rather than strategic is the absence of a globally-connected telegraph station in the territorial entity acquired at the time of acquisition. The presence of such a station is associated with a 29 percent reduction in the probability of expansion being inadvertent (see **Figure 3.2**), and this relationship holds even when conditioning on other plausible explanatory factors. As the evidence from this chapter suggest, and as will be illustrated in the historical case studies in the chapters ahead, the inability of leaders in the capital to rapidly and reliably communicate with, and

---

33 Operationalized as a Polity2 score of -6 or less.


35 See: Appendix **Table A3.3**.
thereby monitor, their agents on the periphery plays a crucial role in the ability for peripheral agents to spring territorial *faits accomplis* upon them—what I refer to as unauthorized peripheral expansion.

Second, the argument that inadvertent expansion is more likely when leaders in the capital perceive little geopolitical risk associated with territorial acquisition is also supported by the analysis. The only other significant predictor of when expansion is inadvertent rather than strategic is the absence of geopolitical risk. The presence of such risk is associated with a 24 percent reduction in the probability of expansion being inadvertent (see Figure 3.2), and this result, too, holds even when conditioning on other explanatory variables. As these results indicate, and as will be further supported in the qualitative chapters to follow, perceptions of geopolitical risk among leaders in the capital will discourage them from accepting the territorial *faits accomplis* presented by their peripheral agents—what I refer to as subsequent central authorization.

***

This chapter has provided a macroscopic perspective of the phenomenon of inadvertent expansion in world politics. In it, I introduced and analyzed new data on great power territorial expansion from 1816 to 2014. The chapter presented two central findings. First, inadvertent expansion is a surprisingly-general phenomenon. Far from being an occasional and obscure “accident of history,” it has been a regular feature of the modern history of great power politics. It occurs in nearly one-in-four cases of great power territorial expansion, spanning over one hundred years, from the early 19th century to well into the 20th century. It is carried out by six different great powers, from the sprawling British Empire to the late-modernizing and highly-centralized Imperial Germany. And a wide variety of territories have been acquired in this manner, from small islands in the South Pacific, to
topographically-forbidding central-African kingdoms, to densely-populated regions of East
and Southeast Asia.

Second, the most important conditions under which inadvertent expansion is likely to
occur is when the capital lacks sufficient control over its agents on the periphery, and when
the acquisition in question involves little geopolitical risk. Expansion onto territorial entities
that were not connected to the global telegraph network at the time of acquisition is
significantly more likely to be inadvertent than expansion onto territories that were
connected. Similarly, expansion in conditions involving little geopolitical risk is significantly
more likely to be inadvertent than expansion in conditions involving considerable risk. Other
factors—most notably, the state’s institutional capacity—do not appear to be related to the
form territorial expansion takes. What this chapter has primarily accomplished is to present
what is distinctive about inadvertent expansion within the broader universe of cases of
territorial expansion, and these distinctions have been shown to be consistent with the
theory of inadvertent expansion.

However, two caveats are necessary in closing. First, a lack of rapid communications
technology is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for inadvertent expansion. There
are twelve cases in the data of inadvertent expansion onto territories that are connected to
the global telegraph network, showing that it can occur under conditions of modern
communications technology. And there are 69 cases in the data of strategic expansion in
the absence of a proximate telegraph station, indicating that great powers can still readily
direct territorial expansion from the capital, without the aid of modern communications.

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36 The United Kingdom in: Western Peninsular Malaya (1874), North Borneo (1888), Northern Nigeria (1900),
Togoland (1914). France in: Eastern Morocco (1904), Togoland (1914), Cameroon (1916). Russia in: Merv
(1884). Japan in: The Caroline Islands (1914), The Mariana Islands (1914), The Marshall Islands (1914),
Manchuria (1932).
This also applies to geopolitical risk. There are eleven cases of inadvertent expansion in conditions that are objectively risky, showing that the existence of geopolitical risk is not a fool-proof guarantee of expansion being strategic. And there are eight cases of inadvertent expansion that are both onto territories with a global telegraph network connection and involve considerable geopolitical risk. However, what the evidence presented in this chapter does suggest, is that relatively low peripheral control by the capital and low geopolitical risk seem to make inadvertent expansion significantly more likely.

The second caveat is that, as mentioned above, the structure of the data and the variation examined in the analysis are not ideal for testing the theory of inadvertent expansion as it is presented in Chapter 2. The ideal data would include, not only all cases of successful strategic and inadvertent expansion, but also all cases of unsuccessful strategic and inadvertent expansion. This would give us a much better sense of the universe of cases of inadvertent expansion opportunities—helping us deal with problems of selection bias—as well as allow us to quantitatively examine the variation between acceptances and rejections of the fait accompli by leaders in the capital. Difficulties of observation and data collection rule this possibility out. However, it is possible to examine variation between inadvertent expansion and inadvertent non-expansion on a smaller sample of cases, in a more focused and detailed way. Conducting such an examination is the task of the remainder of this dissertation.


38 The United Kingdom in: Togoland (1914). France in: Eastern Morocco (1904), Togoland (1914), Cameroon (1916). Japan in: The Caroline Islands (1914), The Mariana Islands (1914), The Marshall Islands (1914), Manchuria (1932). Note that all but two occur during the First World War, suggesting that the “fog of war” may play a role in enabling inadvertent expansion.
CHAPTER 4

INADVERENT EXPANSION IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH: THE UNITED STATES

“…the occupation of these places in Spanish Florida by the commander of American forces was not by virtue of any orders received by him from this Government to that effect.”

John Quincy Adams

This chapter examines inadvertent expansion as it manifested itself in two cases from the antebellum United States of America. The first case examines the U.S.’s acquisition Florida from 1818-19. The second, a briefer case, presents the U.S.’s non-acquisition of the Republic of Texas in 1836-37. The purpose of these cases is twofold. First, this chapter presents the dissertation’s first pair of comparative, theory-testing case studies, illustrating how varying perceptions of geopolitical risk produced divergent outcomes, leading to expansion in Florida but non-expansion in Texas. Florida and Texas are a useful comparison in that they hold many factors fixed—the same great power, operating in the same region, in the same era, and even with one of the same key actors—while the outcomes vary across the two cases. Second, this chapter powerfully illustrates the differences between what I referred to in Chapter 2 as the “view from the capital” and the “view from the frontier,” in that the very same individual inhabits both positions—and adopts the associated perspectives—across the two cases. In the case of Florida in 1819, the peripheral agent driving the conquest is

Andrew Jackson, then a major general in the U.S. Army, whereas by the time the U.S. has an opportunity to acquire Texas in 1836, Jackson is president of the United States. Jackson’s boldness in the case of Florida, and his reticence in the case of Texas, is a striking indication of how vastly different an individual’s perceptions can be depending upon the position they inhabit.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the case study of the U.S.’s acquisition of Florida, where Major General Jackson exceeds his orders from Washington in conquering a series of Spanish forts and towns, ultimately leading to their acquisition. Second, I present the case of the U.S.’s non-acquisition of Texas, where now-President Jackson is deeply reluctant to risk war with Mexico in the face of a clear opportunity to acquire the newly-independent republic, leading to his rejection of the fait accompli. And third and finally, I conclude with a consideration of alternative arguments and a brief discussion of the importance of these cases for the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2.

**Jackson Enters the “Wolf’s Den”: The United States in Florida, 1818-1819**

The United States acquired the Spanish imperial provinces of East and West Florida\(^2\) between January 1818 and February 1819, over the course of the First Seminole War (1817-18). The conquest of these provinces was carried out by Andrew Jackson, then a major general in the U.S. Army, overstepping the bounds imposed by his superiors in Washington. The theory of inadvertent expansion makes three key arguments that are borne out in this case. First, that peripheral expansion is a manifestation of a principal-agent problem, driven

\(^2\) Contemporary Florida, U.S.A.
by diverse preferences between capital and frontier, and information asymmetries favoring the latter. In the case of Florida, the vast distances under pre-telegraph technology made controlling frontier agents such as Jackson very difficult for Washington. Second, that the acquisition of a given territory, in part or in whole, will often activate mechanisms that make it difficult to readily relinquish the new possession. In the case at hand, Jackson’s invasion drove down the costs of eventual acquisition, and his powerful domestic-political supporters made backing down extremely difficult for Washington. And third, that a lack of perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will encourage leaders in the capital to accept the territorial fait accompli, resulting in subsequent central authorization. In the case of Florida, once it became clear that the Spanish had little appetite for war, and that British weren’t coming to their aid, the U.S. partially withdrew and then pressed Spain hard for the complete cession of Florida, resulting in their acquisition through the Transcontinental Treaty of February 1819.

Historical Background

On the eve of the invasion in early 1818, Florida had been a backwater province of Spain’s vast “New World” empire for most of the past three-hundred years, predating the founding of the Jamestown settlement by more a century. While it was fairly large, at nearly 152,000 km², it lacked the natural resources of other Spanish imperial holdings—such as gold, silver, and sugar—and was therefore sparsely populated and lightly defended.³ It had been divided into East and West Florida during a brief interregnum of British rule (1763-83), and the vast majority of the population of 20,000 lived in the two provincial capitals of St. Augustine

(East) and Pensacola (West). Its only neighbor, of course, was the growing American juggernaut, whose population had soared from 3.9 million in 1790 up to over 9 million by 1818. The U.S. had acquired an enormous swath of what was very recently Spanish territory with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and had been chipping away at Spanish West Florida since 1810, taking approximately half of that province in the process. Florida’s forbidding swamps, thick, lush forests, intertwined river systems, and thousands of offshore islands made it an attractive destination for those seeking refuge from oppression and those looking to escape the clutches of the law.

Anglo-American settler encroachment on Native American lands helped spark a civil war within the Creek Confederacy, in which the United States became deeply involved on the side of the Lower Creeks against the Red Sticks Creeks in July 1813. The Treaty of Fort Jackson, which settled the war in favor of the United States on 9 August 1814, led to the expulsion of the Red Sticks from Mississippi Territory and the expropriation of approximately 93,000 km² of tribal lands. Many of the Red Sticks fled across the southern border with Spanish Florida, where they connected with other Native American tribes—becoming collectively known as the Seminoles—and launched attacks on the Georgia,

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5 “Population: 1790–2000 (Table Aa6-8),” HSUS.


Mississippi, and Alabama border regions. The turbulence that would characterize America’s border with Spanish Florida, as well as the continued expropriation of Native American territory, would ultimately lead to the First Seminole War in late 1817, the occasion for the U.S. invasion.

The primary agent of the Red Sticks’ expulsion and the eponym of Fort Jackson was, of course, Major General Andrew Jackson. Jackson was commander of the southern division of the U.S. Army, effectively in charge of the defense of the southern half of the Union. His military career was short, but his rise, meteoric. In his early teen years, he served as a courier for the militia in his native South Carolina during the American Revolutionary War, and was detained for a time by the British as a prisoner of war. Jackson wouldn’t again see military service until he was elected to command the Tennessee militia at the age of 34 in 1802. In the meantime, he had been trained as a lawyer, become a public prosecutor, and been elected as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and a judge of the Superior Court of Tennessee. Jackson was also a land speculator, a Freemason, and an infamous dueler, having participated in at least a dozen such contests. During the Creek War (1813-14) and the War of 1812 (1812-15), he became a national celebrity with his spectacular victories at the Battles of Horseshoe Bend and of New Orleans. Jackson had a

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rugged, frontier persona, but could be extremely well-mannered when he needed to.\textsuperscript{12}

Having relatively little formal education and not being particularly well-read, he had

famously-atrocious spelling and grammar, but could nevertheless be powerfully expressive in

writing and speech.\textsuperscript{13} Jackson was egotistical, impulsive, excessively sensitive to criticism, and

had a notoriously violent temper. He also had a tendency to defy orders and to disregard

authority, and was deeply nationalistic.\textsuperscript{14} Jackson was the key actor on America’s

southeastern frontier who would independently launch the conquest of Florida.

The President at the time was James Monroe. Often seen as the least impressive of the

“Virginia Dynasty,” Monroe was, in fact, a deeply experienced politician by the time he took

office, and would be quite successful as president.\textsuperscript{15} He had twice served as governor of

Virginia, had been minister to France and the United Kingdom, and a Senator, a Secretary of

War, and a Secretary of State. Monroe was pragmatic, deliberate, thoughtful to the point of

seeming unemotional, and was a consummate political animal, whose considerable talents

were almost entirely devoted to a lifetime in politics.\textsuperscript{16} Serving as Monroe’s Secretary of War

was John C. Calhoun. A former House member and future Vice President, Calhoun was

ambitious, incredibly hardworking, radiated confidence to the point of arrogance, and was a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{13} Remini, \textit{Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire}, pp. 7-8; Brands, \textit{Andrew Jackson}, pp. 17-18.
\bibitem{14} Remini, \textit{Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire}, pp. 7-8, 25, 342-343; Weeks, \textit{Building the Continental Empire}, p. 32; Brands, \textit{Andrew Jackson}, pp. 17, 297.
\end{thebibliography}
famously-ardent defender of slavery.\textsuperscript{17} Finally, the position of Secretary of State was held by John Quincy Adams. The son of a president and a future president himself, Adams is generally regarded as among the greatest Secretaries of State in the United States’ history.\textsuperscript{18} Adams had served as minister to the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia, and the United Kingdom, and in the U.S. Senate, by the time he took up his position at the head of the State Department. Adams was intellectually gifted, supremely industrious, and deeply religious, though he could be pugnacious and argumentative, and was known to be fiercely independent.\textsuperscript{19} Monroe, Calhoun, and Adams were the key leaders in the capital who would be dragged unwittingly into the conquest of all of Spanish Florida.

The Seminole War would begin with yet another expulsion.\textsuperscript{20} In early November 1817, U.S. Army Brevet Major General Edmund P. Gaines ordered the Creek inhabitants of Fowltown, a village just north of the Florida border in Georgia, to vacate the area under the terms of the Treaty of Fort Jackson. When they refused, the village was attacked, four Creeks, including one woman, were killed, and Fowltown was burnt to the ground.\textsuperscript{21} In retaliation, the Creeks ambushed a U.S. Army transport boat on its way up the Apalachicola

\textsuperscript{17} John Niven, \textit{John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union: A Biography} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), pp. 5-6, 70.


River through Florida, killing 41, including several women on board. News of the attack shocked and infuriated officials from the frontier to the capital. Andrew Jackson, who was monitoring events from southern division headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee, wrote on 16 December that it was time “that the wolf be struck in his den.” The Seminole War had begun.

Washington & the Florida Frontier

Washington faced serious principal-agent problems with respect to its frontier agents in the south, such as Jackson. These were due to information asymmetries favoring those on the frontier and a divergence of preferences between leaders in the capital and their frontier agents. First, as a result of the highly-rudimentary transportation and communications technology of the time, there were stark information asymmetries in favor of the periphery. This was still the pre-rail and -telegraph era, and it took approximately one month for a letter to travel from Washington to Spanish Florida on horseback, meaning that it would take at least 60 days to receive a reply. The long travel times from capital to frontier meant that the administration in Washington was at the informational mercy of its frontier agents, and had to rely heavily on the official reports they sent back.

Second, there was a divergence of preferences between leaders in Washington and their agents on the Spanish frontier. Both sides ultimately wanted Florida for the United States,

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24 This is an estimate based on the fact that news of Jackson’s initial attack on the Fort of St. Marks on 6 April 1818 was first learned in Washington on 4 May 1818. “May 4th, 1818,” in Charles Francis Adams, ed., Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848, Vol. IV (Philadelphia, L.B. Lippincott & Co., 1875), p. 87.
and Washington had been in negotiations with Madrid over them since the beginning of the War of 1812. Yet, they differed as to when and how they would be achieved. Leaders in the capital felt that time was on their side and they were certain that the Floridas could ultimately be achieved through negotiation with Spain, without the need to risk war to acquire them immediately. Their agents on the periphery, and particularly Major General Jackson, were considerably less cautious in their approach. Jackson felt that, so long as the Floridas were in Spanish hands, and so long as the Seminoles were able to effectively have sanctuary there, the U.S.’s southern frontier would see no peace or stability.

_Florida_

Given these preferences in Washington, when the Seminole War broke out, the orders to the Southern Division of the Army were clear—if needed, they could enter Spanish territory in pursuit of the Seminoles, but under no circumstances were they to take territory or attack a Spanish fort. As Secretary of War John Calhoun wrote to the commander of U.S. forces in the war, Major General Gaines, on 16 December 1817, you should “consider yourself at liberty to march across the Florida line, and to attack them from within its limits, should it be found necessary, unless they should shelter themselves under a Spanish post. In the last event, you will immediately notify this Department.”

Jackson, of course, saw things differently. After seeing Gaines’ orders, he penned a letter to Monroe on 6 January, arguing that “the whole of East Florida [should be] seized.” Jackson added:

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“this can be done without implicating the Government; let it be signified to me through any channel, (say Mr. J. Rhea) that the possession of the Floridas would be desirable to the United States, and in sixty days it will be accomplished.”

Jackson never received a response to this letter. In fact, when it arrived in Washington, President Monroe was seriously ill and bed-ridden, and happened to be without a secretary. The letter was apparently briefly skimmed by Calhoun and Treasury Secretary William Crawford, only to end up in a pile of Monroe’s other papers, not to be seen by the President until there was a Congressional investigation of the Seminole War a full year later. What Jackson hadn’t been aware of when he wrote the letter was that General Gaines was to be diverted to another theater, and that Jackson would be appointed as commander of U.S. forces in the Seminole War. Secretary Calhoun wrote to Jackson on 26 December 1817 that he should “repair, with as little delay as practicable, to Fort Scott, and assume the immediate command of the forces in that section,” and that he should “adopt the necessary measures to terminate [the] conflict”—though this order wouldn’t arrive in Nashville until 11 January 1818—five days after Jackson had sent his provocative letter to the president.

While Calhoun’s new orders didn’t explicitly place the same limitations on Jackson that had been placed on Gaines with regards to respecting Spanish sovereignty, it is clear from

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27 John A. Rhea was a member of the House of Representatives (1803-15, 1817-23) and a personal friend of Andrew Jackson.


his 6 January letter that Jackson had seen Gaines’ orders. And on 30 January 1818, President Monroe wrote to Calhoun, asking him to instruct Jackson “not to attack any post occupied by Spanish troops, from the possibility, that it might bring the allied powers upon us,” though for reasons that remain unknown, this order was never transmitted to Jackson.31 Calhoun later claimed, with substantial justification, that he had assumed “that the orders in this case to Genl Gains [sic] are obligatory on Genl Jackson,” adding that “there is no military principle better established.”32 In any case, the administration seems to have believed that its instructions for Jackson were clear. As President Monroe assured Congress on 25 March 1818, over two months after Jackson had departed for Florida, “Orders have been given to the general in command not to enter Florida, unless it be in pursuit of the enemy, and, in that case, to respect the Spanish authority wherever it is maintained.”33

Upon receipt of his orders, Jackson quickly readied his force of 1,100 and prepared for the 775-kilometer journey southbound to the Florida frontier in Georgia, reporting to Calhoun on 20 January 1818 that they were ready “to inflict speedy and merited chastisement on the deluded Seminoles.”34 Conditions would prove difficult for the 46-day journey, with heavy rains, flooded and washed-out roads, multiple crossings of swollen


rivers, and ration and supply shortages.\footnote{Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun, Head-Quarters, Division of the South, Fort Early, February 26, 1818, in \textit{American State Papers, Military Affairs}, Vol. I, p. 698.} Jackson’s forces crossed the Florida border around 13 March, and on 16 March they arrived at the ruins of the old British fort at Prospect Bluff (also known as “Negro Fort”), where he ordered it rebuilt and renamed Fort Gadsden, after his aide-de-camp. This was a first territorial claim Jackson wasn’t supposed to make.

After ten day’s rest and resupply, Jackson and his forces left Fort Gadsden on 26 March headed for St. Marks, a Spanish fort approximately 110 km to the southeast. Jackson had written to Calhoun the previous day, reporting that he had “no doubt but that St. Mark’s is in possession of the Indians,” and that he would “take possession of the garrison as a depot for my supplies.”\footnote{Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun, Head-Quarters, Division of the South, Fort Gadsden, March 25, 1818, in \textit{American State Papers, Military Affairs}, Vol. I, p. 698.} On his way, Jackson was reinforced on 1 April by Tennessee militia members as well as 2,000 Creek allies, bringing his total forces to nearly 5,000.\footnote{Remini, \textit{Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire}, p. 353; Howe, \textit{What Hath God Wrought}, p. 100.} With this larger force, Jackson engaged in what historian and Jackson biographer Robert Remini has referred to as a “thoroughgoing campaign of terror,” killing and capturing Seminoles, seizing their cattle and foodstuffs, and burning their villages to the ground.\footnote{Remini, \textit{Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire}, p. 354.} A few days later, Jackson proudly reported to Calhoun that the “duty was executed to my satisfaction; nearly three hundred houses were consumed.”\footnote{Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun, Head-Quarters, Division of the South, Camp, Near St. Marks, April 8, 1818, in \textit{American State Papers, Military Affairs}, Vol. I, p. 700.} Jackson’s forces then took the fort of St. Marks without resistance on 7 April, justifying the conquest to the Spanish commandant there on
“the immutable principle of self-defence.” With this, his second unauthorized territorial acquisition had been carried out.

Jackson and his forces then headed east for Bowleg’s Town, a Seminole village 160 km from St. Marks on the Suwannee River. Jackson’s forces razed the town when they arrived on 16 April, and in skirmishes in and around the town they killed 49 Seminole warriors and took over one hundred men, women, and children prisoner. At St. Marks and then in Bowleg’s Town, Jackson happened upon and arrested two British nationals—a Scottish trader from the Bahamas, Alexander Arbuthnot, and a former Royal Marine, Robert Ambrister—on the dubious charge of instigating the war and aiding the Seminoles. Jackson then returned to St. Marks, put his two British captives on trial, and had them executed on the morning of 29 April 1818—Ambrister being shot, and Arbuthnot being hung from the yardarm of his own ship. In reporting these events to Calhoun, Jackson wrote on 5 May:

“I hope the execution of these two unprincipled villains will prove an awful example to the world, and convince the Government of Great Britain, as well as her subjects,

40 “General Jackson to F. C. Luengo, Head-Quarters, Division of the South, Before St. Mark’s, April 6, 1818,” in *American State Papers*, Foreign Relations, Vol. IV, p. 575.


that certain (if slow) retribution awaits these unchristian wretches, who, by false
promises, delude and excite an Indian tribe to all the horrid deeds of savage war.”

However, Jackson’s work in Florida wasn’t quite complete. He claimed to have received
intelligence that as many as five hundred Seminole warriors had congregated in the capital of
Spanish West Florida, Pensacola, some 275 km west of Fort Gadsden. On 10 May, Jackson
gathered a force of approximately 1,200 personnel and set out across the Apalachicola for
Pensacola. Two weeks later, on 24 May, Jackson’s forces took the city without resistance,
with Jackson warning the Governor before storming the city that “the blood which may be
shed by a useless resistance on your part to my demand will rest on your head.” After
taking Fort Barrancas on 28 May, a Spanish fort just 10 km outside Pensacola, Jackson
issued a proclamation appointing a U.S. territorial governor, seizing the royal archives, and
establishing tax collection procedures, while shipping the Spanish governor and garrison off
to Havana, Cuba. As Jackson would report to Calhoun on 2 June 1818, the articles of
capitulation “amount to a complete cession to the United States of that portion of the
Floridas.”


With much of Spanish Florida under the control of his forces, Jackson finally saw his job as complete—though he was always ready for more. As he prepared to head back to Nashville on 2 June, he wrote to President Monroe, telling him that with some minor reinforcements, “I will insure you Cuba in a few days.”\(^5^0\) However, along with Jackson’s brashness were notable undertones of diffidence. On “our Southern frontier, I have established peace and safety” Jackson wrote to the president, “and hope the government will never yield it[:] should my acts… be disapproved, I have this consolation[:] that I exercised my best exertions and Judgt. and that sound national policy will dictate holding Possession as long as we are a republic.”\(^5^1\) Andrew Jackson had, without orders, taken control of much of Spanish Florida in 80 days, and at a cost of just seven of his forces killed.\(^5^2\) His fait accompli was complete. The question that now seemed to be on his mind was how the administration in Washington would react.

**Washington Reacts**

News of Jackson’s exploits in Florida began to filter back to Washington through unofficial channels in late April and early May 1818. The first dispatches the administration received from Jackson directly were on 4 May, reporting on his conquest of St. Marks. Though it was a clear violation of his orders, the administration’s reaction to this first acquisition was fairly muted.\(^5^3\) With the exception of Secretary of State Adams, who worried that Jackson was

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acting “without due regard to humanity,” no one in Monroe’s cabinet raised significant concerns.54 For the time being, the administration was content to await further information from the frontier.

However, the Florida issue began to heat up in June. Once the Spanish learned of what had transpired there, minister to Washington Luis de Onís lodged a formal complaint on 17 June, referring to Jackson’s actions as “monstrous acts of hostility.”55 The following day, the president and his cabinet became aware of the storming of Pensacola and the execution of the two British subjects.56 This was clearly a more serious turn of events, as not only had a major Spanish city been taken, but Jackson risked bringing the United Kingdom into the conflict as well. As Secretary Adams noted in his diary that day, “This, and other events in this Indian war, makes so many difficulties for the administration.”57 Yet Monroe preferred to await Jackson’s official correspondence, and prepared to head to his farm in Loudoun County, Virginia, on 26 June. Adams was astounded by his superior’s nonchalance. As he wrote in his diary, “though the moment is very critical, and a storm is rapidly thickening, he has not read many of the papers that I left with him, and he puts off everything for a future time.”58

Matters would come to a head in July. On the seventh, Secretary of State Adams was awoken in the middle of the night by Minister Onís, demanding a meeting the following


56 Ammon, James Monroe, p. 421; Cunningham, The Presidency of James Monroe, p. 60.


day. On 9 July, Monroe received official documents from Jackson at his farm in Loudoun County, and he quickly prepared to return to the capital. The following day, in a letter to former President James Madison, Monroe foreshadowed the debate that would take place in his cabinet by pointing out that “There are serious difficulties in this business, on which ever side we view it.” The president arrived back in Washington on 13 July, as Adams put it, “in the midst of the storm.”

The Monroe cabinet held six separate hours-long cabinet meetings from 15 to 21 July 1818, to discuss the Florida crisis. The basic initial stance of most cabinet members was of opposition to Jackson’s conduct in Florida. There were a number of reasons for this, but important among them was the geopolitical risk involved in backing Jackson and retaining the Floridas. Secretary of War Calhoun and President Monroe held this view, seeing Jackson as having committed what amounted to an unauthorized act of war against Spain. On 13 July, Calhoun told Secretary of State Adams that he was “extremely dissatisfied with General Jackson’s proceedings in Florida,” and that he thought that “we shall certainly have a

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60 “Don Luis de Onis to the Secretary of State, Washington, July 8, 1818,” in American State Papers, Foreign Relations, Vol. IV, p. 496.
Spanish war.” President Monroe agreed. As he noted in a letter to Andrew Jackson on 19 July, if they retained Spanish Florida, it would not be “improbable that war would immediately follow… The war would probably soon become general; and we do not foresee that we should have a single European power on our side. Why risk these consequences?”

In the view of Calhoun and Monroe, promptly returning Spain’s territory and disavowing the actions of Major General Jackson seemed the surest way to avoid war with Spain. As Calhoun argued in the cabinet meeting of 20 July, by putting the responsibility squarely on Jackson’s shoulders, the administration “would take away from Spain all pretext for war, and for resorting to the aid of other European powers.”

Yet, it wasn’t quite so simple. For the very act of Jackson’s conquering Spanish territory in Florida activated two mechanisms that would make it extremely difficult to simply cut the major general loose and withdraw. First, the conquests drastically drove down the perceived costs of acquisition of these territories. The ease with which Jackson’s forces acquired most of East and West Florida put Spain’s inability to protect and defend these territories in stark relief. Secretary of State Adams, having been in negotiations with Spain over the Floridas from almost the time he took office in September 1817, was quick to grasp this, and pushed for approval of Jackson’s actions and retention of the territories on these grounds. And Adams’ position wasn’t without foundation. The French minister, who was acting as

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something of an intermediary between the U.S. and Spain in negotiations, reported to
Adams on 10 July that Spain was ready to cede the Floridas to the U.S.68 The following day,
Spanish minister Onís himself told Adams that they were willing to give up the Floridas “for
nothing.”69 George Erving, U.S. minister to Spain, wrote to Washington on 13 July, noting
that Jackson’s actions were forcing the hand of Madrid with respect to the Florida cession
and broader border negotiations.70 President Monroe too, began to recognize this as the
cabinet debate progressed. As he wrote in his letter to Andrew Jackson of 19 July, recent
events in Florida “show the incompetency of Spain to maintain her authority,” and that
Jackson’s actions “will furnish a strong inducement in Spain to cede the territory.”71 Thus, it
was difficult to deny that Jackson’s fait accompli had significantly strengthened the U.S.’s hand
in border negotiations with Spain, essentially overnight, making arguments for a blanket
withdrawal more difficult to sustain.

Second, Jackson’s unauthorized conquest helped generate significant domestic political
pressure on the administration to support one of their own nationals, rather than siding with
Spain. Jackson was the most popular military figure in the country—a veritable national
celebrity—and the administration perceived significant domestic political costs associated
with repudiating him.72 And Jackson’s notoriously fierce temper and his vengeful disposition
likely only strengthened these perceptions. Secretary of State Adams, again, came to this

70 Dangerfield, The Era of Good Feelings, p. 143.
72 Ammon, James Monroe, p. 423; Weeks, Building the Continental Empire, p. 45; Howe, What Hath God Wrought, p. 103.
realization fairly early on in the debate. On 16 July, Adams argued that to disavow the major
general would create the appearance that the administration was trying “to put down Jackson
in the public opinion; [and] that he would immediately resign, and turn the attack upon the
Administration, and would carry a large portion of the public with him.”73 “It would be
said,” Adams argued in the cabinet debate of 18 July, that “after having the benefit of his
services, he was abandoned and sacrificed to the enemies of this country.”74 In the
penultimate cabinet meeting, on 20 July, Adams summed up his view more generally, noting
that if one’s own agent’s actions were “dubious, it was better to err on the side of vigor than
of weakness—on the side of our own officer, who had rendered the most eminent services
to the nation, than on the side of our bitterest enemies, and against him.”75

The rest of the administration would come around to this point of view.76 Two months
later, looking back on the cabinet debates, Secretary of War Calhoun noted in a letter to
Senator Charles Tait that, “from the popularity of the General, it was inexpedient to punish”
Jackson.77 Monroe, too, would ultimately agree, writing in a September 1818 letter to
Virginia politician and friend George Hay that turning on Jackson would have created
“internal feuds of the most pernicious character.”78 Monroe expanded on these views in a
letter to former President Madison some seven months after the cabinet debates:

75 “July 18th, 1818,” in Adams, ed., Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Vol. IV, p. 113. See also: Weeks, John Quincy
Adams, p. 115.
76 Niven, John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union, p. 70; Weeks, John Quincy Adams, p. 138.
77 “John C. Calhoun to Charles Tait, Cook’s Law Office, Elbert County, Ga., War Dept., 5th September, 1818,”
78 Cunningham, The Presidency of James Monroe, p. 64.
“Had Gen\(^1\) Jackson been ordered to trial I have no doubt that the interior of the country would have been much agitated, if not convulsed, by appeals to sectional interests, by imputations of subserviency to the views of Ferdinand, of hostility to the cause of the colonies, &c.”\(^79\)

Thus, the administration perceived significant domestic political costs associated with cutting Jackson loose and disavowing his actions altogether.

This combination of perceived geopolitical risk associated with retaining the Floridas and domestic political costs associated with relinquishing them created something of a dilemma for the administration.\(^80\) If they stood firm and kept the territories, they risked war with Spain, and possibly even the United Kingdom. If they backed down and relinquished them, they risked severe domestic political consequences, potentially bringing down the administration itself. Secretary of State Adams summed up the administration’s precarious position in a diary entry on 21 July 1818:

“The Administration were [sic] placed in a dilemma from which it is impossible to escape censure by some, and factious crimination by many. If they avow and approve Jackson’s conduct, they incur the double responsibility of having commenced a war against Spain, and of warring in violation of the Constitution without the authority of Congress. If they disavow him, they must give offence to all his friends, encounter the


shock of his popularity, and having the appearance of truckling to Spain. For all this I
should be prepared.”

Washington Decides

To get out of this dilemma, President Monroe ultimately decided to split the difference,
settling on a partial rebuke of Jackson as well as a partial withdrawal from Florida. With
respect to his decision on Jackson, the president decided to make it clear that the major
general had acted without prior authorization, absolving the administration of complicity in
his actions. Yet Monroe also emphasized that Jackson was acting from principled motives
and in the national interest, aiming to avoid the wrath of Jackson’s domestic political
supporters. The administration’s policy on Florida would be published in an article,
ghostwritten by Attorney General William Wirt, in the *Daily National Intelligencer* on 27 July
1818. In it, the administration made clear that “In attacking the posts of St. Mark and
Pensacola, with the fort of Barrancas, General Jackson… took these measures on his own
responsibility.” Yet the article was quick to add that Jackson’s “operations proceeded from
motives of the purest patriotism.” This formulation—of Jackson having acted on his own

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accord but with noble intent—would be repeated in Monroe’s letters to Jackson himself,\textsuperscript{85} in his communications with Congress,\textsuperscript{86} as well as in diplomatic correspondence with Spain.\textsuperscript{87}

With respect to Florida, the administration decided to conduct a partial withdrawal, planning to pull out of Pensacola expeditiously, of Fort St. Marks only once Spain was prepared to garrison it sufficiently, and retaining Fort Gadsden indefinitely.\textsuperscript{88} There were three reasons the administration settled on a partial withdrawal. First, it is clear the administration wanted to avoid what was viewed as an unnecessary war with Spain. In a letter to former President Thomas Jefferson on 22 July 1818, Monroe explained that central to his Florida policy was to avoid “giving to Spain just cause of war.”\textsuperscript{89} The president repeated this rationale in later communications with Andrew Jackson and with James Madison, arguing that one of his primary goals in Florida had been “to deprive Spain and the allied powers of any just cause of war.”\textsuperscript{90} Thus, withdrawal from Pensacola was seen as an important way to avoid backing Spain into a corner from which war would be its only option.

\textsuperscript{85} Monroe to Jackson, July 19th, 1818” and “James Monroe to General Jackson, Washington, October 20, 1818,” both in Hamilton, ed., \textit{The Writings of James Monroe}, Vol. VI, pp. 55, 74.

\textsuperscript{86} “President’s Message at the Commencement of the Session, Communicated to Congress, November 17, 1818,” in \textit{American State Papers}, Foreign Relations, Vol. IV, p. 215.

\textsuperscript{87} “The Secretary of State to Don Luis de Onis, Department of State, Washington, July 23, 1818” and “Secretary of State to Erving, November 28, 1818,” both in \textit{American State Papers}, Foreign Relations, Vol. IV, pp. 498-499, 539, 541.


\textsuperscript{90} “James Monroe to General Jackson, Washington, December 21, 1818” (quoted) and “Monroe to Madison, February 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1819,” both in Hamilton, ed., \textit{The Writings of James Monroe}, Vol. VI, pp. 86, 87-88.
However, the administration felt that St. Marks and Fort Gadsden could be safely retained without similar attendant risks. Secretary of State Adams had suspected this early on, but it became clearer as the Florida crisis progressed. It was obvious that Spain wouldn’t be clamoring for war with the United States. For much of the past decade, it had either been fighting Napoleon in the Peninsular War (1807-14) at home, or struggling to put down Latin American revolutionaries abroad. At this point, Spain was clinging to its empire by its fingernails, and there was simply very little it could do to expel the United States from Florida. And perhaps more importantly, it became clear that Britain had no intention of coming to Spain’s aid. The War of 1812 had ended only three years earlier, and no one wanted another North American war. Britain and the United States had also just recently signed an arms limitation treaty for the Great Lakes, and were in the midst of negotiating their outstanding boundary issues. While the British press and public were outraged by the unlawful execution of two of their nationals, British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh refused to let the fate of the two adventurers disrupt the ongoing rapprochement with the United States. As Castlereagh would inform American minister to the U.K. Ricard Rush on 7 January 1819, his government had decided that “the conduct of these individuals had been

92 Weeks, John Quincy Adams, p. 131.
93 Howe, What Hath God Wrought, p. 107; Nugent, Habits of Empire, pp. 128-129.
unjustifiable, and therefore not calling for the interference of Great Britain.”  Thus, it turned out that the United States could hold onto some of Spain’s territory, as there were few geopolitical risks associated with doing so.

The second reason the administration opted for a partial withdrawal is that there were important constitutional issues at stake. According to Article I of the U.S. Constitution, Congress, not the executive, is vested with the power to declare war. Thus, by attacking Spanish holdings in Florida, Jackson had potentially usurped the power of Congress and violated the constitution. By retaining Pensacola in particular—as it was felt that the other conquests could be justified on the basis of self-defense—the administration risked having engaged in an extra-constitutional war. This was an argument made by Secretary of War Calhoun from the beginning, it clearly resonated with President Monroe, and despite some resistance, even Adams ultimately relented to it. As the president explained to Jackson in his letter of 19 July 1818, “If the Executive refused to evacuate the posts, especially Pensacola, it would amount to a declaration of war, to which it is incompetent. It would be accused of usurping the authority of Congress, and giving a deep and fatal wound to the Constitution.” Thus, at least some withdrawal was seen as necessary.

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97 Ammon, James Monroe, p. 422.


The third and final reason the Monroe administration settled on a partial withdrawal from Florida had to do with coercive diplomacy. Over the course of the crisis, it became increasingly clear that Spain was in a highly vulnerable position. With the Americans in control of much of Florida, and Britain standing aside, Spanish leaders had few options beyond trying to strike the best deal with Washington they could. A partial withdrawal would allow Spain to come to the negotiating table with its dignity intact, but it would also allow the U.S. to retain coercive leverage for the purpose of the negotiations. As President Monroe explained in his same letter to Andrew Jackson on 19 July, “If we hold the posts, her government cannot treat with honor, which, by withdrawing the troops, we afford her an opportunity to do.” From this position of advantage, the administration could then pressure, even browbeat, Spain into giving up the Floridas. For instance, the Intelligencer article of 27 July closed by pointing out Spain’s “incompetency to maintain her authority in the Floridas” and advised that it would “be much wiser for her to cede those provinces at once.” Similarly, in a famously-tough-worded letter to the Spanish government, Adams wrote on 28 November 1818 that “the right of the United States can as little compound with impotence as with perfidy.” The Secretary continued:

“Spain must immediately make her election, either to place a force in Florida adequate at once to the protection of her territory, and to the fulfillment of her engagements, or

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101 Cunningham, *The Presidency of James Monroe*, p. 64.


103 *Daily National Intelligencer*, p. 2.
to cede to the United States a province, of which she retains nothing but the nominal possession”¹⁰⁴

Spain would ultimately opt for the latter.

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A Congressional inquiry into the Seminole War opened in December 1818. It included a floor debate lasting nearly a month, at that point the longest single issue debated in Congress in the nation’s history.¹⁰⁵ The high point was a three-hour speech delivered by Speaker of the House of Representatives, Henry Clay of Kentucky.¹⁰⁶ Warning of the risks of Jacksonian military despotism, Clay admonished his colleagues to:

“Beware how you give a fatal sanction, in this infant period of our republic, scarcely yet two score years old, to military insubordination. Remember that Greece had her Alexander, Rome her Caesar, England her Cromwell, France her Bonaparte, and that if we would escape the rock on which they split, we must avoid their errors.”¹⁰⁷

But it would ultimately make little difference. All resolutions condemning Jackson’s actions would be defeated by wide margins.¹⁰⁸ Jackson was simply too popular, and his recent exploits in Florida made him only more so. He was mobbed by adoring admirers wherever


¹⁰⁵ Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, p. 371.


¹⁰⁸ Weeks, John Quincy Adams, p. 160.
he went, and was bestowed honors and awards by civil society organizations and local
governments throughout the country.\textsuperscript{109} A future president was clearly in the making.

On 22 February 1819, John Quincy Adams and Luis de Onís signed the Transcontinental
Treaty, which not only ceded the Floridas to the United States but defined the U.S.-Spanish
border all the way to the Pacific.\textsuperscript{110} Adams would write in his diary that night that the
“acknowledgement of a definite line of boundary to the South Seas form a great epocha in
our history.”\textsuperscript{111} Although ratification would be delayed on the Spanish side, the U.S. would
finally take possession of Florida in February 1821, with none other than Andrew Jackson as
its inaugural territorial governor.

As part of the Adams-Onís Treaty, the United States, notably, agreed to relinquish its
claims to the Spanish imperial province of Texas. President Monroe’s reluctance to add
another slave-holding state to the Union was at the forefront of his mind in his decision to
exclude the claim.\textsuperscript{112} As the president wrote to Thomas Jefferson in May 1820, “it is evident
that further acquisition of territory, to the West & South, involves difficulties, of an internal
nature, which menace the Union itself.”\textsuperscript{113} But it wouldn’t take long for Texas to once again
burst onto the national scene. As the Spanish Empire continued to crumble, Texas would
present the next major opportunity for American territorial expansion.


\textsuperscript{110} Nugent, \textit{Habits of Empire}, p. 127.


\textsuperscript{113} “James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, Washington, May 1820,” in Hamilton, ed., \textit{The Writings of James Monroe},
Jackson Stands Aloof: The United States and Texas, 1836-1837

The United States refrained from acquiring the independent Republic of Texas\textsuperscript{114} between April 1836 and March 1837, in the aftermath of the Texas Revolution. The revolutionary overthrow of Mexican authority in Texas was independently planned and executed by recent American emigres, led by a former United States governor and member of congress.\textsuperscript{115} The theory of inadvertent expansion makes two arguments that are borne out in this case. First, that once a territory is acquired, a number of mechanisms are activated that make relinquishment difficult. In the case of Texas, the revolution, and particularly the brutal crackdown by Mexican forces, led to widespread sympathy and support for the cause, especially in the American south. And second, that the perception of significant geopolitical risk associated with acquiring the territory will discourage leaders in the capital from accepting it. In the case at hand, American leaders in the capital strongly suspected that annexing Texas would mean war with Mexico, an outcome they simply weren’t willing to risk. The U.S.’s failure to accept the Texan \textit{fait accompli} would mean that the erstwhile Mexican state would remain an independent republic for the following ten years, until it was annexed as the 28\textsuperscript{th} state of the Union in 1845.

\textit{Historical Background}

Within just six months of the Adams-Onís Treaty having entered into force in February 1821, Mexico declared its independence from Spain after a ten-year armed insurgency.

\textsuperscript{114} Contemporary Texas, U.S.A.

\textsuperscript{115} The case of Texas is somewhat different from other cases in this dissertation. While in most cases the peripheral agents who engage in conquest and present leaders in the capital with a \textit{fait accompli} are members of the state apparatus, or at least are the state’s own nationals, in this case they are recent emigres to a foreign territory. However, the recency of their emigration, as well as the fact that they were led by American political elites, make this case comparable with the others. And, despite these differences, the case will show that the dynamics of inadvertent non-expansion are broadly similar.
Texas, a territory of 678,000 km² over which the U.S. had relinquished all claims, became part of the Republic of Mexico’s northernmost state of Coahuila y Tejas in 1824.¹¹⁶ Like the Spanish Empire before it, Mexico faced the problem of chronic underpopulation on its northern frontier.¹¹⁷ To deal with this, the Mexican government encouraged immigration to Texas by selling land at rates significantly lower than in the United States, and by authorizing colonization agents (or empresarios) such as Stephen F. Austin to facilitate settlement from across the border. And the immigrants—and their slaves—poured in. Starting with a local population of roughly 2,500 at independence, by 1830 over 20,000 Americans had settled in Texas, greatly outnumbering the Mexican population.¹¹⁸ Within just five years the total number of settlers from the north reached 40,000, outnumbering the Mexican population by a factor greater than ten-to-one.¹¹⁹ Along with those who came in under formal empresario contracts were thousands of illegal immigrants—“squatters, drifters, adventurers, smugglers, [and] conspirators”—who were attracted by the relative lawlessness of the Mexican-American frontier zone.¹²⁰

These demographic shifts alarmed Mexican officials, who began to make efforts to stem the flow of migrants, putting Mexico City on a collision course with its new Texan inhabitants. In April 1830 the Mexican government passed a law banning immigration from

¹¹⁶ “Territorial expansion of the United States,” HSUS.


the United States and the importation of slaves.\textsuperscript{121} In 1832, Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna launched a coup, resulting in the overthrow of the government in 1833 and the establishment of centralized authoritarian rule the following year.\textsuperscript{122} Uprisings emerged in several Mexican states, only to be crushed by Santa Anna’s forces. The migrant population in Texas chafed under the increasingly heavy hand extending from Mexico City. And when the Mexican government imposed customs duties on Texan trade, and sent its forces out to enforce its new edicts, matters reached a boiling point.\textsuperscript{123}

\textit{Washington \& the Texan Frontier}

Among the migrants aggravated by the centralization of Mexican rule was Sam Houston. Born in Lexington, Virginia, near the Tennessee border, Houston would go on to represent Tennessee in the House of Representatives and serve as the state’s governor. Houston was also a veteran of the War of 1812, where he had served under the command of Andrew Jackson and was badly wounded in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.\textsuperscript{124} Jackson and Houston remained lifelong friends, with Houston acting as a pall bearer for Rachel Jackson’s funeral in December 1828.\textsuperscript{125} After a failed marriage, a three-year sojourn with the Cherokee in Arkansas Territory, some very heavy drinking, and a conviction for battery against a sitting House member, Houston entered Texas at the suggestion of an old friend in December


\textsuperscript{122} Pletcher, \textit{The Diplomacy of Annexation}, p. 68; Weeks, \textit{Building the Continental Empire}, p. 87; Nugent, \textit{Habits of Empire}, pp. 150-151.

\textsuperscript{123} Howe, \textit{What Hath God Wrought}, p. 661.


127 Haley, *Sam Houston*, p. 87.


ham-handed attempts to purchase the northern state for as much as $5 million—all to no avail.\textsuperscript{132}

However, this was as far as Jackson was willing to go. In fact, he specifically wanted to acquire Texas, as he put it, “without any just imputation of corruption on our part.”\textsuperscript{133} Everything had to be above board. Hearing early rumors of Houston’s plans to acquire Texas, Jackson referred to these as “deranged,” part of a “wild scheme,” and as the “mere effusions of a distempered brain.”\textsuperscript{134} If Jackson was to acquire Texas, he intended to do so through negotiation with the central government in Mexico City. “A revolt in Texas,” Jackson told his chargé in Mexico in February 1831, “may close the door forever to its advantageous settlement.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textit{Texas}

But a revolt is precisely what would eventually occur.\textsuperscript{136} A small skirmish between American settlers and Mexican military authorities in the town of Gonzales in October 1835 sparked a more general armed uprising, determined to drive the Mexican army out of Texas.\textsuperscript{137} The following month, the Texan revolutionaries created a provisional government, and named

\ \textsuperscript{132} Remini, \textit{Andrew Jackson}, Vol. III, p. 353; Cole, \textit{The Presidency of Andrew Jackson}, p. 131; Brands, \textit{Andrew Jackson}, p. 514; Meacham, \textit{American Lion}, p. 316.

\ \textsuperscript{133} Brands, \textit{Andrew Jackson}, p. 514.


\ \textsuperscript{137} Howe, \textit{What Hath God Wrought}, p. 661.
Sam Houston commander-in-chief of their armed forces. By December, the revolutionary army had defeated all Mexican garrisons and was in control of the state. In response, Mexican President Santa Anna ordered a two-pronged counter-offensive, one of which he led himself, to take the state back from the insurgent army. Santa Anna’s armies slaughtered hundreds of Anglo-Texan revolutionaries after a two-week siege at the Alamo and the surrender at Goliad through February and early March 1836. As this was occurring, Anglo-Texan political leaders gathered on 2 March 1836 and officially declared the independent Republic of Texas, drafting a constitution over the following two weeks. On 15 April 1836, former empresario and now-Texan revolutionary leader Stephen F. Austin sent President Jackson an impassioned plea for assistance, writing: “This people look to you, the guardians of their rights and interests and principles, will you, can you turn a deaf ear to the appeals of your fellow citizens in favor of their and your country men and friends, who are massacred, butchered, outraged in Texas at your very doors?”

However, immediate assistance wouldn’t ultimately be necessary. In their final push to drive the revolutionaries out of Texas, Santa Anna’s army was decisively defeated by Sam Houston’s forces on 21 April 1836 at San Jacinto, and Santa Anna himself was taken prisoner. With this victory, the Texas Revolution was over. In September, elections were held, and the constitution and the matter of annexation to the United States were put to referendum. Sam Houston was elected President of the Republic of Texas in a landslide, the

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138 Nugent, Habits of Empire, p. 152.
constitution was approved, and the voters supported annexation to the United States 3,277 to 91.\(^{140}\) The question now was how leaders in Washington would respond.

**Washington Reacts**

There were some good reasons to support the Texas revolutionaries. The sparking of the revolution itself, and the bloody battles that followed, activated two mechanisms that made simply rejecting the Texan *fait accompli* difficult. First, the costs of acquiring Texas had been dramatically reduced. The revolution was over; the Texans had prevailed and had made their intentions unmistakably clear. The actual, on-the-ground costs associated with acquiring Texas had already been paid by the Anglo-Texan forces. All President Jackson had to do was agree to the request for annexation that was before him. And in light of Jackson’s demonstrated desire to acquire Texas for the United States, along with his close personal friendship with Sam Houston, the revolution presented a golden opportunity for the administration.

Second, there was significant public support for the Texas revolutionaries in the United States. The outbreak of the revolution was accompanied by a flood of money and supplies across the Louisiana border in support of the Anglo-Texan insurgents. Young men from across the American south streamed across the border by the thousands to enlist and fight for the Texan cause.\(^{141}\) The national and regional press were strongly sympathetic with the rebels, portraying events in Texas in a sensationalist manner.\(^{142}\) Politicians from the south and the west put pressure on the Jackson administration, urging them to recognize Texan


\(^{141}\) Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire*, p. 87; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 662

\(^{142}\) Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, p. 70.
independence and prepare the way for annexation. Aiming to take advantage of this groundswell of support, the Texas government dispatched a number of commissioners to Washington over the course of 1836, who lobbied members of congress and the administration for recognition and annexation. This broad public support is hardly surprising. After all, most of the revolutionaries were Americans, at least until very recently, and some, such as Sam Houston, had important ties to the U.S. political elite. And the idea of a scrappy, burgeoning republic casting off the yoke of distant tyranny to declare its independence clearly appealed to American sensibilities.

However, not all of the American public supported annexation. For Texas at this time had a slave population of roughly 5,000, having been brought in by the American settlers. And the Texas revolution was taking place in the wake of the “Missouri Compromise” of 1820, as well as the more recent “Nullification Crisis” of 1832-33, both of which exposed and exacerbated the important sectional conflicts between free and slave-holding states. Abolitionists, Whig Party members, and northerners more generally were strongly opposed to the annexation of Texas, horrified at the prospect of adding a large, slave-holding territory to the Union. While the opposition was initially quiet and on the fringes of political debate, it would grow in volume and importance as the months passed.

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However, while there were reasons to accept the Texan *fait accompli*, there were also reasons for caution. Besides the simmering political opposition, there was also potentially significant geopolitical risk involved in annexing the newly-independent republic. For one, Mexico, with a newly-installed leader, seemed to be intent on taking Texas back from the revolutionaries by force. As the local U.S. minister in Mexico City reported to Secretary of State Forsyth on 19 May 1836, less than a month after the Battle of San Jacinto, the Mexican “national congress has resolved to prosecute the war against Texas with the utmost vigor.” The minister added that “the alleged reason for entertaining such questions is the supposed interference of the United States in the war of Texas.”

149 Similar observations were reported back to the capital in June, August, and October.

There was also at least some concern over the possibility of Mexico gaining the support of a European great power, such as the United Kingdom, in taking back the renegade state. On 25 June 1836, the U.S. minister in Mexico reported to Forsyth that the “application of this government to Great Britain for aid to restore her authority in Texas is a question of great magnitude.”

151 Mexico was apparently using its opposition to slavery in Texas as a means to try to elicit British aid. And there was clearly concern over this in Washington.


150 Doc. 3345: “Powhatan Ellis to John Forsyth, [Extract], Mexico, June 25, 1836” (p. 330), Doc. 3358: “Powhatan Ellis to John Forsyth Mexico, August 26, 1836” (p. 344), and Doc. 3374: “Powhatan Ellis to John Forsyth Mexico, October 11, 1836” (p. 369), all in Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, Vol. VIII.


For instance, in August 1836 the acting Secretary of State urged his minister in Mexico to
“be vigilant as to the movements of the Mexican Government towards obtaining foreign aid
for the subjugation of Texas, and give early information thereof to the Department.”
Thus, while Mexico would be ultimately disappointed in its efforts to enlist British
support, the possibility clearly weighed on the minds of policymakers in Washington.

Washington Decides

Facing a combination of enthusiastic, though non-unanimous, domestic political support, as
well as perceived geopolitical risk, President Jackson would ultimately opt for a rejection of
Texas’ *fait accompli*. Despite the president’s considerable personal sympathy for the cause, and
his own decades-long friendship with Houston, the downside risks seemed too great to
consider annexation at this moment. Instead, the administration adopted a neutral stance in
the Texas-Mexico conflict, and refused to get involved until it had been settled between the
two parties. Jackson had earlier foreshadowed this position in his annual message to
Congress of December 1835. However, his position became unmistakably clear when, in
reacting to Austin’s request for assistance of 15 April 1836, Jackson coolly wrote:

“The writer does not reflect that we have a treaty with Mexico, and our national faith
is pledged to support it. The Texians[,] before they took the step to declare themselves
Independent, which has aroused and united all Mexico against them[,] ought to have

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pondered well, it was a rash and premature act; our neutrality must be faithfully maintained."157

This position, which would be repeatedly referred to as one of “strict neutrality,” defined the Jackson administration’s response throughout the course of the crisis.158

The Jackson administration had a number of motivations in deciding to reject the Texan fait accompli. To the extent that there is a conventional wisdom on this matter, it is that concerns over the domestic political repercussions of annexation, particularly with regards to Texas’ slave-holder status, scared the Jackson administration off.159 These fears were particularly acute, the argument goes, in the context of an impending federal election in November 1836, where Jackson hoped his vice president, Martin Van Buren, would be elected president.160 There is a lot of evidence to support this argument, and it was clearly an important part of what guided the president’s decision making. In a 5 December 1836 message to Congress, Jackson made reference to the “reconciliation of various and conflicting interests” as a prerequisite for the annexation of Texas.161 And using almost identical language, Secretary of State Forsyth reportedly told a Texan commissioner in early


January 1837 that “various conflicting sectional interests in Congress would have to be reconciled before annexation would be agreed to.”\textsuperscript{162}

However, for three reasons, this “sectional conflict” hypothesis, while not wrong, is at the very least incomplete. First, it is somewhat difficult to make sense of Jackson’s years of efforts to purchase Texas from Mexico if his primary concern was sparking a sectional conflict over slavery. As late as 1834, Jackson was still actively seeking to acquire Texas through his \textit{chargé} in Mexico via negotiation and purchase,\textsuperscript{163} and in January 1837, in a meeting with former Mexican President Santa Anna, Jackson, again, offered to buy the state for $3.5 million.\textsuperscript{164} It seems, to an important extent, that Jackson was more concerned with the \textit{way} Texas was acquired than the simple fact of its acquisition. Second, the victory of Vice President Van Buren in the November election, of which the administration was assured by the beginning of December 1836,\textsuperscript{165} should have allayed at least some of these domestic political concerns, but it seemed not to. The administration still had three months of annexation opportunities until the end of its term in March 1837, which it elected not to avail itself of. In meetings with Texas commissioners from December through February, Jackson and other members of the administration exhibited the same reluctance toward annexation they had all along.\textsuperscript{166}


\textsuperscript{163} Cole, \textit{The Presidency of Andrew Jackson}, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{164} Remini, \textit{Andrew Jackson}, Vol. III, p. 365; Brands, \textit{Andrew Jackson}, p. 526.


\textsuperscript{166} “Wharton to Austin, Despatch No. 1, Washington City, December 22nd 1836” (pp. 157-158), “Wharton to Austin, Despatch No. 4, Washington City, January 6th 1837” (p. 169), “Wharton to Austin, Despatch No. 5,
The third and most important reason the sectional conflict hypothesis appears to be incomplete is that there is a lot of evidence that the Jackson administration had other concerns; namely, the geopolitical risk associated with annexing Texas.\footnote{Weeks, Building the Continental Empire, p. 88; Nugent, Habits of Empire, pp. 153-154; Weeks, Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, p. 168.} This concern over the possibility of war can be seen clearly in two episodes that occurred during the crisis over Texas. First, in January 1836, as the revolution was heating up, Major General Edmund Gaines was dispatched by Secretary of War Cass to establish a defensive position near the Louisiana border with Texas. Gaines was explicitly reminded, in line with administration policy, that it was “the duty of the United States to remain entirely neutral.”\footnote{“Lewis Cass to Major General E. P. Gaines, War Department, January 23, 1836,” in Asbury Dickins and John W. Forney, eds., American State Papers, Class V: Military Affairs, Vol. VI, 1836-1837 (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1861), p. 417. Available at: https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html.} In late March and early April, Gaines reported back to Washington that he had intelligence that several tribes of Native Americans were preparing to attack the American frontier from within Texas, and requested permission to cross the border if necessary.\footnote{“Edmund P. Gaines to Lewis Cass, Headquarters Western Department, Baton Rouge, March 29, 1836” (pp. 417-418) and “Edmund P. Gaines to Lewis Cass, Headquarters Western Department, Natchitoches, Louisiana, April 8, 1836” (pp. 419-420), both in American State Papers, Military Affairs, Vol. VI.} Secretary Cass replied on 25 April, clarifying that it was “not the wish of the President to take advantage of present circumstances, and thereby obtain possession of any portion of the Mexican territory,” but that Gaines was, indeed, “authorized to take such position on either side of the imaginary boundary line as may be best for your defensive operations.”\footnote{“Lewis Cass to Major General E. P. Gaines, War Department, April 25, 1836,” in American State Papers, Military Affairs, Vol. VI, p. 418. See also: Klunder, Lewis Cass, p. 91.} Perhaps out of concern that he had given the major general too much discretion, Cass followed up with dispatches on 4

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169 “Edmund P. Gaines to Lewis Cass, Headquarters Western Department, Baton Rouge, March 29, 1836” (pp. 417-418) and “Edmund P. Gaines to Lewis Cass, Headquarters Western Department, Natchitoches, Louisiana, April 8, 1836” (pp. 419-420), both in American State Papers, Military Affairs, Vol. VI.

and 12 May, reminding Gaines to “act cautiously,” to not cross the border “unless circumstances distinctly show this step is necessary,” and, if so, to “return as soon as the safety of the frontier will permit.”

In June 1836, Gaines crossed the Sabine River into Texas and occupied the town of Nacogdoches, some 80 km from the border. The major general then called up militia forces from Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana to provide additional personnel, which their governors were only-too-eager to provide. When President Jackson learned of the occupation and the militia requisition in early August, he was “much astonished.” Within a few days, he had contacted the state governors in question and had countermanded Gaines’ requisition, ordering the militia forces to be discharged. In a 12 August letter to Amos Kendall, Jackson’s Postmaster General and a key member of his “kitchen cabinet,” Jackson explained his reasoning, arguing that Gaines’ action “was a violation of that neutrality which we had assumed, and was in fact, and which Mexico might have viewed as[,] an act of war upon her if it had been carried into effect.” Thankfully, Jackson continued he had “stopped it in the bud.” In a letter to Gaines himself on 4 September, Jackson reminded the major general that “ours is a state of strict neutrality,” and that Gaines,

171 “Lewis Cass to Major General Gaines, War Department, May 4, 1836” (p. 421) and “Lewis Cass to Major General Gaines, War Department, May 12, 1836” (p. 424, quoted), both in American State Papers, Military Affairs, Vol. VI.


“as the commander of our forces on that frontier[,] must religiously observe and maintain it.”

Thus, it is clear that Jackson’s reversal of what was, frankly, a golden opportunity to gain territory in Texas was motivated, in important part, by the desire to avoid war with Mexico.

There was a second episode that makes clear the administration’s concerns over geopolitical risk. In June 1836, President Jackson dispatched an agent by the name of Henry R. Morfit to gather “detailed information of the civil, military and political conditions of Texas.”

The results of Morfit’s reports would play an important role in shaping the thinking of the Jackson administration. As Secretary of State Forsyth told the Texan commissioners in July 1836, the president “would not act definitely upon the subject of Texas until the report of a Confidential Agent sent to that country should be received.”

In his first, detailed report of 9 September, Morfit cast doubt on Texas’ prospects, and his primary reason for doing so was that “the Mexicans it is said are preparing to invade Texas during this winter.”

In his second report the following day, Morfit emphasized the vast imbalance of power that Texas faced vis-à-vis Mexico, noting that the Mexican population was “about 8 million” and that of Texas “between 40 and 50 thousand,” so, in his view, it could not “be supposed that under ordinary circumstances the issue of this war would

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remain long undecided.” In closing this second report, Morfit argued that Texas’ “future security must depend more upon the weakness and imbecility of her enemy then upon her own strength.”

President Jackson seemed to take these findings to heart. Annexation would be definitively off the table, and he even decided to refer the matter of diplomatic recognition to Congress. Jackson’s reasoning for doing so is also telling. As he wrote to Amos Kendall on 8 December 1836, with “the Constitutional power of declaring war being vested in Congress, and as the acknowledgment of the Independence of Texas might lead to war with Mexico,” the subject should be referred to that body. In a special message to Congress on 21 December, Jackson noted that a “premature recognition under these circumstances, if not looked upon as justifiable cause of war, is always liable to be regarded as proof of an unfriendly spirit.” Jackson added that there was, “in appearance at least, an immense disparity of physical force on the side of Mexico.” Thus, Jackson argued, the United States “should still stand aloof and maintain our present attitude.”For the time being, Texas was on its own.

After contemplating the matter for two months, Congress would pass a series of resolutions appropriating the funds necessary for the diplomatic recognition of Texas in late February 1837. In his very last day in office, on 3 March, Jackson formally recognized the

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independence of Texas by nominating a chargé d’affaires to the republic.\textsuperscript{184} Texas would continue to unsuccessfully press for annexation after the inauguration of President Martin Van Buren. A Texas diplomatic official explained the U.S.’s continued reticence to consider annexation in January 1838 by pointing, among other things, to a fear “of involving this country in a war, in which they are now doubtful whether they would ever be supported by a majority of their own citizens, and which would be at once branded by their enemies at home and abroad as an unjust war, instigated for the very purpose of gaining possession of Texas.”\textsuperscript{185} Texas would remain a ramshackle independent republic until March 1845, when it would be formally annexed to the United States during the transition period between Presidents John Tyler and James K. Polk. This annexation of Texas would, of course, spark the war with Mexico that Jackson had so feared.

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In closing, it is worth reflecting on the sea change observed in the perceptions and behaviors of Andrew Jackson across the two cases. Jackson, as a field commander in the case of Florida, argued that “the whole of East Florida [should be] seized,” and that he would happily do it himself. In the course of carrying out the conquest, Jackson also rashly put to death two British subjects for little more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and whose execution, he hoped, would “prove an awful example to the world.” Yet his behavior as president was strikingly different. In the case of Texas, Jackson characterized the revolution as a “rash and premature act,” decided that his government would maintain


“strict neutrality” in the conflict, and urged the U.S. Congress to “stand aloof.” And when he heard that the Texans had captured Mexican President Santa Anna and were considering putting him to death, he argued vehemently against it. In a letter to Sam Houston on 4 September 1836, Jackson argued that “nothing now could tarnish the character of Texas more than such an act at this late period,” and urged his friend to “preserve his life and the character you have won… this is what I think, true wisdom and humanity dictates.” And this was Santa Anna, who had, just a few months earlier, ordered the slaughter of hundreds to Texan (and American) revolutionaries at the Alamo and Goliad. It is difficult to imagine a more fitting illustration of the difference between the “view from the capital” and the “view from the frontier,” discussed in Chapter 2.

**Alternative Explanations**

Three alternative arguments that might explain the cases of Florida and Texas are strategic expansion theory, state institutional weakness, and leader interests. First, it is clear that neither the case of Florida nor of Texas are characterized by strategic expansion. In Florida, Andrew Jackson was acting in direct contravention of orders from the capital that his predecessor had received only weeks earlier, and in Texas, Sam Houston’s revolution was sparked without any foreknowledge or support from Washington. While the ultimate decision by Monroe in the case of Florida and Jackson in the case of Texas was strategic in nature—a cost-benefit calculation based on domestic political pressure and perceived geopolitical risk—these leaders had no control over the process whatsoever until it was thrust into their laps. And their ultimate decisions were strongly conditioned by the twin

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forces of the conquest-generated incentives to retain the territories and the perceived geopolitical risks associated with doing so. In short, there is little “strategic” about these instances of territorial expansion.

Second, state institutional weakness doesn’t appear to be a sufficient explanation for the unauthorized peripheral expansion in the cases of Florida and Texas. While the American state was clearly relatively weak, particularly as compared to its more centralized European counterparts, this fact doesn’t seem to have produced abundant inadvertent expansion overall. As presented in Table 3.4 in the previous chapter, fewer than 10 percent of American cases of territorial expansion overall were inadvertent in nature, whereas institutionally stronger states such as France and the United Kingdom experienced considerably more. Thus, in the United States, as in other cases, state institutional capacity played little role in its inadvertent expansion.

Third, leader interests don’t appear to explain why leaders in the capital subsequently authorized the expansion in the case of Florida, but not in Texas. The problem here is that leader interests were relatively constant—both the Monroe administration in Florida and the Jackson administration in Texas wanted the territories in question—but the outcomes varied. Monroe was able to relatively-safely authorize the fait accompli because he perceived the geopolitical risk in Florida to be manageable. Jackson, on the other hand, was unable to authorize the Texan fait accompli, despite his strong desire for the Mexican state, because he


188 40.4% in the case of France, 27% in the case of the United Kingdom. See Table 3.4 (Chapter 3).
saw the risks of war to be too great. The perceived geopolitical consequences of acquisition were a far more important determinant of the choices these leaders made than a simple reference to their narrow interests.

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This chapter has presented comparative case studies of inadvertent expansion and non-expansion by the United States in Florida and Texas. Both cases strongly support the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2. First, the case of Florida showed how unauthorized peripheral expansion is enabled by a lack of adequate control by the capital—that it is a manifestation of a principal-agent problem. Second, both cases support the argument that unauthorized peripheral expansion activates mechanisms that make a simple withdrawal significantly more difficult. In both Florida and Texas, peripheral expansion dramatically drove down the perceived costs of acquisition for leaders in the capital, and generated domestic political pressure in favor of acquisition. And third, in both cases the decision of whether to accept or reject the territorial *fait accompli* was crucially determined by the perceived geopolitical risk associated with doing so. In the case of Florida, the Monroe administration deftly retained partial control of the Spanish province, without fear that this would lead to war with Spain. In the case of Texas, President Jackson feared that accepting the Texan *fait accompli* would mean war with Mexico, which led to its rejection. In both cases, what I referred to in Chapter 2 as the “view from the capital” and the “view from the frontier” was powerfully illustrated—showing Andrew Jackson to be the hot-blooded frontier agent in the case of Florida, but the cool-headed leader in Washington in the case of Texas.
CHAPTER 5

INADVERTENT EXPANSION ON THE EURASIAN STEPPE: RUSSIA

“Such has been the fate of every country which has found itself in a similar position. The United States of America, France in Algeria, Holland in her Colonies, England in India—all have been irresistibly forced, less by ambition than by imperious necessity, into this onward march, where the greatest difficulty is to know when to stop.”

Prince Alexander M. Gorchakov

“It can hardly be said that the Russians have a fixed policy in Asia. The government at St. Petersburg has been always sincerely desirous of refraining from conquests and extension of dominion, in Central Asia, but circumstances have compelled them often to take the aggressive, and conquests having been once made, it has been found to be impossible to give them up, without a certain loss of prestige. One general after another has seen himself obliged to keep up the credit of Russian arms, and attack a native government. The reasons which led him to this course have at last been found good at St. Petersburg, although it was regretted that such necessity had arisen, and the conquests which he made were retained. The policy has thus been a floating one, subject entirely to circumstances.”

Eugene Schuyler


2 “Mr. Schuyler’s report on Central Asia, Legation of the United States, St. Petersburg, March 7, 1874” in “Document 526: No. 524. Mr. Jewell to Mr. Fish, Legation of the United States, St. Petersburg, March 10, 1874. (Received April 3),” in Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Transmitted to Congress, With
This chapter examines inadvertent expansion in two cases from the Russian Empire in Central Asia. The first case focuses on the Russian acquisition of territory in the Khanate of Kokand in 1864-66. The second case examines the Russian Empire’s non-acquisition of the Ili Region of western Qing Dynasty China in 1871-81. The purpose of this chapter is to present the dissertation’s second pair of comparative, theory-testing cases, showing how varying perceptions of geopolitical risk helped produce the divergent outcomes observed.

Russia in the Khanate of Kokand and in the Ili Region is a useful comparison in that the two cases hold many factors fixed—the same great power, operating in the same region, with most of the same leaders in the capital, and separated by only five years—while the outcomes vary.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the case of Russia in the Khanate of Kokand, where a local military officer defies St. Petersburg’s orders and independently conquers the cities of Chimkent and Tashkent, resulting in their incorporation into the Russian Empire. Second, I move onto the case of Russia in the Ili Region, where another military officer orders the conquest of the Ili River Valley without authorization from St. Petersburg, and his territorial claim is ultimately relinquished. Third and finally, I conclude with a brief consideration of alternative arguments, as well as a discussion of the importance of these cases for the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2.

Russia in the Khanate of Kokand, 1864-1866

The Russian Empire acquired the Khanate of Kokand’s cities of Chimkent³ and Tashkent⁴ between July 1864 and August 1866. The conquest of these cities was independently planned and executed by a local officer of the Imperial Russian Army, disregarding the orders of his civilian and military superiors in the capital, St. Petersburg. The theory of inadvertent expansion makes three central arguments that are borne out in this case. First, that peripheral expansion is the result of a principal-agent problem; that a combination of a divergence of preferences between leaders in the capital and their agents on the periphery and information asymmetries favoring the agents lead to a loss of control over the agents’ actions. In the case of Russia in Kokand, there was a significant divergence of preferences between leaders in the capital and members of the Imperial Russian Army on the Central Asian frontier, and the vast distances separating the two led to dramatic information asymmetries in favor of the army. Second, that once a territory is partly or wholly acquired, a number of mechanisms are activated that make it difficult for leaders in the capital to simply withdraw. In the case at hand, the frontier army’s striking successes in acquiring these cities helped convince some of the more reluctant leaders in the capital, and broader concerns for Russian national honor meant backing down seemed out of the question. And third, that a lack of perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will encourage leaders in the capital to accept the fait accompli, resulting in territorial expansion. In the case of Russia in Kokand, the Central Asian khanates were relatively weak, and concerns over a potentially-adverse reaction by the British were quickly alleviated by their muted response. These facts

³ Contemporary Shymkent, Kazakhstan.
⁴ Contemporary Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
strengthened the case for central authorization, which would occur when Tashkent was formally annexed to the Russian Empire in August 1866.

**Historical Background**

The Russian Empire began to advance deep into the Kazakh Steppe of Central Asia in the 1840s. From its base in Orenburg, at the southern tip of the Ural Mountains, a string of forts was established through the late 1840s and early 1850s, culminating in the conquest of Ak Mechet and the founding of Fort Perovsk there in 1853. Further to the east, from Omsk in Western Siberia, a similar southward advance ensued, which itself would culminate in the founding of the town Vernyi in 1854. These two lines each penetrated over 1,000 km southward into the Kazakh Steppe, fully enveloping it. Yet they themselves were separated by over 1,000 km of uncharted territory. To the south of the Russian lines were the three Uzbek khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand. Established at the turn of the previous century, these Islamic kingdoms were fairly populous, harshly autocratic, militarily weak and prone to warfare amongst themselves, and often internally divided in ways that made them vulnerable to outside influence and attack. The Khanate of Kokand sat further north than

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5 Contemporary Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan.

6 Contemporary Almaty, Kazakhstan.


the other two, and its affluent urban centers of Chimkent and Tashkent made it an enticing
target for the expanding Russian Empire.

With the outbreak of the Crimean War (1853-56) in October 1853, the Russian Empire
would slow its advance in Central Asia for the following decade. Russia’s humiliating defeat
steadily revealed its technological and military inferiority as compared to its European great
power rivals, and sparked a period of introspection and dramatic domestic reform.10
Economically bankrupt and internally focused, there was little money, manpower, energy, or
interest to devote to acquiring new territory in Central Asia. However, as the recovery from
Crimea progressed, and as Russia’s multi-generational conquest of the Caucasus began to
wind down, attention once again turned toward Central Asia in the early 1860s.

The central question of Russian imperial policy that would emerge in Central Asia was
when—and, more importantly, where—to connect Russia’s two strings of forts and establish
a defensible southern border for the empire.11 The foreign minister at the time was the
esteemed diplomat, Prince Alexander Gorchakov. An unusually cautious and circumspect
advisor to the tsar, Gorchakov tended to cast his gaze westward, toward Europe and the
balance-of-power politics that prevailed there, and was averse to the use of Russian force to
achieve interests he deemed peripheral.12 The minister of war was Dmitry Miliutin, a brilliant
military historian and strategic thinker who tended to be somewhat more forward-leaning in

his advocacy for the use of force. Their principal role in imperial policy was to inform and advise the tsar, Alexander II. A progressive leader in 19th century Russian terms, Alexander, like Gorchakov, tended to be judicious when it came to the use of force, and focused more on domestic reform than imperial expansion. Yet the tsar was also prone to be tempted by notions of glory, grandeur, and Russian national prestige. These three individuals—Gorchakov, Miliutin, and Alexander II—were the leaders in the capital that were primarily responsible for Russian imperial policy. It is they who would be dragged unwittingly into more territorial acquisitions than they had bargained for in Central Asia.

In February 1863, a special committee on Central Asian policy was held in the capital, St. Petersburg, and it was agreed that reconnaissance between Russia’s two lines was a necessary first step. The individual tasked with this reconnaissance would be a lieutenant colonel in the Imperial Russian Army, Mikhail Grigorevich Cherniaev. Cherniaev came from venerable Russian military lineage—his grandfather had served Catherine the Great and his father fought Napoleon’s armies at Austerlitz and in the invasion of Russia. Cherniaev himself spent his entire adolescent and adult life in military service, entering a military preparatory school at the age of 12 and enlisting in the imperial army at 19. A decorated veteran of the Crimean War, Cherniaev also served in Russian Poland and the Caucasus before landing in

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17 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, pp. 3-6.
Orenburg on Russia’s Central Asian frontier in the early 1860s. Cherniaev was said to be charming, ambitious, deeply religious, and profoundly conservative. He was open, direct, and accessible, traits that made him well-loved by those under his charge. Yet Cherniaev also had a strong independent streak and was often impatient, quarrelsome with his superiors, and highly sensitive to criticism. He was also paranoid and prone to conspiratorial thinking, and would defy orders from above almost as a matter of course. Lieutenant Colonel Cherniaev was the key actor on the Russia’s imperial periphery who would independently launch the conquests in the Khanate of Kokand.

Cherniaev began his reconnaissance of the territory separating Fort Perovsk and the town of Vernyi in the spring of 1863. The instructions given to him by the governor-general of Orenburg were to “display the greatest peaceableness, and use arms only in case of extreme necessity.” However, Cherniaev’s actions on this exploratory mission would be a strong indication of what was to come. On 30 May, he came upon the town of Suzak, some 400 km down the Syr-Darya River from Fort Perovsk. Cherniaev was then fired upon, and he ordered a retaliatory bombardment of the town, leading to its prompt surrender. News of the acquisition of Suzak shocked the governor-general of Orenburg, but was met with praise in St. Petersburg. Even the usually-cautious Foreign Minister Gorchakov noted in July 1863 that the “successful actions of Colonel Cherniaev, without special expenditures and sacrifices have brought us closer to the goal [of closing the lines] which we had in view originally.”

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The following month, Gorchakov and War Minister Miliutin agreed that the lines should be connected expeditiously, and their unification was officially ordered by Tsar Alexander II on 20 December 1863. The key question was where they would be connected.

It was agreed in early 1864 that an initial line would be drawn north of the Syr-Darya and Arys Rivers, which would be connected from Suzak through the town of Aulie-Ata. The line could then, according to Miliutin, be moved further south and connected through Chimkent “when the time is favorable.” On 9 February 1864, Cherniaev was appointed commander of the Western Siberian detachment based in Omsk, and was given orders to occupy and fortify Aulie-Ata. In late April, Cherniaev departed Vernyi with 2,500 personnel, 800 horses, and 4,000 camels, and he reached Aulie-Ata, some 450 km away, on 2 June. After a two-day siege, Cherniaev and his forces stormed the town and easily took it, inflicting approximately 300 deaths upon the Kokandian forces and suffering only three slightly wounded of their own. In late June, the lines between Orenburg and Vernyi were connected, and Cherniaev was promoted to Major-General.

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23 Contemporary Taraz, Kazakhstan.

24 Morrison, “Russia, Khoqand, and the Search for a ‘Natural’ Frontier,” p. 175. See also: MacKenzie, *The Lion of Tashkent*, p. 34


with striking success. As he wrote in a letter to his parents on 28 June 1864, the capture of Aulie-Ata “comprised the final goal set this year for the detachment”\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{St. Petersburg & Russian Central Asia}

St. Petersburg suffered severe principal-agent problems with respect to Cherniaev and its other agents on the Central Asian frontier, due to a divergence of preferences between the two parties and information asymmetries strongly favoring the periphery. First, there was a divergence of preferences between the leaders in St. Petersburg and actors on the Central Asian frontier when it came to Russian imperial policy there. In general, leaders in St. Petersburg were not in favor of significant expansion in the region.\textsuperscript{30} Perhaps, in the relatively near future, Chimkent could be added to Russian holdings, but Tashkent, further to the south and one of the largest cities in Central Asia, was seen as off limits by most. While there had been regular calls from within the Russian government for Tashkent’s acquisition since the late 1850s,\textsuperscript{31} those whose opinions mattered most—Alexander II, Gorchakov, and, to a lesser extent, Miliutin—were opposed. They preferred to consolidate existing Russian gains in the region rather than add to them, were concerned about the potential for sparking conflict with Britain, and thought it better to influence these territories as independent entities from without rather than directly controlling them from within.\textsuperscript{32} In sum, leaders in the capital embodied what I referred to in Chapter 2 as the “view from the

\textsuperscript{29} MacKenzie, \textit{The Lion of Tashkent}, p. 37.


capital”—the responsibilities of rule were weighty, the dangers were distant, and the incentive to act quickly was absent. In contrast, many actors near and on the Central Asian frontier advocated for a more expansionist policy for Russia there. Cherniaev, in particular, had long argued for a more forceful policy in the region, and had come to see Chimkent and Tashkent as particularly enticing possibilities. As he wrote while posted on the Central Asian frontier in the late 1850s, advocating for an advance beyond Fort Perovsk, “We have the resources for this, but they are being kept under wraps… We need this region to extend our influence over Central Asia.”

Hardened frontier agents such as Cherniaev exemplified what I referred to as “the view from the periphery”—their responsibilities were narrow, the dangers were near, and, therefore, their temptation to act was high.

Second, the vast distance between St. Petersburg and Russian Central Asia and the rudimentary state of transportation and communications technology meant that there were important information asymmetries favoring the periphery. While Orenburg had been connected to St. Petersburg by telegraph since the 1850s, Russian territory deep in Central Asia, such as Suzak and Aulie-Ata, would not see a telegraph station until 1873, and the region wouldn’t be fully accessible by rail until 1898. It took a full month’s difficult journey to travel the approximately 1,500 km from Orenburg to the front lines in Russian Central Asia, and, therefore, communications sent from St. Petersburg would take at least two

34 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 22.
35 Becker, Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia, pp. 72-73, 111, 349n46.
36 Pierce, Russian Central Asia, pp. 185-188.
months to receive a reply. According to historian David MacKenzie, this distance “stimulated initiative and independent judgment but encouraged ambitious commanders seeking decorations and promotion to commit their government to a course contradicting its general policy.” It also meant that frontier agents such as Cherniaev were often the only source of information on happenings in the region, and they could (and did) distort events in their favor, exaggerating the severity of local threats and downplaying or glossing over their own mistakes and misdeeds. Thus, as a result of a divergence of preferences and information asymmetries, leaders in St. Petersburg had a very difficult time controlling the actions of agents on the periphery, and this opened the door to a great deal of independent action.

**Chimkent**

Within just days of taking Aulie-Ata and connecting the Russian lines, Cherniaev began eyeing Chimkent, a Kokandian city roughly 260 km to the southeast, on the south side of the Arys River. In the first week of July 1864, Cherniaev resolved to advance on the city, writing to the governor-general of Western Siberia that because “Kokanese concentrations grow daily… I have decided to protect Aulie-Ata and nearby nomads by advancing toward Chimkent and operating there according to circumstances.” Cherniaev then set out from

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Aulie-Ata with a force of 1,400 towards Chimkent. He received peace overtures en route from the Kokandian warlord Alimqul, but he quickly brushed these aside, arriving at the Chimkent city walls on 19 July. There he was met by Kokandian cavalry forces and a battle ensued, resulting in a clear Russian victory, with as many as 400 Kokandian forces killed and, again, just three Russians wounded. However, Cherniaev soon realized that his own force was likely insufficient to capture the city outright, and after three days they returned to Aulie-Ata.

This initial, abortive attempt didn’t dissuade Cherniaev from his goal of acquiring the city. In an August 1864 letter to the Imperial Army’s general staff, Cherniaev wrote that by “taking Chimkent we shall deliver a decisive blow to Kokand,” and argued that the city’s “seizure before winter is not only beneficial but essential for the region’s peace.” Cherniaev then pointedly asked, with characteristic threat-inflation, “Should we wait until, with the help of Europeans, military science in Kokand compares with our own, or should we now remove their power to resist?” The Major-General summed up his message by declaring: “I have decided to conquer Chimkent on my own responsibility,” and this is precisely what he would do.

On 12 September 1864, Cherniaev once again set out from Aulie-Ata, this time with a force of 1,700. The concentration of Kokandian forces at Chimkent had subsided in the

preceding weeks, and the prospects for a successful attack looked much improved. Cherniaev’s forces arrived at Chimkent on 19 September, and after a two-day siege, they stormed the city. The invasion itself reportedly took place through a 60-foot water pipe extending through the city wall, with Cherniaev audaciously plunging into the pipe before any of his subordinates.47 Within a few hours, Chimkent had fallen and Cherniaev was in control of the city. He had pulled off his fait accompli and the Russian Empire had gained a new territory.

When news of the march on Chimkent began to filter back to St. Petersburg, reactions were mixed. When he heard of Cherniaev’s decision to attack the city, Minister of War Miliutin grumbled that such “an extension of our frontiers never entered into our plans; it lengthens our lines unduly and requires considerable increases of forces.” The problem they faced, the War Minister added, was that “communications are so slow that any instructions arrive too late.”48 However, this wouldn’t stop him from engaging in the largely futile exercise of telegraphing the governor-general of Western Siberia the following day, ordering him to instruct Cherniaev “in no case… to go further than was proposed.”49 A few weeks later, when he learned of Chimkent’s successful acquisition, an exasperated Miliutin asked, “who will guarantee that after Chimkent Cherniaev won’t consider it necessary to take Tashkent, then Kokand, and there will be no end to it.”50 Foreign Minister Gorchakov felt similarly, and was ultimately in favor of withdrawal.51

47 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 43.
49 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 43.
However, the very fact of Cherniaev’s successful acquisition activated two mechanisms that would make Chimkent very difficult to readily relinquish. The first was the simple fact that the territory had already been acquired, and at minimal cost. While leaders may not have wanted it to be taken just then and there, there had been longer-term plans to add Chimkent to the empire, and so Cherniaev was largely insubordinate with respect to the timing of the conquest rather than the conquest itself. And once it was in Russian hands, some in St. Petersburg, such as many in the War Ministry, saw it as too strategically valuable to give up. The second were concerns over Russian national honor, particularly those of the tsar, Alexander II. He was far more enthusiastic regarding the whole venture, awarding Cherniaev with the St. George’s Cross, Third Class, and referring to the conquest as “a glorious affair.” As noted above, Alexander II was prone to fall prey to concerns over Russian national prestige, and given that it was his opinion that mattered most, his enthusiasm meant that reversal was not an option. Chimkent was to be part of the Russian Empire. Cherniaev would get his way.

Tashkent

After the fall of Chimkent, history would repeat itself with the next major Kokandian urban center, Tashkent. Sitting just 120 km from the walls of Chimkent, and being the largest and most prosperous city in Central Asia, it would prove to be an even more enticing target for Cherniaev and his forces. Again, just days after the successful conquest of Chimkent, Cherniaev decided to move on Tashkent. Citing rumors of a threat from the neighboring


54 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 43.
Khanate of Bukhara, Cherniaev informed the governor-general of Western Siberia on 25 September 1864 that he was advancing on Tashkent, “not to occupy it, but if circumstances prove favorable, to forestall the plans of the emir of Bukhara.”55 Two days later he departed Chimkent, heading south toward Tashkent with 1,500 personnel.56 Cherniaev and his forces arrived at the Tashkent city walls on 2 October, and initiated a preparatory barrage. Thinking the walls had been breached, Cherniaev’s force advanced, only to find the wall intact and themselves in a highly vulnerable position. Cherniaev ultimately ordered a retreat, but only after suffering sixteen dead and 62 wounded, including the deaths of two of his top commanders.57 While not an enormous number in an absolute sense, with no gains, and in terms of Russia’s wars of empire in Central Asia, this was seen as an unmitigated disaster.

When news of Cherniaev’s march on Tashkent reached St. Petersburg, leaders there were infuriated. In a memo to the emperor on 31 October, Foreign Minister Gorchakov argued that such a move was “extremely dangerous and not only would place no limits on our advance into the heart of Central Asia but would… involve us directly in all the wars and disorders there.”58 That same day, Gorchakov memorialized that “we have firmly resolved not to occupy additional lands,” and recommended that Tashkent be promptly evacuated if it were occupied.59 A few weeks later, Gorchakov and War Minister Miliutin penned a joint

55 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 44.
56 Pierce, Russian Central Asia, p. 21; Morrison, “Russia, Khoqand, and the Search for a ‘Natural’ Frontier,” p. 183.
memorandum, arguing that every “new conquest, by lengthening our frontiers, requires a considerable increase in military resources and expenditures… and weakens Russia,” and recommended drawing the line at Chimkent.60 While Cherniaev would deliberately drag his feet in filing the report on the disastrous results of his attack, details of his failure and the associated loss of life reached the capital in late November, and it only made matters worse.61 When the tsar finally heard of Cherniaev’s failed attack on 2 December, he wrote: “I greatly regret that he decided upon a useless assault costing us so many men.”62

Foreign Minister Gorchakov was particularly worried about the reactions of the other great powers, and especially that of the United Kingdom. In an effort to allay any concerns, he wrote a memorandum on 21 November 1864 to be circulated among Russia’s European embassies and presented to local counterparts.63 In what has become known, simply, as “The Gorchakov Memorandum,” the foreign minister justified recent Russian expansion by pointing to the difficult position in which Russia found itself in Central Asia. This position, in Gorchakov’s words, “is that of all civilized states which are brought into contact with half-savage nomad populations, possessing no fixed social organization.” In order to ensure the security and prosperity of its frontier regions, he argued, the state is forced to choose between two unwelcome alternatives: to “abandon its frontier to perpetual disturbance” or to “plunge deeper and deeper into barbarous countries, where the difficulties and expenses increase with every step in advance.” “In spite of our unwillingness to extend our frontier,”


63 See this chapter’s epigraph.
Gorchakov claimed, it was necessary to lay down a borderline definitively, “so as to escape the danger of being carried away, as is almost inevitable, by a series of repressive measures and reprisals, into an unlimited extension of territory.” This line had been drawn at Chimkent, he argued. And, going forward, they would make every effort “to prove to our neighboring states… that Russia is not their enemy, [and] that she entertains towards them no ideas of conquest.” While some scholars have dismissed the memorandum as merely a “smoke screen” for further expansion, the evidence suggests that Gorchakov’s message was sincere. The plan in Central Asia, as far as St. Petersburg was concerned, was for Russia to expand no further.

But Cherniaev, predictably, had other ideas. Cooling his heels for the winter at Chimkent, he itched for another shot at Tashkent. As he complained in a letter to a friend on the Russian general staff on 22 January 1865, “the attack on Tashkent was not as pointless as my friends in St. Petersburg claimed. Had it not been for my instructions, by now I would have driven the Kokanese from that little town… but in St. Petersburg, of course, they know better.” But his orders were clear. On 2 February, Minister of War Miliutin dispatched a message to Orenburg, reminding them that Cherniaev should “undertake nothing” without specific orders and reinforcements, and in a separate dispatch on 24 February, Foreign

64 “The Gorchakov Memorandum.”
66 Becker, Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia, pp. 19-20; Morrison, “Russia, Khoqand, and the Search for a ‘Natural’ Frontier,” p. 167.
68 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 53.
Minister Gorchakov noted that “we have decided not to include [Tashkent] in the Empire believing it to be much more advantageous to exert indirect influence over it.”

However, even these most direct of instructions would not deter the major-general. Once again citing a Bukharan threat to Tashkent, Cherniaev set out from Chimkent in late April 1865 with a force of 1,300 personnel and twelve cannons. He sent a message to the governor-general of Orenburg on 2 May, arguing that he “could not remain indifferent to the [Bukharan] Emir’s machinations and was compelled, without awaiting the arrival of reinforcements on the line, to advance now along the road to Tashkent.” Cherniaev’s force stopped first at Niazbek, a Kokandian fortress that controlled Tashkent’s water supply from the Chirchik River. Despite its being defended by a force of roughly 7,000, Cherniaev managed to compel its surrender at a cost of only seven Russian forces wounded. Having cut off the water supply to Tashkent, Cherniaev and his forces then laid siege to the city itself on 7 May. Cherniaev’s sieging army was attacked by Kokandian warlord Alimqul with a force of 6,000, but made easy work of them, inflicting 300 deaths on the Kokandians, including Alimqul himself, and losing only twenty wounded of their own.

By early June, the effects of the siege were beginning to bite. Hunger and drought were affecting the populace, and a Bukharan army had surreptitiously slipped into the city one night to take over its defenses. Cherniaev saw his window of opportunity closing and, at this

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72 Pierce, *Russian Central Asia*, pp. 22.
point, backing down was not seen as an option. As he wrote to the governor-general of
Orenburg on 11 June, to “withdraw from the city would give the [Bukharan] Emir vast
prestige in Central Asia and strengthen him with all the sinews of war concentrated in
Tashkent. Consequently, I [have] decided to seize the city by open force.”

With a reinforced army of 1,950 personnel, Cherniaev launched the assault on Tashkent
in the early morning of 15 June. Despite being surrounded by a moat, 26 km of twelve-to-
fifteen-foot walls, twelve fortified gates, and 63 cannons, Cherniaev’s forces were able to
penetrate the city with the aid of internal collaborators. Tashkent’s much larger Kokandian
and Bukharan force of 30,000, it would turn out, was no match for the Russian army, and on
17 June the city surrendered. Tashkent, the largest city in Central Asia, has been acquired at
a cost of 28 Russians killed and 85 wounded.

On the day of the surrender, Cherniaev reportedly rode quietly through the city under
minimal guard, drinking tea offered by locals without hesitation and relaxing in a traditional
Uzbek bath. From this point onward, some in Tashkent referred to Cherniaev as “Shimaib,”
or lion commander. He triumphantly reported to Orenburg that, with Tashkent’s
occupation, “we have acquired in Central Asia a position corresponding to the interests of
the empire and the power of the Russian people.” The fait accompli was complete.

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76 Schuyler, Turkistan, p. 101; Pierce, Russian Central Asia, p. 21; MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, pp. 57-58.
77 Schuyler, Turkistan, p. 115; Pierce, Russian Central Asia, p. 23; MacKenzie, “The Conquest and Administration
78 Schuyler, Turkistan, p. 115; Pierce, Russian Central Asia, p. 23; MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 59.
79 Schuyler, Turkistan, pp. 115-117; MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 61n41.
The reaction from St. Petersburg was, again, mixed. On the one hand, official policy was still guided by the Gorchakov Memorandum—Russia’s Central Asian border was to run through Chimkent, and Tashkent was to remain firmly outside the bounds of the empire. Gorchakov and Miliutin agreed that Cherniaev should ultimately withdraw and that Tashkent should be independent, in line with this policy. On the other hand, many leaders in the capital found it difficult to not get swept up in the excitement of the moment. Tsar Alexander II, employing the same language he did after the acquisition of Chimkent, referred to Cherniaev’s actions as “glorious,” and ordered the presentation of “rewards to those who distinguished themselves.” The Russian interior minister captured the mood of many in St. Petersburg when he summed up the situation on 20 July 1865: “General Cherniaev took Tashkent. No one knows why or to what end… There is something erotic about our goings on at the distant periphery of the empire.”

Cherniaev’s successful acquisition of Tashkent, as with Chimkent, activated mechanisms that made withdrawal appear very difficult. The most important of these was the engagement of Russian national honor and prestige, and the Bukharan Emir’s demand that the Russians withdraw only strengthened these pressures. On 29 July, in a memo to the Governor-General of Orenburg, Miliutin argued that “the dignity of the Empire and the interests of Russia do not allow us even to consider the possibility of retreat or concession to the Emir of Bukhara’s arrogant demands. Our whole future in Central Asia depends on

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Even the congenitally-cautious Gorchakov raised such concerns. In a memo to Miliutin on 23 July, he complained about Cherniaev’s insubordination but affirmed that, “We cannot retreat now. It is unthinkable to bow before the emir.” The need to defend Russian honor, and to not appear weak before Central Asian rivals, was a powerful motivating force in this instance.

And, besides, there were few geopolitical risks associated with retaining Chimkent and Tashkent. The Kokandian armies had shown themselves to be no match for the Russian forces, and the armies of Bukhara and Khiva, too, were poorly equipped, trained, and disciplined, and tended to fight amongst themselves. The khanates were highly unlikely to be able to mount an effective collective defense. There were also few rival great power interests at stake. Chimkent and Tashkent were at least 350 km from the Afghan border and nearly 600 km from British India. During Russia’s conquests, Kokandian leaders sent envoys to Calcutta, requesting aid and protection against the expanding Russian Empire, but the British were unwilling to get involved. The United Kingdom, in this period, embraced a policy in Central Asia known as “masterly inactivity,” a strong commitment to avoid potentially entangling alliances and interventions in the region. Once Tashkent fell, London, for its part, was willing to accept Russian assurances and largely acquiesced to the

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84 Becker, Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia, p. 29.
85 MacKenzie, The Lion of Tashkent, p. 68.
89 Sergeev, The Great Game, pp. 120-121.
The lack of adverse reaction by Britain weakened arguments made within the tsarist cabinet for withdrawal from Tashkent, and strengthened arguments for its retention. It would take two more decades of steady Russian gains for the British to push back, as they did with the Russian annexation of Penjdeh in 1885, nearly sparking a war between the two great powers. This is where Russian expansion in the region would come to an end. As David MacKenzie notes, “What eventually set limits to Russian expansion in Central Asia were… mountain barriers and British power.” Both were conspicuously absent in this case.

Cherniaev, it would turn out, was a much better warrior than administrator. He not only continued to routinely defy the orders of his superiors in Orenburg and St. Petersburg, he badly mismanaged the finances of the occupation as well. By November 1865, St. Petersburg had had enough, and the emperor ordered Cherniaev recalled. As Miliutin later explained the decision, Cherniaev’s “willfulness, disobedience, and petty tyranny amounted to clear violations of the basic rules of the military service.” However, it turned out that removing so popular a major-general was not totally straightforward, and it would take until the end of April 1866 for Cherniaev to finally arrive back in the capital, where he was received at the Winter Palace. After prickly exchanges with both Gorchakov and Miliutin,

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90 MacKenzie, *The Lion of Tashkent*, p. 60.


Cherniaev was brought in for an audience with the emperor. While the Cherniaev was apprehensive at first, Alexander II’s warm welcome and affectionate embrace moved the major-general to tears.\(^{96}\) It is noteworthy that official War Ministry accounts written soon after Cherniaev’s dismissal largely exonerated the major-general, and placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of Bukhara.\(^{97}\) St. Petersburg, it seemed, was eager to put the past behind it.

Tashkent was formally annexed to the Russian Empire by the governor-general of Orenburg in August 1866. Renewed conflict with Bukhara that had bubbled up since Cherniaev’s conquest put an end to any idea of its independence.\(^{98}\) In July 1867, after much discussion, the area was organized as the governate-general (krai) of Turkestan, with Tashkent as its political and administrative center.\(^{99}\) Chimkent, Tashkent, and their surrounding areas wouldn’t see true independence until the collapse of the Soviet Union over 120 years later.

The individual who would be given the difficult task of administering this new Russian territory was a lieutenant general in the Imperial Russian Army, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman. Unlike Cherniaev, Kaufman was not expected to engage in insubordination. As he personally told Tsar Alexander II before departing for Tashkent, “I do not fear supervision over me and my activities…, nor do I seek to escape it.”\(^{100}\) However, things would be

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\(^{98}\) Becker, *Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia*, p. 34.


different once he was on the ground in Russian Central Asia. And Kaufman would prove to be just the latest peripheral agent to nearly drag his superiors in St. Petersburg into an unplanned territorial acquisition.

**Russia and the Ili Region, 1871-1881**

The Russian Empire refrained from acquiring the Ili Region of western China between June 1871 and February 1881. The conquest of this area was planned and ordered by the governor general of Russian Turkestan, acting without orders from his superiors in St. Petersburg. The theory of inadvertent expansion makes three central arguments that are supported in this case. First, that unauthorized peripheral expansion is the result of a principal-agent problem, combining a divergence of preferences between the capital and the periphery and information asymmetries favoring the latter. In the case of Russia in the Ili Region, there was a divergence of preferences between those in St. Petersburg and those on the Chinese frontier, and the absence of rapid communications hampered central control. Second, that once territory is acquired, a number of mechanisms are activated that make it difficult to readily relinquish it. In the Ili Region case, concerns over domestic-political pressure and Russian national honor gave leaders in St. Petersburg pause before agreeing to withdraw. And third, that perceptions of significant geopolitical risk associated with acquisition of a given territory will discourage leaders from subsequently authorizing their peripheral agents’ fait accomplis, leading to relinquishment. In the case of Russia in Ili, China’s clear willingness to fight over the territory, and a locally-adverse balance of power in China’s

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101 The contemporary Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang, China.
favor, pressed Russian leaders to return the territory, which they did with the Treaty of St. Petersburg in February 1881.

**Historical Background**

On the eve of the Russian invasion in 1871, the Ili Region was an area of roughly 3,200 km² in the northwest of Qing Dynasty China’s protectorate of Xinjiang, right on the Russian border. Xinjiang was a vast region that had been a Chinese protectorate since the mid-18th century, with China proper to its east, the Russian Empire to its north and west, and to the south, the Chinese protectorate of Tibet, and beyond that, British India. It was inhabited by a wide variety of mostly-Muslim, Turkic-speaking peoples—including Dungan, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Sibe, Taranchi, Uighur, and Uzbek—as well as Mongols, Manchus, and Han Chinese. The Ili Region itself was lush and fertile compared to its more arid surroundings, consisting of the Ili River and its valley, which flowed from its source in the Tian Shan Mountains westward to the border with Russian Turkestan. According to a knowledgeable contemporary observer, the Ili River Valley was “by far, in every respect, the richest, best, and most beautiful part of Central Asia.” It was also remote, sitting nearly 3,000 km from Beijing and over 3,800 km from St. Petersburg. Qing China’s presence in the Ili Region—and Xinjiang more broadly—was light, and its hold over the region, precarious, and the

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103 Its relatively-central location in Eurasia, and the many great power interests that surrounded it, led the influential China scholar Owen Lattimore to refer it as the “Pivot of Asia.” Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia* (Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1950).


106 “Mr. Schuyler’s report on Central Asia,” in *FRUS*, 1874.
region experienced regular unrest and rebellion from the time it was conquered.\textsuperscript{107} One such rebellion would eventually serve as a precipitating cause of the Russian invasion.

In 1862, a major Muslim rebellion broke out in the northern Xinjiang region of Dzungaria.\textsuperscript{108} The compounding effect of years of onerous taxes, administrative corruption, official discrimination, and heavy-handed Sinicization policies led local populations to rise up and try to overthrow the Qing authorities.\textsuperscript{109} At this point, Beijing was still heavily preoccupied with the Taiping Rebellion, a fifteen-year civil war that was concentrated in the south, and thus, the Muslim rebellion was able to spread largely uninterrupted, reaching the Ili River Valley in mid-1864.\textsuperscript{110} The rebellion began to cause problems all along the Russo-Chinese border, including the interruption of trade, cross-border raids, the destruction of Russian property, and massive refugee flows.\textsuperscript{111}

Prominent among the rebel leaders was a Kokandian general by the name of Yaqub Beg. Yaqub had, in fact, been the commander of Kokandian forces that had held off Mikhail Cherniaev’s first attack on Tashkent in October 1864.\textsuperscript{112} That year he traveled to Kashgar, in southern Xinjiang, and by 1867 he had begun to carve out his own independent khanate.

\textsuperscript{107} Lobinov-Rostovsky, \textit{Russia and Asia}, p.183; Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, p. 22.


\textsuperscript{111} Pierce, \textit{Russian Central Asia}, p. 28; Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, pp. 29-30; Paine, \textit{Imperial Rivals}, pp. 119-20

there. By 1870, he dominated all of southern Xinjiang, and parts of the north as well. Russian leaders on the frontier and in St. Petersburg were not pleased with this turn of events. They far preferred a weak and distant China to a strong, unified Muslim khanate on their border, which might serve as a rallying cry for their own recently-conquered Muslim territories. Even more alarming was the close relationship Yaqub Beg was developing with Russia’s rival, the Ottoman Sultan, and the United Kingdom in India and beyond. Both London and Constantinople officially recognized Yaqub's khanate, and provided him with significant amounts of military aid.

Observing events from across the Russian border in Turkestan was its governor-general, Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman. Kaufman was of noble German descent, and the son of a Russian general who had participated in the defense of Russia against Napoleon’s invasion. After completing his studies at Russia’s Imperial Military Academy, Kaufman entered the army and began an esteemed military career, serving in a variety of posts and participating in the conquest of the Caucasus and the Crimean War. Kaufman also spent a few years at the War Ministry’s chancellery, and had been a personal aide to War Minister Dmitry Miliutin, which won him the minister’s friendship and confidence—and, eventually, his recommendation for the governor-generalship in 1867. This would be a difficult

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114 Hsü, The Ili Crisis, p. 28.

115 Lattimore, Pivot of Asia, p. 35; March, Eastern Destiny, p. 143; Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 122.

116 “Mr. Schuyler’s report on Central Asia,” in FRUS, 1874; Lattimore, Pivot of Asia, p. 32; Pierce, Russian Central Asia, p. 28; Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 122.

117 Lattimore, Pivot of Asia, pp. 34-35, 37; Lobinov-Rostovsky, Russia and Asia, pp. 184-185; Hsü, The Ili Crisis, p. 35; Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 122.

assignment for Kaufman: the territory had just recently been conquered, he had no regional experience, and he needed to establish an administrative structure from scratch, all while being overseen by superiors some 3,500 km away in St. Petersburg. But Kaufman had their every confidence, being granted broad economic, political, and military powers to enable him to organize the new governate-general as he saw fit.

Kaufman was, by all accounts, very smart, dedicated to his duties, and eminently reasonable in his decision making and dealings with others. He was also very skilled, combining, in the words of a successor at the chancellery, “brilliant military and fighting capacities with outstanding administrative talent.” Kaufman also had a reputation for being kind, patient, and even fatherly and affectionate with his subordinates, which won him their devoted loyalty. Yet combined with these traits was a strong sense of Russian nationalism, an ardent devotion to the empire and its expansion, and an abiding faith in what he saw as Russia’s civilizing mission in Central Asia. And, contrary to expectations, Kaufman would show an independent streak once he was on the ground in Tashkent, effecting the conquest of the Khanate of Bukhara in June 1868 without authorization from

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St. Petersburg.\textsuperscript{124} Kaufman was the frontier agent who would nearly drag the leaders in the Russian capital into acquiring the Ili Region.

The cast of characters in St. Petersburg had changed little from the conquests of Chimkent and Tashkent just a few years earlier. Alexander II was still tsar and Dmitry Miliutin, still Minister of War. Alexander Gorchakov was technically still Minister of Foreign Affairs, however, the director of the ministry’s Asiatic Department, Nikolay K. Giers, was increasingly acting in that role, partly due to Gorchakov’s health and, later, partly due to his political sidelining after Russia’s embarrassing defeat at the Congress of Berlin in 1878.\textsuperscript{125}

These were the leaders in the capital who would be dragged unwittingly into nearly acquiring the Ili River Valley from China.

\textit{St. Petersburg & Turkestan}

St. Petersburg faced serious principal-agent problems with respect to its agents on the Chinese frontier in Russian Turkestan. First, there was a divergence of preferences between the leaders in St. Petersburg and their frontier agents such as Kaufman, with leaders in the capital tending to be more defensively-oriented and the frontier agents more expansionist. This was put in stark relief with Kaufman’s unauthorized conquest of the Khanate of Bukhara in 1868, where, when ordered by the capital to return the territory, Kaufman flatly refused to “commit such sacrilege against the prestige, honor and rights of Russia.”\textsuperscript{126} With respect to China in particular, leaders in the capital, and the Foreign Ministry in particular, didn’t want to disturb Russia’s good relations with the Qing Empire, and therefore were

\textsuperscript{124} Becker, \textit{Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia}, pp. 39-42.


opposed to any territorial acquisitions there. When Kaufman suggested in 1870 that Russian forces should occupy the Ili River Valley, the idea was summarily rejected by the government in St. Petersburg.

Beyond the divergence of preferences, there were also stark information asymmetries in favor of the frontier agents such as Kaufman. The region wouldn’t see a telegraph connection with St. Petersburg until 1873, when Tashkent and Vernyi extended connections. The closest existing telegraph station to the Ili River frontier with China was in Omsk, nearly 1,400 km away. Under these circumstances, it was incredibly difficult to communicate with, and thereby potentially control, wayward peripheral agents. According to a contemporary member of the Russian Finance Ministry, due to “the remoteness of the region and the lack of telegraph, [Kaufman] was compelled by force of circumstances… to take measures for which under normal conditions he would have needed to ask permission.” Even after the installation of a number of telegraph stations in the region, it was still widely known that the government in St. Petersburg was “very badly informed as to what actually goes on” in Russian Central Asia. Thus, a preference divergence between the capital and the periphery, and information asymmetries favoring the latter, made unauthorized peripheral expansion a distinct possibility in this case.

The Ili Region

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128 Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 121.

129 Becker, Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia, pp. 72-73, 111, 349n46.


131 “Mr. Schuyler’s report on Central Asia,” in FRUS, 1874.
By 1870, the turbulence along the Sino-Russian border had only gotten worse. Russian cattle continued to be raided, trade with China had been all but entirely wiped out, and conflicts among rebel factions drove waves of refugees across the Russian border. And Yaqub Beg’s regime seemed to only strengthen with time. This was all viewed with concern in St. Petersburg, and with alarm in Tashkent, and in April 1871 the central government decided it was time to develop a plan to work collaboratively with the Chinese government in order to put down the uprisings.

However, Kaufman was a few steps ahead of his metropolitan superiors. Since August 1870, after having had his formal request denied in the capital, Kaufman had been working on a plan to occupy the Ili River Valley on his own accord. And when he received intelligence that Yaqub Beg’s armies were moving on the Ili Region, Kaufman decided he could wait no longer. In May 1871, he ordered the military governor of Semirechye, Major General G. A. Kolpakovskii, to conquer the Ili Region. On 24 June 1871, with a force of 1,850, Kolpakovskii crossed the Chinese border and began to move rapidly up the Ili River, eventually creating a Russian occupation area that extended roughly 400 km up the valley. While there were armed clashes with local rebel forces, they were ultimately no match for the Russian army, and on 4 July 1871, Kolpakovskii declared the Ili Region annexed to the

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133 Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 120.

134 Lobinov-Rostovsky, Russia and Asia, p. 185; Hsü, The Ili Crisis, p. 30; March, Eastern Destiny, p. 143.


136 Lobinov-Rostovsky, Russia and Asia, p. 186; Pierce, Russian Central Asia, p. 28; Hsü, The Ili Crisis, p. 30; Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p. 444; March, Eastern Destiny, p. 143; Paine, Imperial Rivals, pp. 110, 121.
Russian Empire “in perpetuity.”137 This had all been accomplished without the knowledge or authorization of leaders in St. Petersburg.138 Kaufman’s *fait accompli* had been successfully executed.

*St. Petersburg Reacts… and Delays*

It took about three weeks for news of the conquest to begin to filter back to St. Petersburg, and even longer to Beijing.139 In his report back to the capital, Kaufman justified his action based on the danger associated with Yaqub Beg’s advance and the risk of his being supported by the British.140 Once most of the facts had become clear, the Russian minister in Beijing was instructed to inform the Chinese government of the conquest, which he did on 1 September 1871. China’s control over, and communications with, its western territories was so weak that this was when its government first became aware that the Ili River Valley had come under foreign occupation.141 However, to their relief, from the get-go Russian officials were interested in discussing when and how they would retrocede the territory back to China. The Russian position was that the occupation was a necessary, but temporary, expedient to protect their border from Muslim rebels. Once China had suppressed the rebellion and retaken control over Xinjiang, the Russians argued, they would be prepared to

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139 Hsü, *The Ili Crisis*, pp. 31-32.


return the territory. According to a report from the Russian Foreign Ministry, the return of the Ili Valley “can only take place in the event that the Chinese Government presents us with adequate guarantees of an enduring reestablishment of its authority there.” This policy was made official in December 1872, when Tsar Alexander II issued orders requiring the return of the Ili Region once China had reestablished control in Xinjiang and the Russian border was secure. And having lost control of most of its western territories, China was hardly in a position to resist.

The Chinese took these conditions seriously—perhaps more seriously than Russian leaders expected. The government entrusted the recovery of Xinjiang to the famed Chinese general, Zuo Zongtang. General Zuo had spent decades suppressing the Taiping Rebellion, and then various Muslim rebellions in the west, and so was the perfect person for the job. After many months of preparation, Zuo began his campaign in March 1876 with an enormous force, which would ultimately number upwards of 100,000. Within a matter of months, Zuo was making good progress, defeating rebel armies and retaking rebel-held

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143 Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, p. 121.

144 Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, p. 121.

145 Hsü, *The Ili Crisis*, p. 34.


cities as he moved westward. In May 1877, the rebel leader Yaqub Beg was killed under mysterious circumstances, and his khanate, centered in Kashgar near the Russian border, soon began to disintegrate. By the first few days of 1878, General Zuo had pacified the rebellion and was in control of all of Xinjiang, with the exception of the Russian-occupied Ili River Valley. Chinese leaders felt they had accomplished what the Russians had required of them, and were ready to negotiate Russia’s withdrawal.

In March 1878, Tsar Alexander II constituted a committee under War Minister Miliutin to discuss the Ili problem. The committee, again, recommended the return of the Ili Region to China, but had moved the goalposts in the intervening years. According to Miliutin, the committee “came to the conclusion that national dignity demanded of us the honest fulfillment of the promise” to return Ili, “but not before concessions had been secured from the Chinese.” These concessions would prove to be onerous. China’s newly-constituted foreign office, the Zongli Yamen, sent an envoy to St. Petersburg who would arrive in late 1878 to negotiate the return of the Ili Region. For reasons that remain a matter of historical debate, the envoy effectively agreed to all of Russia’s terms and came to an agreement, against the explicit orders of the Zongli Yamen. The result was the Treaty of Livadia of 2 October 1879, which granted to Russia the Ili Region’s most strategic territory.

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a five-million-ruble indemnity, the right to establish seven new consulates in Xinjiang, and substantial new trading privileges, among other benefits.\textsuperscript{155} It was an overwhelming diplomatic victory for St. Petersburg, and an outright disaster for Beijing.

The Qing court was thrown into turmoil by news of the treaty’s signing.\textsuperscript{156} The territorial cessions in the Ili River Valley were particularly alarming, including key strategic passes through the Tian Shan Mountain range, which would have given Russia effective military control of the entirety of Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{157} China’s leaders were furious, and Empress Dowager Cixi, China’s de facto ruler, was said to have burst out in exasperation that their envoy “must die!”\textsuperscript{158} In February 1880, a conference established by the Qing court officially renounced the Treaty of Livadia, disavowed the actions of the envoy, and threw him in prison with a sentence of death by beheading.\textsuperscript{159} The court then appointed another envoy to renegotiate the settlement of the Ili crisis, who would arrive in St. Petersburg in July. The envoy carried with him a document of seven principles for the negotiations, and was under strict orders to follow them precisely.\textsuperscript{160}

\textit{St. Petersburg’s Calculus}


\textsuperscript{157} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, p. 60. See also: Paine, \textit{Imperial Rivals}, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{158} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, pp. 1, 69.


After hearing the demands of the Chinese envoy, the tsar convened another grand conference on 13 August 1880, which was attended War Minister Miliutin and acting Foreign Minister Giers, among others. The committee, which would meet several times over the coming months, was tasked with making a final decision on the fate of the Ili Region. Despite Chinese demands for a prompt withdrawal from the territory, it wasn’t quite so simple from the Russian leaders’ perspectives. This is because the conquest itself, and the now-nine-year occupation that followed, had activated mechanisms that made relinquishing the Ili River Valley somewhat difficult. The first and most straightforward of these was that the costs of the conquest had already been paid. Kaufman had acquired the Ili River Valley at minimal cost, in terms of lives and treasure, and the territory was effectively theirs for the keeping. Over the course of the occupation, Russian properties and businesses had also been established in the area, and abandoning these would come at a cost for St. Petersburg.

A second mechanism that encouraged leaders in St. Petersburg to retain the Ili Region were concerns over domestic politics in Russia. Despite the harsh autocracy of the tsarist regime, Alexander II’s program of domestic reform in the 1860s had helped create a modicum of space for popular dissent, and this was recognized by leaders at the time. For instance, in the run-up to the signing of the Treaty of Livadia, acting Foreign Minister Giers showed regular concern over what newspapers were printing about the possibility of returning the Chinese territory. In the spring of 1880, after China had renounced the


treaty, Russian leaders agreed, regarding the return of Ili, that in view of “our public opinion, it was desirable that this restitution was not carried out purely and simply.” Acting Foreign Minister Giers was of this mind as well, writing to one of the Russian negotiators in September 1880 that Russia needed serious concessions from the Chinese in the Ili negotiations, “so as not to hurt public opinion.” Thus, Russian leaders were clearly concerned about the public’s reaction to any return of the Ili River Valley.

A third reason Russian leaders had difficulty relinquishing the territory and turning it back over to the Chinese were concerns over Russian national honor, prestige, and reputation. Some, for instance, argued that conceding too much would only invite further demands and challenges, from the Chinese and others in the region. In September 1879, War Minister Miliutin opposed the return of China’s territory on the grounds that “the Asiatics will attribute generosity, or even justice, solely and simply to incapacity to retain what had been taken.” A government committee held in the spring of 1880 agreed, arguing that if Russia returned the territory outright, “we would appear to have claimed an excessive territorial extension only to renounce it following threats from the Chinese,” an unacceptable outcome. And acting Foreign Minister Giers shared these concerns, writing in October

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164 Note that this and all other translations (from French) in this chapter were carried out by the author. “A. G. Jomini to N. K. Giers, 22 September 1880,” in Jelavich and Jelavich, eds., Russia in the East, p. 111. See also: Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 154.


166 Hsü, The Ili Crisis, p. 172.


1880 that “it is to be feared that [Russian] moderation only serves to encourage” the Chinese to ask for more.\textsuperscript{170}

There is also a striking number of references to Russian “prestige” and dignity” in correspondence between leaders in these months. For instance, the spring 1880 committee cited Russian “prestige” as a reason to avoid promptly returning the territory.\textsuperscript{171} In September of that year, an exasperated Giers wrote, “We want to emerge with dignity from this detestable affair.”\textsuperscript{172} Giers reiterated these concerns the following month, writing in mid-October that Russia would “not be able, without compromising our dignity, to submit to Chinese demands and give in on all points.”\textsuperscript{173} In some cases, Russian leaders almost seemed to take these honor concerns personally. For instance, Giers wrote on 14 October that “We will have to show them our teeth, because it is impossible to allow us be scoffed at by these wretches.”\textsuperscript{174} A few days later Giers claimed that the Chinese envoy’s attitude “revolts me,” and argued that “the more we show ourselves to be conciliatory and polite towards him—the more arrogant he will become.”\textsuperscript{175} Thus, for reasons of reduced costs, domestic political pressure, and concerns over national honor, it appeared difficult for Russian leaders to simply and straightforwardly return the Ili Region to China.


\textsuperscript{175} “Giers to Jomini, 18 Oct. 1880,” in Jelavich and Jelavich, eds., \textit{Russia in the East}, p. 154.
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However, as the crisis unfolded, it became increasingly clear that there were serious geopolitical risks associated with standing firm and refusing to withdraw from Ili. China appeared to be willing to wage war over the territory, and as Russian leaders would learn over the course of the crisis, they were not. After China’s rejection of the Treaty of Livadia in February 1880, many in and around the Qing court began to call for a campaign to retake the territory by force. In March, the Chinese government put General Zou in charge of defense of the northwest, with orders to raise new forces, reenlist veterans of the pacification campaigns, and to develop a plan to invade Ili. In May, Zou moved his headquarters to Hami, in eastern Xinjiang, and dramatically carried a coffin with him in order to show his willingness to die for his country. He believed, as he reported to his superiors in Beijing, that the military preparations would coerce the Russians into granting them concessions in negotiations in St. Petersburg. Beijing also began to acquire large number of guns and other munitions from the United States and other European countries. Russia, too, would begin preparing for war in April 1880, with Kaufman shifting his headquarters from Tashkent to Vernyi, near the Chinese border, and St. Petersburg


sending a powerful naval fleet of 26 ships to the Chinese coast.\textsuperscript{182} In late October and into November 1880, the negotiations became tense, involving open talk of the possibility of war.\textsuperscript{183} As the Chinese negotiator said to his Russian counterpart on 5 November:

“China does not want there to be war. Should this misfortune come to pass, the… Chinese can endure difficulties imposed by others and work long hours. Even if China were not to win the first battle, as China is the largest country in the world, were it to go on for a decade or more, they could still endure it. I think that your honorable country definitely would not be able to avoid losses.”\textsuperscript{184}

However, despite their preparations, Russian leaders had little real interest in fighting over the Ili River Valley. This was so for three key reasons. First, the local balance of power strongly favored the Chinese.\textsuperscript{185} While Russia had a relatively-large and powerful military, the Ili Region was a long way from St. Petersburg, and transport and supply were slow and incredibly costly. Russia had only approximately 5,000 military personnel in the area, and would be hard-pressed to produce many more. The Chinese, by contrast, had been waging pacification campaigns in the west for years under General Zou, and were believed to have as many as 180,000 troops in the vicinity.\textsuperscript{186} These numbers, and China’s preparations more broadly, were sobering for Russian leaders.\textsuperscript{187} As a Russian negotiator wrote to acting


\textsuperscript{183} Paine, \textit{Imperial Rivals}, pp. 158-159.

\textsuperscript{184} Paine, \textit{Imperial Rivals}, p. 160.


\textsuperscript{186} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, pp. 97, 99, 157; Paine, \textit{Imperial Rivals}, pp. 135, 143-144.

\textsuperscript{187} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, p. 180.
Foreign Minister Giers in October 1880, “Of course, [the Chinese] don’t want war and they fear it. But they have convinced themselves that we want it even less and that we are hardly in a state to wage it.”

Second, the balance of resolve also favored the Chinese in Ili. From the perspective of St. Petersburg, the territory was small, distant, incredibly difficult to administer and defend, and without much intrinsic value. For Beijing, in contrast, it was highly strategically valuable. As noted above, the Ili River Valley contained key mountain passes in the Tian Shan range, and was critical to its military control of Xinjiang as a whole. And Xinjiang itself was viewed as an important strategic buffer with which to defend Beijing and the Chinese heartland from the west. This, too, was recognized by Russian leaders at the time. As the Russian negotiator wrote to acting Foreign Minister Giers in August 1880, referring to Ili, “this territorial concession, so precious to the Chinese… so worthless to us.” This sentiment was reiterated by this same negotiator, who pointed out to Giers in October 1880 that the “final possession of [Ili]… would hardly compensate for our expenses” in any war over it.

Third, Russia had only recently finished waging a major war in the Balkans, the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), having mobilized 934,000 personnel and suffering 118,000 deaths in its victory. This had two effects on the Ili crisis. First, many of Russia’s best and the most experienced military personnel were still tied up in the Balkans, with few left to spare for a

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188 “A. G. Jomini to N. K. Giers, 12/24 October 1880,” in Jelavich and Jelavich, eds., Russia in the East, p. 121. See also: Hsü, The Ili Crisis, p. 179; Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 164.

189 Paine, Imperial Rivals, p. 112.


distant, Far Eastern contingency.\textsuperscript{193} And second, the Ottoman War had been very hard on Russian finances, and Russia was simply in no position to wage another costly war.\textsuperscript{194} And its leaders were keenly aware of this. As the Russian negotiator wrote to acting Foreign Minister Giers in October 1880, “only a good beating can bring [the Chinese] to their senses. But I admit that while this is necessary, it would be very hard on our poor finances!”\textsuperscript{195} Chinese leaders were also aware of the dire state of the Russian treasury, and this increased their confidence that their coercive diplomacy would soon bear fruit.\textsuperscript{196}

All of this meant that time was clearly on China’s side.\textsuperscript{197} As the negotiations dragged on, the perception among leaders in St. Petersburg was that it only redounded to China’s advantage, giving them more time to increase their troop numbers, import arms from Russia’s European rivals, and put further strain on the Russian treasury. From early on in the negotiations, Russian officials showed concern that the Chinese might be “dragging us along so they can complete their armaments.”\textsuperscript{198} They also saw great importance in “putting an end to current expenses as quickly as possible.”\textsuperscript{199} Similar views were present among key Russian leaders. For instance, as acting Foreign Minister Giers wrote on 23 September 1880, “what matters most to us is to carry out the negotiations as quickly as possible so that we can recall the fleet.

\textsuperscript{193} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, p. 51.


\textsuperscript{196} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, pp. 97-98.

\textsuperscript{197} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, p. 175.

\textsuperscript{198} “A. G. Jomini to N. K. Giers, 10 September 1880,” in Jelavich and Jelavich, eds., \textit{Russia in the East}, p. 106. See also: “A. G. Jomini to N. K. Giers, 7 September 1880” (p. 105) and “A. G. Jomini to N. K. Giers, 1 October 1880” (p. 115), both in Jelavich and Jelavich, eds., \textit{Russia in the East}.

\textsuperscript{199} “Jomini to Giers, 22 Sept. 1880,” in Jelavich and Jelavich, eds., \textit{Russia in the East}, p. 111.
and put our troops back along the Chinese border on a footing of peace.”\(^{200}\) An important reason for this haste was a concern that the conflict with Turkey might reignite—a far less peripheral concern—and that the Russian navy would be tied up thousands of kilometers away in the East China Sea.\(^{201}\) As Giers wrote on 25 September, they needed “a good solution as soon as possible—because all our attention must be directed towards Turkey where one can foresee great complications.”\(^{202}\)

This clash of incentives put Russian leaders in something of a bind. On the one hand, they had incentives to retain the Ili River Valley, based on reduced acquisition costs, domestic political pressure, and concerns over Russian national honor and prestige. On the other hand, there were severe geopolitical risks associated with retaining the territory—namely, the risk of war with China over a concern that was, at best, peripheral to Russia’s interests. A key Russian negotiator described the position as an “inextricable dilemma,” lamenting that he did “not forgive those who put us here by protesting last year against the outright restitution of the territories which we had temporarily occupied with the promise to return them!”\(^{203}\) The problem, he wrote a few days later to acting Foreign Minister Giers, is that the Russian government was rapidly approaching a point at which it would have “no


choice but between a risky war, onerous and dangerous, or an evil and precarious peace.”

It was an unenviable position, to be sure.

**St. Petersburg Decides**

The determination to avoid war with China would ultimately be St. Petersburg’s primary political aim, necessitating the relinquishment of the Ili Region. The central importance of avoiding war had been present in the writing of Russian leaders over the months of the negotiations. The key Russian negotiator, for instance, wrote on 1 October that “war would be a deplorable end. It would be ruinous, endless, and of no benefit to us.”

This sentiment was echoed by acting Foreign Minister Giers, who wrote that same month that “it is to avoid war that we enter into negotiations” with the Chinese. Even War Minister Miliutin—who had strongly opposed returning Ili a year earlier—would agree. By mid-October, he reportedly saw a potential war with China as “a misfortune without any possible compensation” and argued that it was “necessary to absolutely avoid it.”

For nearly a decade, the Chinese and the Russians had stood toe-to-toe over the Ili Region, and, in the end, Russia would blink.

Tsar Alexander II called a final conference in December 1880 to settle the Ili crisis, attended by Giers, Miliutin, and other key Russian leaders. All present agreed that, in order

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to avoid war with China, the return of the Ili Region was necessary.\textsuperscript{209} After a few days of discussion, the Russian negotiators approached the Chinese with a compromise, the core of which would result in the Treaty of St. Petersburg of 12 February 1881.\textsuperscript{210} Under the terms of this treaty, the Ili Region would be returned to China, Russia would receive minimal trade and political concessions, and their shared border would remain almost entirely unchanged.\textsuperscript{211} While Russia was awarded a rather large nine-million-ruble indemnity, and a small strip territory west of Ili was ceded to Russia to settle refugees of the rebellion, this was a clear diplomatic victory for China, and a complete reversal of fortunes from the Treaty of Livadia less than two years earlier.\textsuperscript{212} After the treaty was ratified in the respective capitals, the Ili River Valley was returned to China in February 1882, nearly 11 years after Lieutenant General Kaufman had independently ordered its occupation.\textsuperscript{213}

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One month after the Treaty of St. Petersburg had been signed, an assassin’s bomb detonated and killed Tsar Alexander II on 13 March 1881.\textsuperscript{214} The news of the tsar’s death badly shook

\textsuperscript{209} Hsü, \textit{The Ili Crisis}, p. 185.


Kaufman, who himself would suffer a massive stroke only three weeks later, leaving him paralyzed and without speech.\textsuperscript{215} He would technically remain governor-general of Turkestan for the following 13 months as his health deteriorated, until he died on 16 May 1882.\textsuperscript{216} Kaufman’s dying wish, as a true Russian nationalist and imperialist, was to be buried in Tashkent, “so that everyone will know that here is true Russian ground where it is no dishonor for a Russian to lie.”\textsuperscript{217} And in a final twist of irony, Kaufman’s replacement as Turkestan’s governor-general would be none other than Mikhail Grigorevich Cherniaev.\textsuperscript{218}

\textit{Alternative Explanations}

Three alternative explanations that might account for the cases of Russia in the Khanate of Kokand and the Ili Region are strategic expansion theory, state institutional weakness, and leader interests. First, it is clear that neither Russian case is an example of strategic expansion. In both cases, Russian agents in the periphery were acting against explicit orders to the contrary from their superiors in the capital. While the decisions ultimately made by Alexander II, Miliutin, Gorchakov, and Giers were strategic in nature—weighing domestic political and honor concerns against perceptions of geopolitical risk—they were only in a position to make these decisions as a result of agents and processes that were almost-entirely out of their control. In short, these two cases of Russian expansion were obviously inadvertent in nature.


Second, the two cases are somewhat indeterminate as to whether state institutional weakness might explain unauthorized peripheral expansion. Among the great powers, Russia’s state institutions were clearly on the weaker side. Universal military conscription was only introduced in 1874, three years after the conquest of the Ili Region and nine years after the conquest of Tashkent. While Russia had a statistical agency as early as 1810, its first census was run in 1897, and its first civil registration was only inaugurated in the early Soviet years, allowing it scant detailed information about its own population and territory. It is certainly possible that Russian state institutional weakness played a role in unauthorized peripheral expansion in these cases. However, the fact that state institutional weakness was found to have little relationship with inadvertent expansion overall (see Chapter 3), and that Russia experienced very little inadvertent expansion once the telegraph became widespread (see Table 3.3), suggests communication and control may be a more powerful explanation.

Third, leader interests don’t seem to be a sufficient explanation for subsequent central authorization in these two cases. Leaders such as Miliutin and Gorchakov were dismayed by Cherniaev’s actions in Kokand, and initially favored a return of the claimed territories. In contrast, Russian leaders tried to get away with retaining the most strategic territory in the Ili River Valley, but were forced by their geopolitical concerns to turn it back to the Chinese. Thus, while not entirely irrelevant, leader interests are an insufficient explanation for these two Russian cases.


This chapter has presented the comparative case studies of inadvertent expansion and non-expansion by Russia in the Khanate of Kokand and the Ili Region of western China. Both cases strongly support the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2. Both cases showed how inadvertent expansion is a manifestation of a principal-agent problem, based on divergent preferences and information asymmetries. Divergent preferences for expansion between St. Petersburg and Central Asia, as well as the lack of a telegraph connection in Kokand or the China border region hampered central control and enabled unauthorized peripheral expansion to take place. Second, both cases showed how unauthorized peripheral expansion can activate mechanisms that make it difficult for leaders in the capital to easily withdraw. In Kokand and the Ili Region, unauthorized peripheral expansion dramatically drove down the costs of acquisition and generated concerns over prestige and national honor in St. Petersburg. In the Ili Region case, there were also some domestic political concerns weighing on the minds of Russian leaders as they navigated the crisis. And third, in both cases the decision of whether to accept the territorial fait accompli was importantly conditioned by perceptions of geopolitical risk. The absence of such risks cleared the way for acceptance of Cherniaev’s fait accompli in Kokand, whereas the risk of war with China led to the rejection of Kaufman’s fait accompli in Ili.
CHAPTER 6

INADVERTENT EXPANSION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: FRANCE

“in this Indo-Chinese enterprise… events have more often shaped our policy than our policy has directed the course of events.”

Jules Ferry

This chapter examines inadvertent expansion through two examples from the French Empire in Southeast Asia. The first, a shorter case study, focuses on the French Empire’s non-acquisition of the northern Vietnamese region of Tonkin in 1873-74. The second, a more detailed case, examines France’s eventual acquisition of that territory in 1882-83. The primary purpose of this chapter is to present the dissertation’s third pair of comparative theory-testing cases, illustrating how varying perceptions of geopolitical risk produced the divergent outcomes observed.

The two Tonkin cases provide a unique inferential opportunity for comparison, in that they are strikingly similar in nearly all respects. History, in these two cases, seems to repeat itself in a way it very rarely does. As historian of the French Empire Raymond Betts puts it, referring to the two key peripheral actors from the Tonkin cases:

“One can find, in the annals of French colonial history, no better examples of this sort of individualized behavior than those afforded by François Garnier and Henri Rivière. As if in tandem, these two men performed similar military actions in the same setting,

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1 Note that this and all other translations in this chapter were carried out by the author. Jules Ferry, “Speech of 26 November 1884 in the Chamber,” in Paul Robiquet, ed., Discours et Opinion de Jules Ferry: Publié avec Commentaires et Notes, Tome V: Discours sur la Politique Extérieure et Coloniale (Paris: Armand Colin, 1897), p. 416.
with the same disregard for orders, with the same disastrous personal results and in
the same geographical situation—almost exactly a decade apart.”

What Betts doesn’t add here is that while Garnier fails to have his fait accompli accepted by
the French government in Paris in 1874, Rivière succeeds in his venture just ten years later.
This chapter will trace the processes of these two cases, showing the crucial role played by
varying perceptions of geopolitical risk.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the case of France’s
non-acquisition of Tonkin in 1873-74, where Francis Garnier exceeds his orders from the
capital in conquering Tonkin, but Paris ultimately returns the territory to local authorities.
Second, I present the case of France’s acquisition of Tonkin in 1883, where Henri Rivière
similarly exceeds his orders in conquering the territory, ultimately leading to its retention by
the French government. And third and finally, I conclude with a consideration of alternative
arguments and a brief discussion of the importance of these cases for the theory of
inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2.

L’Affaire Garnier: France and Tonkin, 1873-1874

France refrained from acquiring the northern Vietnamese region of Tonkin between
October 1873 and March 1874. The ultimately failed conquest of Tonkin was independently
planned and executed by a young French naval officer and explorer, with the support of the
governor of the French colony of Cochinchina. This case supports two of the central
arguments of the theory of inadvertent expansion. First, that inadvertent expansion is a

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3 The contemporary 25 provinces making up the Northern region of Vietnam.
manifestation of a principal-agent problem, combining a divergence of preferences between leaders in the capital and their agents on the periphery, and information asymmetries favoring the agents. In the case at hand, peripheral actors in Saigon and Tonkin were far more open to conquest than leaders in the capital, and the vast distances separating the two, and the lack of telegraphic communications to Tonkin itself, meant that their behavior was very difficult to monitor and control. And second, that the perception of significant geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will discourage leaders in the capital from retaining the territory, leading to a rejection of the *fait accompli*. In this first case of France in Tonkin, French military weakness in the wake of its catastrophic loss in the Franco-Prussian War, as well as its fear of sparking a crisis with Germany or Britain in Europe, led leaders in the capital to precipitously withdraw from the newly-conquered territory.

*Historical Background*

On the eve of the French invasion in 1873, Tonkin comprised the northern region of the Vietnamese Empire, ruled by the Nguyen Dynasty Emperor Tu Duc, out of Hue, in the central region of Annam. Southern Vietnam, known to the French as “Cochinchina,” had been colonized between 1862 and 1867, after the invasion of French Emperor Napoleon III. At over 116,000 km² and containing a few million people, Tonkin bordered the Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi to the north, the Thai vassal state of Luang Phrabang to

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5 Contemporary northern Laos.
the west, and the Gulf of Tonkin to the east. With the French annexation of Cambodia in 1863, Annamese leaders in Hue began to feel the French noose tightening around them.

After its acquisitions of Cochinchina and Cambodia, France began to look to the Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi as potentially rich sources of trade and investment. In June 1866, a two-year expedition was launched to chart the Mekong River from its mouth in Saigon to its source, with a keen interest in its possibility as a trade route to southern China.

While the Mekong proved to be unsuitable for this purpose, the Red River, which ran through Tonkin, was found to be a very promising alternative. In 1871, a French arms dealer based in Hankou, Jean Dupuis, began transporting cargo up and down the Red River with the knowledge, though not the official backing, of the French Ministry of the Navy and Colonies. After having completed several successful missions, Dupuis was detained by authorities in Hanoi in June 1873, the capital of Tonkin, being told that his trade activities were in violation of the Franco-Annamese Treaty of Hue of 1863. Dupuis had an official arms commission from Chinese authorities in Yunnan and a crew of approximately 300, and was incensed at being detained. Being at an increasingly tense impasse, both Dupuis and

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9 Contemporary Hong River, Vietnam and Yuan River, China.

local Vietnamese officials reached out to the governor of French Cochinchina in order to resolve the conflict.\textsuperscript{11}

The Governor of Cochinchina at this time was Admiral Marie Jules Dupré, a career naval officer and veteran of the Crimean War (1853-56). To help him deal with the Hanoi conflict, Dupré would call upon fellow French naval officer, Captain Marie Joseph François Garnier. Garnier was the son of an army officer and had entered France’s naval academy at 15. He had participated in a series of voyages around the South American coast, the conquest of Saigon in 1860, and had served as a native affairs officer in Cochinchina.\textsuperscript{12} From 1866 to 1868, he was second-in-command in the above-referenced Mekong River expedition, and wrote a widely-acclaimed report on the journey.\textsuperscript{13} He had served in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), and was disgusted with what he saw as France’s capitulation in its aftermath.\textsuperscript{14} At just 34 on the eve of the French conquest, Garnier was a young, ambitious, and courageous naval officer of considerable talent.\textsuperscript{15} He was also hot-headed, an ardent believer in France’s \textit{mission civilisatrice}, and an advocate of a more aggressive French colonial policy.\textsuperscript{16} When Garnier received a note from the Admiral in early August 1873, saying “I have to talk to you


\textsuperscript{14} Osborne, “Francis Garnier,” pp. 92-93.


about important matters, so please come as soon as you can,” Garnier wasted little time. 17 Admiral Dupré and Captain Garnier were the key peripheral actors who would aim to drag their superiors in Paris into the acquisition of Tonkin.

*Paris & Tonkin*

Leaders in Paris faced severe principal-agent problems with respect to their subordinates in the Southeast Asian periphery. First, there were stark information asymmetries in favor of the peripheral agents. While, by this time, telegraph technology was becoming established globally, and there was a telegraph connection between Paris and Saigon, communication with Tonkin itself remained slow, being carried by boat along the Vietnamese coast and up the Red River. The fastest a letter from Saigon could be delivered to Hanoi was eleven days, and therefore it would take, at the very least, three weeks to get a response to a message sent from Paris to Hanoi. 18 Under these conditions, monitoring—and thereby controlling—the behavior of any potentially-wayward agents was incredibly difficult.

Second, there was a sharp divergence of preferences between the leaders in Paris and their agents in Saigon and Tonkin. Dupré had long pushed for a more aggressive colonial policy in the region. 19 Since taking up his position as governor in Saigon in 1871, he had been aiming to get Hue to recognize France’s annexation of Cochinchina, and he thought

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17 Norman, *Tonkin*, p. 97.

18 This figure is inferred from the fact that it took eleven days for news of Hanoi’s capture (20 November-1 December 1873) and thirteen days for news of Garnier’s death (21 December 1873-3 January 1874) to reach Saigon from Hanoi. See: “Admiral Dupré to the Court of Hué, 1 December 1873,” in Taboulet, *La Geste Francoise en Indochine* II, p. 721; “Marie Jules Dupré to Charles de Dompierre d’Hornoy, Saigon, 4 January 1874,” in M. Dutreb, *L’Amiral Dupré et la Conquête du Tonkin* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1924), pp. 82-83.

this could be facilitated by a more coercive approach. As he wrote to the Naval and Colonial Minister in Paris in December 1872, “the time for talks and reasoning has passed”—it was time for “the occupation of Kécho [Hanoi], the capital of Tonkin, and the mouth of the Song Koi [Red River].” Dupré followed these letters with similar appeals to Paris in March and May of 1873, arguing that France’s “establishment in Tonkin is a matter of life and death for the future of our domination in Cochinchina.”

However, winning over the cabinet in Paris would be no small feat. In the wake of France’s loss in the Franco-Prussian War, and the civil war with the Paris Commune (1871), there was little appetite in the capital for imperial adventures. The Naval and Colonial Minister at the time, Louis Pothuau, responded to Dupré’s appeal of December 1872 by pointing out that the foreign minister “does not think (and I share this view) that the present circumstances allow us to resort to violent means against Emperor Tu Duc.” Upon reading another of Dupré’s letters of March 1873, a cabinet minister penciled in the margin: “He absolutely insists on waging war and we will have great difficulty in preventing him from moving forward. However, it is important to do so and in the most formal way.” These views were shared by the French prime minister, Jacques-Victor Albert, the 4th duc de

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21 “Marie-Jules Dupré to the Minister of the Navy and Colonies, 22 December 1872,” in Dutreb, *L’Amiral Dupré*, p. 15.


Broglie. As he plainly put it in a dispatch to Dupré in July 1873, “Under no circumstances, for any reason whatsoever, should you engage France in Tonkin.”

Despite this resounding message coming out of Paris, the conflict between the French arms trader Dupuis and local officials in Hanoi seemed too good an opportunity for Governor Dupré to pass up. This could finally allow France to squeeze the Vietnamese into recognizing the annexation of Cochinchina, and possibly even coughing up Tonkin in the process. A few days after he had summoned Captain Garnier to Saigon, Dupré sent yet another appeal to the new Naval and Colonial Minister, Admiral Charles de Dompierre d’Hornoy on 28 July 1873. Dupré reported that the Tonkin “question has just taken a new and decisive step,” and argued that, under the circumstances, he deemed “it necessary to occupy the citadel of Kécho or Hanoi (the capital of Tonkin) and points along the coast.”

The governor added that he was ready “to assume all the responsibility of the consequences of the expedition,” which he knew would expose him “to disavowal, recall, or the loss of rank.” Dupré added that he wasn’t “asking for approval or reinforcements,” he was simply asking Paris to be allowed to proceed.

On 8 September 1873, Dupré received a brief telegraphic reply, stating only that he should “do nothing that would expose France to dangerous complications”—not a flat veto, but certainly not a ringing endorsement either. However, a few days later, Naval and Colonial Minister d’Hornoy wrote a longer response to the governor’s plea. He began by pointing out that he was put “on guard” by the “bold” and “adventurous” nature of Dupré’s

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proposal. He further noted that “at any other time than the sad time we are in, I would have admired and perhaps even pushed for these grand ideas of conquest.” However, these weren’t normal times, d’Hornoy pointed out, and the circumstances “prevent the government from agreeing to any aggressive measures” in Tonkin. “It is necessary to wait,” the minister continued, “prepare for more prosperous times, leave France to regain its strength, [and to] reconstitute itself militarily, fundamentally and politically.” Thus, while Governor Dupré would receive authorization to negotiate with Hue in October, any sort of armed conquest was definitively off the table.

But mere orders wouldn’t suffice to deter the governor. Captain Garnier arrived in Saigon in late August 1873, and Dupré and Garnier immediately set about planning the expedition. What was discussed between Dupré and Garnier in these weeks is not fully known, and the evidence is somewhat contradictory. Garnier seems to have been initially wary of Dupré’s plans, writing to his brother on 8 September that the governor “was embarking on a very dangerous path, that of an armed expedition.” And the official instructions Dupré gave to Garnier, on 10 October, were remarkably cautious in tone, especially given the governor’s past arguments and Garnier’s later actions. Garnier was ordered to investigate the conflict between Dupuis and local authorities, to insist on the merchant’s prompt departure, and to


32 Osborne, River Road to China, p. 199.


34 McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, p. 128; Osborne, River Road to China, p. 199.
negotiate the opening of the Red River to trade, but also to “abstain from any intervention” and “reserve all of our freedom of action so that we can choose… the line of conduct most in accordance with humanity, justice, and our interests.”

However, it seems likely that these official orders may have been something of a smoke screen for private verbal instructions, for Garnier later claimed he had complete freedom of action, writing to his brother that, “As for instructions, carte blanche! The Admiral is relying on me! Forward then for our beloved France!” And Dupré also wrote, just nine days after issuing his instructions for Garnier, that the “occupation of a military position in the heart of Tonkin will very probably be a necessary step toward the conclusion of the treaty, which must be equivalent to the protectorate of France over the entire kingdom.”

Thus, Paris’ inability to readily monitor Garnier’s behavior once he had left Saigon, as well as the divergence of preferences between Paris and its peripheral agents, helped set the stage for the unauthorized conquest that followed.

**Tonkin**

Garnier set off from Saigon on the evening of 11 October 1873, with a force of about 80 personnel and two small gunboats. A second, slightly larger reinforcement force, which would meet them in Hanoi, was set to depart two weeks later. Garnier ominously signaled his intentions when he wrote to a friend en route on 20 October that things “must be in a

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37 Osborne, *River Road to China*, p. 205.

very bad state in Tonkin for the Annamese to so kindly welcome the wolf into the sheepfold.”

He arrived in Hanoi on 5 November.

It was evident from the beginning that Garnier had little interest in fairly adjudicating the dispute between the arms trader Dupuis and the authorities in Tonkin. Garnier quickly established friendly relations with Dupuis and his associates while throwing his weight around in his dealings with Hanoi officials. When negotiations opened the day after his arrival, it was clear that leaders in Tonkin weren’t open to discussing trade along the Red River, and simply wanted Dupuis expelled. All of this frustrated Garnier, who wrote to his brother Léon only five days after arriving that he had made up his mind: “On 15 November, I will attack the citadel with my eighty men: I will arrest the Marshal and send him to Saigon,” and “I will officially declare… the country open to trade.”

By this point, Garnier’s reinforcement force of 88 troops had arrived with two more gunboats from Saigon. Combined with Dupuis’ accompanying guard, with whom Garnier was now openly collaborating, their total force was approximately 450 personnel. On 16 November, Garnier decided to try to force the issue, putting forth a proclamation that declared the Red River open to trade and referring to himself as the “Great Mandarin

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39 Norman, *Tonkin*, p. 120.


A few days later, on 19 November, Garnier sent Marshal Nguyen an ultimatum: disarm the citadel and comply with Garnier’s decree or face attack. The Marshal had until 6:00 PM to decide. At 10:00 PM, having heard nothing from the Marshal, Garnier wrote to his brother: “The die is cast… I attack tomorrow, at dawn, 7,000 men behind the walls, with 180 men.”

The attack on the Hanoi Citadel—a Vauban-style fortress complex and the center of Annam’s military power in the area—opened at 6:00 AM on 20 November 1873. The citadel was shelled by French gunboats from the Red River while Garnier’s forces streamed to a number of the complex’s weakly fortified gates, managing to shell and batter them open with relative ease. The Vietnamese forces were soon in disarray, for while the garrison was numerous, they were abysmally armed—carrying only swords, spears, even stones—and the attack caught them largely by surprise. One-by-one, each of the citadel’s five fortified gates was taken by Garnier’s forces in rapid succession. By 8:00 AM, the French Tricolor was flying over the complex. Two thousand Vietnamese forces were taken prisoner and thousands of others fled. Marshal Nguyen was gravely wounded by the shelling, and would later succumb to his injuries. The French had no wounded and only a single soldier killed.

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likely the result of friendly fire.\textsuperscript{49} The capture of the heart of Hanoi’s military power had been executed in fewer than two hours.

The very next day, on 21 November, Garnier and his small army began the systematic conquest of the entire Tonkin region. They took Hung Yen and Phu Ly on 23 and 26 November.\textsuperscript{50} Then Hai Duong and Nam Dinh on 4 and 11 December.\textsuperscript{51} Finally, Nin Binh was seized on 17 December by a force of fewer than a dozen personnel.\textsuperscript{52} With each acquisition, Garnier’s forces installed pro-French authorities and a small French garrison, and then moved onto the next. They received significant support from Vietnamese Catholics and other anti-Hue forces within Tonkin, in the form of intelligence, supplies, administrative support, and even combat power.\textsuperscript{53} On 13 December, when the conquest was nearly complete, Garnier wrote to Governor Dupré from Nam Dinh, putting forth his view “that a General Protectorate of the entire Empire of Annam would be the best result to draw from the current situation.”\textsuperscript{54}

On 18 December 1873, Garnier was forced to rush back to Hanoi. Chinese river pirates known as the “Black Flags,” who operated and controlled territory in the upper reaches of the Red River, were massing alongside Vietnamese provincial forces at the town of Son Tay,
some 40 km upriver of Hanoi.\textsuperscript{55} Annamese authorities in Hue had simultaneously sent envoys to the Tonkin Citadel in order to negotiate an end to the conflict with Garnier.\textsuperscript{56} On 21 December, the day peace negotiations were set to commence, approximately 600 Black Flags and 2,000 Vietnamese provincial forces began to move toward the citadel. After a very brief attack by the Black Flags, they withdrew upon contact with French artillery.\textsuperscript{57} Garnier, aiming to seize the moment, told his men that “We must make a sortie; we cannot leave such an enemy a thousand yards away.”\textsuperscript{58}

With only 18 personnel and some light artillery, Garnier led a column up the road in the direction the Black Flags had withdrawn. Garnier ordered his forces to divide into smaller groups as they pursued the enemy, and conditions on the road meant the artillery had to be abandoned.\textsuperscript{59} During the pursuit, Garnier accidentally tripped in a drainage ditch near where some Black Flags were hiding, just over a kilometer from the citadel. As they approached, Garnier managed to fire six shots from his revolver, but wasn’t able to reload as they pounced upon him, hacking and stabbing him to death. One of Garnier’s companions was shot and killed, and the others fled back to the citadel in disarray. In a grisly denouement, Garnier’s head was taken as a trophy by the Black Flag forces.\textsuperscript{60} The following day, on 22


\textsuperscript{57} Osborne, \textit{River Road to China}, p. 209

\textsuperscript{58} Osborne, \textit{River Road to China}, pp. 209-210.


December, Jean Dupuis, the French merchant whose expedition had initiated the whole conflict, went in to view Garnier’s body after it had been recovered and returned to the citadel:

“I go in to see Mr. Garnier’s body. He is between the two sailors. Nothing is quite as horrible as these headless corpses… Garnier’s clothing is in tatters, his body is covered in wounds made by sabers and spears, he is savagely mutilated… I strongly squeeze his cold right hand for the last time, swearing that he will be avenged.”

*Paris Reacts*

News of Garnier’s initial conquest of the Hanoi Citadel on 20 November didn’t reach Saigon until the end of that month. Initially, Governor Dupré tried to use the conquest to bend Hue to his will, writing to the court on 1 December that “If you do not hurry to make the treaty, our stay in Tokin will be extended; we will be forced to complete the occupation to directly administer the country.” However, as more news filtered back to the governor, he became increasingly uneasy about what was transpiring in Tonkin. Then, on 3 January 1874, the news of Garnier’s death reached the governor, and he cabled Paris the very next day, reporting “the most painful news. On 21 December, Mr. Garnier, who had attacked the citadel of Hanoi, was struck dead.” Dupré tried to distance himself from the operation, making reference to the “excess of confidence” and “imprudence” with which Garnier had acted, and emphasizing that the situation in Tonkin was “imperfectly known” to him. But

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the ball was now in the Paris cabinet’s court—what was to be done with their newly-conquered territory?

The truth was that there were very few incentives to retain Tonkin from the cabinet’s perspective. While Garnier’s successful conquest had driven down the costs of acquiring Tonkin, there was very little domestic-political support for its retention, and news of the death of Garnier did little to ignite concerns over French honor and prestige.64 France had lost the war with Prussia and put down the revolt of the Paris Commune only two-and-a-half years earlier, and had just finished paying reparations to its newly-unified neighbor to the east.65 A bitter political contest between republican and monarchical factions would consume much of France’s energy for the first decade of the Third Republic, leaving little room to consider imperial activity abroad.66

However, a more specific reason for Paris’ reticence was the perceived geopolitical risk associated with retaining Tonkin. While some scholars have pointed to French concerns over conflict with China or Vietnam to explain this reticence, the evidence suggests that French concerns lay much closer to home.67 The risk of igniting geopolitical competition with Britain or Germany in this time of vulnerability is what primarily stayed the hands of

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64 Brunschwig, French Colonialism, p. 43.


French leaders. The preeminence of the European threat in French leaders’ minds can be seen in many of the communications within and between both Saigon and Paris in the run-up to the conquest of Tonkin. For instance, in his 11 September 1873 reply to Paris, Governor Dupré assured Colonial and Naval Minister d’Hornoy that he would “not lose sight of all the precautions imposed on us by the present situation in Europe.” On 22 September, in a letter to a colleague in the navy, French Prime Minister Broglie pointed out that “what concerns me in particular with the occupation of the capital of Tonkin and the taking possession of the mouth of the river… [is that it] would excite the discontent of foreign powers, and England in particular. There is no doubt that the London cabinet… would not care to see us become masters of Tonkin.” The prime minister similarly wrote to d’Hornoy on 6 November that “prudence advised us not to resort to arms” in Tonkin, since the “strengthening of our influence” would be “against the desires of the other powers.”

Even Garnier himself seems to have known of this potential source of opposition. In his letter of 10 November to his brother Léon, announcing his plans for conquest, he wrote that he hoped “that soon after, despite the fear we have of England, it will be recognized that I have rendered service to my country!”

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71 “Duke of Broglie, Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Marine, Versailles, 6 November 1873,” in Dutreb, *L’Amiral Dupré*, p. 119.

However, the most detailed piece of evidence supporting the idea that France’s concerns were geopolitical and lay in Europe is Naval and Colonial Minister d’Hornoy’s 12 September letter to Dupré, forbidding him from engaging in conquest in Tonkin. In it, D’Hornoy points out to the governor that, in terms of foreign policy, “this is where we are. No allies! Our immediate neighbor, from whom we are no longer separated except by a frontier which no longer offers us any means of defense, is a powerful enemy.”

D’Hornoy worried aloud that Bismarck was seeking some motive to, again, declare war on France, and that France’s relatively rapid recovery alone was making the Iron Chancellor wary. He pointed out that the conquest would be costly in terms of money and personnel. D’Hornoy also noted that the Chinese, “while not very formidable as combatants,” would have to be continually repressed. But “the most serious obstacle, in my opinion,” the minister emphasized, the “most dangerous would be the jealousy of England and Germany to see our power extend thus in the East, and I fear that the difficulties that would emerge would be the repercussions felt in Europe.”

Given their relatively weak position in Europe, it was the reactions of the European great powers that French leaders most feared.

Paris Decides

Given these perceptions of geopolitical risk, and the lack of incentive to retain Tonkin, the decision for the leaders in Paris was relatively easy. The cabinet quickly ordered the immediate withdrawal from Tonkin and the return of conquered territories to local authorities.

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Dupré’s report on the death of Garnier on 7 January, noting that the “sad event you are announcing justifies the thoughts I expressed to you about the mission to Tonkin and whose departure I couldn’t prevent.” The minister ordered Dupré to hasten the evacuation of Tonkin, for, as he put it, “the government demands in the most absolute way that there is no question of a prolonged, let alone a permanent, occupation of any part of Tonkin.”

This time, Dupré did as he was told. He ordered the immediate evacuation of French forces from Tonkin, and by February 1874, they had been withdrawn. France’s precipitous withdrawal led to the burning of hundreds of Catholic villages throughout the region as a reprisal for their cooperation with the French. It is estimated that as many as 20,000 may have been killed, and another 70,000 made homeless. On 15 March 1874, France and Annam signed the Treaty of Saigon, settling the conflict in Tonkin. Hue’s most important concession was the recognition of French Cochinchina whereas France’s was the recognition of the independence of Annam and its authority over Tonkin. Hue additionally pledged to protect the rights of Catholics, to open ports in Hue, Hai Phong, and Qui Nhon for commerce, to open the Red River for trade, and to not allow any other power, including China, to intervene in its territory. But none of these would be adhered to in practice. Ultimately, little changed as a result of the French intervention in Tonkin. However, Garnier’s unauthorized conquest and the resulting 1874 treaty would itself set the stage for yet another French naval officer to follow in his footsteps just a few years thence.

76 “Charles de Dompierre d’Hornoy to Marie Jules Dupré, 7 January 1874,” in Dutreb, L’Amiral Dupré, p. 98.

77 Norman, Tonkin, p. 145; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, p. 144.

78 Buttinger, The Smaller Dragon, p. 375; Aldrich, Greater France, p. 80.


France acquired the northern Vietnamese region of Tonkin between April 1882 and August 1883. The conquest of this region was independently carried out by an aging French naval officer and writer, exceeding the limits of his orders and defying his superiors in Paris and French-held Saigon. The theory of inadvertent expansion makes three key arguments that are supported by this case. First, that unauthorized peripheral expansion is the result of a principal-agent problem, combining diverse preferences between capital and frontier, and information asymmetries favoring the latter. In the case of France in Tonkin in 1882-83, a lack of telegraphic communication with Tonkin itself hampered control over actors operating there, and leaders in Paris were far less aggressive than their peripheral agents would ultimately prove to be. Second, that the acquisition of territory often activates a number of mechanisms that make it difficult to simply withdraw one’s troops and return the territory to local governing authorities. In the case at hand, the territorial acquisitions ignited concerns of French national honor and prestige that made backing down seem unthinkable to many, if not most, in the capital. Third, that a lack of perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will encourage leaders in the capital to accept the fait accompli, resulting in territorial expansion. In this Tonkin case, there were no rival great power interests at stake, and French officials from Tonkin to Paris consistently ignored or downplayed the risks of impinging upon China’s interests. French leaders would be proven wrong in this regard, as French actions in the region would ultimately spark the Sino-French War in December 1883. But not before leaders in Paris authorized the acquisition of Tonkin, which was successfully carried out in August of that year.

_Historical Background_
With France’s withdrawal from Tonkin in February 1874, French expansion in the region was put on hold. The domestic political battle between monarchists and republicans raged on, and the economic effects of France’s war indemnity to Germany, though by this point fully paid off, continued to be felt. Furthermore, in their relatively weakened state, French leaders remained wary of antagonizing the other great powers of Europe. Under these conditions, the state of play in Vietnam returned to much as it was before the abortive French conquest of 1873. Catholics continued to be persecuted. French missionaries, traders, and consuls were harassed and hindered in their duties. Hue continued its subordinate relationship with the Qing Empire, sending tribute missions and requesting their assistance in putting down a domestic rebellion. And the Black Flags continued to operate in the upper reaches of the Red River, collecting customs and hindering the free passage of French exploration and trade. However, despite all of these challenges, France took little action. As French Foreign Minister Louis, duc Decazes said of Tonkin in September 1877, “we have renounced openly establishing a protectorate… [We are] not in a position to

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82 Finch, A Progressive Occupation?, p. 77.

83 Thompson, French Indo-China, p. 65.


86 Roberts, The History of French Colonial Policy, p. 425; Eastman, Throne and Mandarins, p. 46.
undertake aggrandizement.” It was almost as if Garnier’s intervention had never happened, and the treaty of 1874 had never been signed.

The new French governor in Cochinchina was Charles-Marie Le Myre de Vilers, the first civilian to hold that position. A former naval officer with extensive diplomatic experience, Le Myre de Vilers saw a more active French role in the region as a solution to many of their predicaments there. The new commander of Saigon’s naval station was Captain Henri Laurent Rivière. Rivière was a career naval officer and a veteran of the Crimean War, the Mexican Expedition (1861-67), and the Franco-Prussian War. He was also instrumental in helping put down a revolt against French rule in New Caledonia in 1879. Arriving in Saigon in September 1881 at the age of 54, Rivière had a rather undistinguished military career which, at this point in his life, he seemed unlikely to improve upon. He was an imposing figure, being tall and barrel-chested with a penetrating gaze and a stolid disposition. Rivière had little interest in colonialism or empire, and was instead an esteemed writer of novels and plays and a brilliant conversationalist, who frequented Paris’ most exclusive salons. As a naval officer, he had a reputation for discretion and whose tact and judgment could be relied

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Henri Rivière was the key actor on France’s Southeast Asian frontier who would drag his superiors into the conquest of Tonkin.

The key leaders in Paris who were responsible for French imperial policy were the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and the Minister of the Navy and Colonies. There was a great deal of turmoil in French domestic politics in these years, and over the course of the Tonkin expedition, the French prime ministership was held by five individuals (Léon Gambetta, Charles de Freycinet, Charles Duclerc, Armand Fallières, and Jules Ferry), the position of foreign minister was occupied by six (Gambetta, Freycinet, Duclerc, Fallières, Paul-Armand Challemel-Lacour, and Ferry), and the Naval and Colonial ministry changed hands four times (Bernard Jauréguiberry, François de Mahy, Charles Brun, and Alexandre Peyron). While some had much greater influence on the process than others, the individuals in these positions were the leaders in the capital who Henri Rivière would drag unwittingly into conquering Tonkin.

*Paris & Tonkin*

These leaders in Paris would face significant principal-agent problems in dealing with Rivière and other agents on the ground in Tonkin. First, there were important information asymmetries favoring their peripheral agents. While, as noted above, there was a telegraph connection between Paris and Saigon, Tonkin itself still lacked a telegraph station, with communications from Saigon continuing to be being carried upriver by boat. The fastest a message from Saigon could be delivered to Hanoi was approximately six days, and therefore it would take, at the very least, twelve days to get a response to a message sent from Paris to

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These communication delays made monitoring—and thereby potentially controlling—the behavior of peripheral agents like Henri Rivière exceedingly difficult for leaders in Paris.

Second, there was a divergence of preferences between many leaders in the capital and their agents in Saigon and Tonkin. While there were advocates in Paris of a more aggressive approach to Tonkin—most notably, Naval and Colonial Minister Jean Bernard Jauréguiberry—the general posture of most leaders in the capital was one of aversion to intervention. And while there was one French cabinet that hoped, and even planned, to possibly acquire Tonkin by force—that of Charles de Freycinet—it didn’t last long enough to put its plans into action. In general, leaders in Paris wanted to avoid an entangling engagement in Tonkin.

Those on the periphery, by contrast, were often more aggressive in their orientation. Cochinchina Governor Le Myre de Vilers, for instance, was a proponent of an aggressive regional posture. In the summer of 1881, he personally advocated for a small armed expedition to the region, to clear the Red River of the Black Flags and to strengthen existing French garrisons there. The Governor’s plan was agreed to by the cabinet and approved by the Chamber of Deputies in July 1881, yet the government in Paris made the limitations on this mission unmistakably clear. In the cabinet’s instructions for Le Myre de Vilers in

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93 This figure is inferred from the fact that it took six days for news of Hanoi’s capture (25 April-1 May 1882) and of Rivière’s death (20-26 May 1883) to reach Saigon from Hanoi. See: No. 107: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of Cochinchina, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies (Telegram), Saigon, 1 May 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques, Affaires du Tonkin, Première Partie, 1874-Décembre 1882 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883), p. 211; No. 199: “Mr. Thomson, Governor of French Cochinchina, to Mr. Charles Brun, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, (Telegram), Saigon, 26 May 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques, Affaires du Tonkin, Deuxième Partie, Décembre 1882-1883 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883), p. 117.


September, he was told to “raise the prestige of French authority” in the region, and to “protect the interests and rights of Europeans in these parts,” but “above all, [to] refrain from embarking on adventures of military conquest.” This was to be, in their words, “a material demonstration which in no way has the character of a military operation.”

By late December, Governor Le Myre de Vilers saw the opportune moment approaching. On 16 January 1882, he notified Paris that he planned to double the garrison in Hanoi, but was quick to emphasize that there “will be no military operation; I will only take preventive measures.” The following day, the governor issued his orders for Commander Rivière, instructing him to double the Hanoi garrison, from 100 to 200 personnel, and to clear the Red River of the Black Flags. And the very same constraints that Paris had placed upon Le Myre de Vilers were, in turn, placed upon Rivière. As the governor put it:

“You know the views of the government of the Republic. It does not want at any cost to wage, four thousand leagues from France, a war of conquest that would drag the country into serious complications. It is POLITICALLY, PEACEFULLY, ADMINISTRATIVELY that we must extend and strengthen our influence in Tonkin and Annam… the measures we take today are essentially preventive. So, you will use

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96 No. 93, Annex: “Admiral Cloué, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, to Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, Paris, ___ September 1881,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, pp. 190-191.

97 “Charles-Marie Le Myre de Vilers to the Minister of Commerce and the Colonies, Maurice Rouvier, Saigon, 21 December 1881,” in Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, p. 763.

98 No. 99: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, to Mr. Rouvier, Minister of Commerce and the Colonies (Telegram), Saigon, 16 January 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 198.

99 Eastman, Throne and Mandarin, pp. 49-50; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, p. 190.
force only in case of absolute necessity and I am counting on your caution to avoid this eventuality.”

To hammer the point home, Le Myre de Vilers closed his orders by pointing out to Commander Rivière that the government’s wishes could “be summed up in this sentence: Avoid gunfire; it would serve no other purpose than to embarrass us.” The governor seems to have had confidence that his subordinate had gotten the message. In a note to the Colonial Minister in Paris the following day, he pointed out that Rivière had promised to strictly comply with his instructions and that they could “count on his prudence and moderation.”

However, there were obvious limits to Le Myre de Vilers’ ability to control Rivière once he had left Saigon, and the governor was sensitive to this. As he wrote in his 17 January orders for Rivière: “I don’t think I can give you more detailed instructions… most likely, things will happen and necessities will arise that I cannot foresee; but I count on your patriotism and your wisdom not to engage the government of the Republic in a way that it does not want to follow.” And while Rivière was known for his sound judgment—and was not known to have an aggressive streak—things often appeared different once one was on the frontier. And without telegraphic communications as a means of monitoring him, there was no telling what might unfold.

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102 No. 102: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, to Mr. Rouvier, Minister of Commerce and the Colonies, Saigon, 18 January 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 201.

Before Rivière had a chance to depart, the ruling ministry of Léon Gambetta fell on 30 January, delaying the expedition’s departure by a few weeks. On 4 March, the returning Naval and Colonial Minister Admiral Jauréguiberry approved Rivière’s instructions, telling Le Myre de Vilers that by ordering the commander “not to use force except in the case of absolute necessity, you have followed exactly the intentions of my Department.” On 16 March, returning prime minister Charles Freycinet also approved of the instructions, similarly reiterating that the mission “cannot include… the occupation of any neighboring territory.” With his orders approved in Paris, Rivière was ready to depart.

Tonkin

Henri Rivière left Saigon for Hanoi with a force of 233 personnel aboard two naval vessels on 26 March 1883. After a brief stop at Hai Phong, on the Tonkin coast, the expedition made its way up the Red River, arriving at Hanoi in the late afternoon of 2 April. For the commander’s first few days in Hanoi, everything seemed to be going relatively smoothly. He

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104 Interestingly, orders arrived from Paris to Le Myre de Vilers via telegram on 17 January 1882 suggesting that the Gambetta cabinet may have been contemplating a larger operation instead. Yet with the fall of his ministry, nothing came of this. See: No. 100: “Mr. Gougeard, Minister of the Navy, to Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina (Telegram), Paris, 17 January 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 198. See also: Norman, Tonkin, pp. 181-182; Munholland, “Admiral Jauréguiberry,” p. 94.

105 No. 104: “Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy, to Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of Cochinchina, Paris, 4 March 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 206. Although Jauréguiberry disagreed with the idea that France’s goals could be accomplished without military force, he was willing to go along. See: No. 103: “Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy, to Mr. de Freycinet, President of the Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 4 March 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 205.

106 Freycinet went as far as to take issue with Le Myre de Vilers’ use of the adjective “administratively” in the orders, seeing it as too aggressive for the mission’s purposes. No. 105: “Mr. de Freycinet, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and the Colonies, Paris, 16 March 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 208.

107 Taboulet, La Geste Francaise en Indochine II, p. 766; Eastman, Throne and Mandarins, p. 50; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, p. 190.

met with local officials, exchanged gifts, was transparent about his plans and intentions, and, in contrast with Francis Garnier before him, was sensitive to, and accommodating of, their concerns regarding the expedition’s sudden appearance.\textsuperscript{109}

However, during the second week of their stay, concerns began to creep in. Local Tonkin officials, knowing from experience that the sudden appearance of a French expedition often spelled trouble, continued to reinforce their forces at the Hanoi citadel, which Rivière watched with increasing alarm.\textsuperscript{110} As the commander wrote to Governor Le Myre de Vilers on 18 April, “The citadel continues to fill with soldiers and to strengthen itself,” and that this “state of affairs can only continue at the expense of our influence” in the region.\textsuperscript{111} When Rivière received a force of 250 reinforcements from Saigon on 24 April, bringing his total to just shy of 600, he decided that it was time to take action.

At 5:00 am on 25 April, Commander Rivière—like Garnier before him—sent the Governor of Hanoi an ultimatum.\textsuperscript{112} He gave the governor until 8:00 am to hand over the citadel or face attack.\textsuperscript{113} At 7:30 am, the Governor asked for a 24-hour delay, but Rivière simply ignored it, taking it as a sign of hostility.\textsuperscript{114} At 8:15 am, Rivière’s gunboats on the Red River initiated a two-and-a-half-hour preparatory bombardment on the Citadel’s north...

\textsuperscript{109} No. 111, Annex I: “Rivière to Le Myre de Vilers, 10-18 Apr. 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, pp. 219-221.

\textsuperscript{110} Norman, \textit{Tonkin}, p. 197; McAleavy, \textit{Black Flags in Vietnam}, p. 191.

\textsuperscript{111} No. 111, Annex I: “Rivière to Le Myre de Vilers, 10-18 Apr. 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, pp. 222-223.


\textsuperscript{113} “The Ultimatum from Commander Rivière to the Governor of Hanoi (25 April 1882),” in Taboulet, \textit{La Geste Française en Indochine} II, pp. 770-771.

\textsuperscript{114} No. 118, Annex I: “Mr. Rivière, Division Chief, Captain of the Naval Station at Cochinchina, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Hanoi, 27 April and 13 May 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 247.
Meanwhile, the assault force divided into two columns and got in position to move on the fortress. When the guns went silent at 10:45 am, one force feigned an attack on the citadel's east gate, while the main assault force attacked where the barrage had taken place, the north gate. By 11:15 am, both forces were inside the citadel, finding that most of its defenders had fled. Before noon, the citadel was secured and the French tricolor was flying at its highest point. The conquest cost the French just four wounded, while at least 40 Annamese defenders were killed, and an unknown but significant number of Annam’s soldiers were wounded. The citadel’s governor perished as well, having hung himself during the attack.

Rivière wrote to Le Myre de Vilers that very day, informing him of the conquest. However, without a telegraph connection in Hanoi, it would take nearly a week for his letter to arrive on the Governor’s desk. “I had to take the Hanoi citadel,” Rivière wrote, “It couldn’t go on.” He promised his superior that the new acquisition would be “all profit for us and no pain,” and begged the governor “to believe that I had to act as I did. The citadel openly fortified near us; it was a danger which we had to cut short.” On April 27, Commander Rivière sent a similar letter of notification to Naval and Colonial Minister Jauréguiberry in Paris, pointing out that, given the “preparations of defense” he observed at

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115 For detailed accounts of the assault, see: No. 116, Annex I: “Mr. Rivière, Division Chief, Commander of the Naval Station, to Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, Hanoi, 25 April 1882” (pp. 241-242) and No. 118, Annex I: “Rivière to Jauréguiberry, 27 Apr. & 13 May 1882” (pp. 246-250) both in Documents Diplomatiques I; “Report from Commander Brthe de Villers to Brigadier General and Commander of Troops in Saigon, Hanoi, 3 May 1882,” in Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, pp. 774-776.


the citadel, he simply “had to prepare to act.” The day after the conquest of the citadel, Commander Rivière issued a proclamation to the people of Hanoi, claiming that his intention was not to take over the country and blaming the conquest on the “reprehensible conduct” of the citadel’s governor. In an attempt to signal his good faith, the commander lowered the French tricolor on the 27 April and replaced it with the Annamese flag. In the days that followed, he also returned much of the citadel to local authorities, only retaining the Royal Pavilion, the military heart of the fortress. Even Rivière himself was stunned by the sudden turn of events and his place in them. “It is quite astonishing,” he wrote to a friend on 2 May, “I have thus become a man of war.”

*Saigon & Paris React*

It took until 1 May for news of the citadel’s seizure to reach Saigon. It clearly came as a surprise to Governor Le Myre de Vilers, for just days earlier he had been assuring Minister Jauréguiberry that Commander Rivière was “too careful and too sane a man to engage lightly on a path contrary to the spirit of your instructions.” The governor was clearly irritated with his subordinate, and even considered recalling him. In his reply to Rivière on 2 May, the governor pointedly asked, “was this measure essential?” noting that “fortresses that are

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122 No. 111: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of Cochinchina, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Saigon, 27 April 1882,” in *Documents Diplomatiques* I, p. 216.

taken without firing a shot are rarely to be feared.” However, from Le Myre de Vilers’ perspective, what was done was done, and he was willing to accept his share of the responsibility, though he reiterated his orders “not to use force against the regular authorities except when absolutely necessary.” 124 In a series of cables and letters sent back to Paris, Governor Le Myre de Vilers stood behind Rivière, pointing to the “threatening attitude” of the Hanoi authorities, noting that there was “nothing to fear” in response, and assuring his metropolitan bosses that they were “not on a war footing.” 125 In the meantime, the Governor continued to urge Rivière to expand no further, and to await instructions from Paris. 126

For their part, leaders in Paris took the news in relative stride. On 20 June, Naval and Colonial Minister Jauréguiberry gave his approval for the steps taken thus far, though agreed that there was a “need to make our success effective by limiting our occupation.” 127 France, in these months, was swept up in a crisis over Egypt that would precipitate a British invasion in July 1882, and had little time or attention to devote to Tonkin. 128 In fact, the decision in Paris, for the time being, was to not make a decision. Rivière was to maintain his position, expand no further, and do nothing that would cause complications for France in the region.

124 No. 11: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of Cochinchina, to Commander Rivière – Saigon, 2 May 1882,” in Masson, ed., Correspondence Politique du Commandant Rivière, p. 92.

125 No. 107: “Le Myre de Vilers to Jauréguiberry, 1 May 1882” (p. 211) and No. 116: “Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, in Paris, Saigon, 2 May 1882” (p. 240), both in Documents Diplomatiques I.

126 No. 15: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of Cochinchina, to Commander Rivière – Saigon, 23 May 1882,” in Masson, ed., Correspondence Politique du Commandant Rivière, pp. 105-107.

127 No. 117: “Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, to Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, Paris, 20 June 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 244. See also: Mauriceley, Le Commandant Rivière, p. 142.

In Le Myre de Vilers’ view, they could reopen diplomatic negotiations with Hue over the future of Tonkin from this new position of relative strength, possibly gaining a protectorate once they had come to an agreement.\textsuperscript{129} As he saw it, time was on their side.\textsuperscript{130} For the time being, he wrote to Rivière on 27 July, they had to “be patient” and “await the auspicious hour.”\textsuperscript{131}

\textit{Frustration in Tonkin & Paris}

For the first few weeks of the occupation, Rivière’s spirits were high, and he sent reports back to Paris in early May, pointing out that the situation was under control. However, as the weeks progressed, impatience began to set in. The commander began to resent being left in limbo, with his superiors deciding neither to withdraw nor to formally annex Tonkin. “I do not know how long these events in Tonkin will last,” Rivière wrote to a friend on 4 June, adding that the “Governor does not know what he wants and the Minister gives no sign of life.”\textsuperscript{132} He conducted a short reconnaissance mission up the Red River in early June, but otherwise remained in Hanoi. He complained in a letter to a friend on 17 July of the “intolerable heat” of the region and, referring to his conquest, added that he did “not know whether it will be approved or not; but it does not matter; I did what I had to…”\textsuperscript{133} The following month, Rivière seemed even more discouraged, complaining to a friend that, with

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\textsuperscript{129} No. 112: “Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, in Paris, Saigon, 5 May 1882,” in \textit{Documents Diplomatiques} I, p. 227.
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\textsuperscript{130} No. 119: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of Cochinchina, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Saigon, 22 May 1882,” in \textit{Documents Diplomatiques} I, p. 257.
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\textsuperscript{133} “Commander Rivière to Madame de Caillavet, Hanoi, 17 July 1882,” in Taboulet, \textit{La Geste Française en Indochine} II, pp. 782-783.
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“a little energy, the day after taking Hanoi, we could have gotten what we wanted from Hué,” and disparaging Le Myre de Vilers’ approach as one of “procrastination and conciliation.”

In Paris, Naval and Colonial Minister Jauréguiberry was similarly frustrated at the lack of progress in Tonkin. On 15 October he sent a letter to the new prime minister, Charles Duclerc, arguing that it was past time for a “solution to the Tonkin question” and concluding that France “must act to formally establish [a] protectorate.” He outlined a plan in which 3,000 French troops alongside 3,000 native troops would occupy the remainder of Tonkin and force Hue to agree to a protectorate. In late October the prime minister signaled his agreement with Minister Jauréguiberry, and on 14 November sent him his “full approval” of the proposal. However, the rest of the cabinet resisted Jauréguiberry’s plan, seeing no pressing need to take action. Instead, they settled for a compromise in which 700 troops were dispatched to the region in late December to reinforce Rivière’s forces. Then, for entirely unrelated domestic political reasons, the


137 No. 139: “Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Paris, 14 November 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 317. See also: No. 135: “Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Mr. Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Paris, 22 October 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 305.


Duclerc ministry fell in late January 1883, leaving the Tonkin question unresolved, yet again.\footnote{Power, Jules Ferry, pp. 160-161.}

**Back in Tonkin**

Rivière’s reinforcement force of 700 arrived in Hanoi on 24 February 1883. Their timing was impeccable, as the commander would soon receive intelligence from a reliable source that a Chinese company was in the process of gaining mining concessions near the port of Hon Gai on the Tonkin coast, alarmingly, with the apparent backing of mining interests in the United Kingdom. Rivière was also disturbed by a proposal recently put forward by the French Minister to China, Frédéric Bourée, to cede the port area to China in a broader division of spheres of influence in Tokin.\footnote{No. 74: “Commandant Rivière to Mr. Rheinart, Chargé d’Affaires of France at Hué – Hanoi, 14 March 1883” (p. 192) and No. 76: “Commander Rivière to Mr. Thomson, Governor of Cochinchina – Hanoi, 17 March 1883” (pp. 198, 199), both in Masson, ed., Correspondence Politique du Commandant Rivière. See also: Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, p. 787.} Thus, on 12 March Rivière decided once again to take matters into his own hands, ordering the occupation of the port, which was carried out by one of his field commanders two days later.

Rivière then set his sights on the citadel of Nam Dinh, about 100 km downriver from Hanoi. According to Rivière, the citadel's governor and his army were displaying “the most hostile attitude” toward the French, and were apparently preparing to create barriers along their stretch of the Red River, potentially cutting off French access to the sea.\footnote{No. 74: “Rivière to Rheinart, 14 Mar. 1883” (pp. 191 [quoted], 192) and No. 78: “Commander Rivière to Mr. Thomson, Governor of Cochinchina – Hanoi, 17 March 1883” (pp. 202-203), both in Masson, ed., Correspondence Politique du Commandant Rivière.} This, according to Rivière, was an unacceptable risk. On 19 March he wrote to Le Myre de Vilers’
recent replacement as governor of Cochinchina, Charles Thomson, announcing that the “situation is serious enough in Nam-Dinh for me to decide to attack the Citadel.”

On 26 March, Rivière arrived at Nam Dinh at the head of a force of 800, and sent the governor an ultimatum: hand over the citadel or be removed by force. When no surrender was forthcoming, the French forces initiated their attack at 7:00 the following morning. While the Annamese defenders put up a spirited resistance, they were ultimately no match for French firepower and tactics, and by nightfall the French tricolor was flying over the citadel. The attack cost the French just one dead and two wounded, while they inflicted as many as 1,000 casualties on their Annamese opponents. Once the citadel was in French hands, Rivière found and ordered the immediate execution of 49 Chinese Black Flag soldiers, who were summarily strung up and hung on the yardarm of one of the French naval vessels. The following day, on 27 March, Rivière wrote to Governor Thomson, proudly informing him he had taken the Nam Dinh citadel, and that between Hanoi and Nam Dinh, France was now in control of the Red River Delta.

It is clear that Rivière had motivations for these conquests beyond the case-specific factors he cited for each acquisition. The conquests of Hon Gai and Nam Dinh brought the Tonkin crisis, in his words, to “a new phase of action.” Reflecting on events a few weeks later, Rivière wrote to a friend, “I decided myself to do what [the Government] couldn’t

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143 No. 80: “Commander Rivière to Mr. Thomson, Governor of Cochinchina – Hanoi, 19 March 1883,” in Masson, ed., Correspondence Politique du Commandant Rivière, p. 208.

144 Norman, Tonkin, pp. 205-206; Eastman, Throne and Mandarins, p. 68; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, p. 200; Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, pp. 787-788.

145 “Commander Rivière to Mr. Thomson, Governor of Cochinchina – Nam-Dinh, 27 March 1883,” in Masson, ed., Correspondence Politique du Commandant Rivière, p. 212.

make up their minds to make me do.” With these acquisitions, he continued, the Government “will be forced to move on the Tonkin question… I do not yet know if they will be happy in France with what I did. [But] I have done the right thing…”147 The Commander was frustrated by his government’s inaction, and was aiming to force its hand.

While Rivière was carrying out the conquest of Nam Dinh, Black Flags and Vietnamese armed forces carried out a large-scale attack on the Hanoi Citadel.148 They were repelled by the French garrison defending the fortress, but news of the attack alarmed Rivière, leading him to rush back upriver to Hanoi where he arrived on 2 April.149 In the weeks that followed, Commander Rivière became increasingly concerned about reports of large concentrations of Black Flags and Vietnamese troops gathered in the villages of Bac Ninh and Son Tay, each within 35 km of Hanoi. Contributing to the tension, a series of provocative placards were posted at the gates of the Hanoi Citadel, purportedly from the leader of the Black Flags, Liu Yong-fu, taunting and threatening the French occupiers.150 In what, it turned out, would be his final letter to Governor Thomson on 16 May, Rivière pointed out that the “situation is not without a certain gravity,” and argued that it was “necessary[,] to get out of the difficulties we are in, to capture Bac-Ninh and Son-Tay.”151


148 No. 182: “Mr. Thomson, Governor of French Cochinchina, to Mr. Charles Brun, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, (Telegram), Saigon, 26 April 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 93; Norman, Tonkin, p. 207.

149 Norman, Tonkin, pp. 208-209; Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, p. 792.

150 Norman Tonkin, pp. 210-12; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, p. 203; Davis, Imperial Bandits, pp. 85, 87.

151 No. 226, Annex I: “Commander Rivière to Mr. Thomson, Governor of French Cochinchina, Hanoi, 16 May 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 156.
At 4:00 am on 19 May 1883, Rivière and a force of approximately 500 headed out from Hanoi toward Son Tay.\(^{152}\) Little did they know it, but a staff member of a local Hanoi hostel where some of the French soldiers were staying had caught wind of the planned attack, and informed the Black Flags in advance.\(^{153}\) Just four kilometers from Hanoi, the French force was ambushed and surrounded on three sides by a Black Flag army, forcing them into a disorganized fighting retreat.\(^{154}\) Amid the fray, one of the French light artillery pieces became stuck in the mud, and Rivière jumped out of his travel carriage to help retrieve it. In the course of its retrieval, the Commander was shot in the shoulder, where he collapsed—not far from where Francis Garnier himself was killed nearly ten years earlier. He was then dragged off alive by the Black Flags to a military base nearby, where he soon thereafter perished. And like Garnier before him, Rivière had his head removed after his death.\(^{155}\) This failed attack on Son Tay had cost the French 30 killed and 51 wounded.\(^{156}\)

Back in Paris

When Rivière was engaging in the conquests of Hon Gai and Bac Ninh, the political winds were shifting back in the capital. After the three-week tenure of a brief, caretaker ministry in early February 1883, Jules Ferry formed his second ministry on 22 February, approximately three months before Rivière was killed in Tonkin. He named Paul-Armand Chalamel-Lacour as his foreign minister and Charles Brun as his Naval and Colonial Minister. From

\(^{152}\) No. 199: “Thomson to Brun, 26 May 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 117; Norman, Tonkin, p. 216.

\(^{153}\) Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, p. 792.

\(^{154}\) No. 199: “Thomson to Brun, 26 May 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 117.

\(^{155}\) “The Consul of France in Haiphong, Forestier, to Thomson, Governor of Cochinchina, 20 May 1883,” in Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, p. 796, also: pp. 792-793; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, p. 204.

the second day of his appointment, Challemel-Lacour got to work on the Tonkin crisis, finding it more serious and more urgent than he had supposed from the outside.¹⁵⁷ He spent about a week going through the available documents, and then forwarded materials to Naval and Colonial Minister Brun and Prime Minister Ferry for consideration.¹⁵⁸ After another week of study, the prime minister decided to hold a cabinet meeting on 5 March to decide the fate of the Tonkin question.

Effecting a prompt withdrawal would have been no small feat. It turned out that Rivière’s actions had activated mechanisms that made pulling out of Tonkin and relinquishing the captured territory exceedingly difficult. For one, Rivière had independently conquered much of the Tonkin Delta, and in doing so, had substantially reduced the costs to Paris of acquiring this territory. However, a second and more important reason it would have been difficult to retrench was the engagement of French national honor and prestige.¹⁵⁹ French leaders in Saigon and in Paris clearly saw France’s honor as being at stake once Tonkin had been partially acquired. For instance, on 11 June 1882, just six weeks after Rivière’s seizure of the Hanoi Citadel, Governor Le Myre de Vilers wrote in a letter to Minister Jauréguiberry that if France didn’t take further action in the region, “we will lose our influence, because our abstention will be considered an act of weakness and cowardice.”¹⁶⁰ In another report


¹⁵⁸ Billot, L’Affaire du Tonkin, pp. 34-35.


¹⁶⁰ No. 125: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of French Cochinchina, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Saigon, 11 June 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, pp. 277-278.
from the governor, sent a week later, Minister Jauréguiberry penciled in on the margin: “We cannot go back now!” \(^ {161}\) The Naval and Colonial Minister had made similar arguments when he requested additional troops to establish a protectorate in the fall and winter of 1882. In his letter of 15 October to Prime Minister Duclerc, he wrote that France in Tonkin was in “a state of affairs which, if continued, could compromise our honor.” He claimed it was “too late to abandon a country where our flag has been flying for eight years” and added that “what was possible without dishonor to the Republic at the beginning of 1880 is no longer [possible]…” \(^ {162}\) The interim Naval and Colonial Minister François de Mahy agreed, writing in February 1883 to incoming Prime Minister Jules Ferry that the abandonment of Tonkin “may have, for our influence in the Far East… consequences such as I cannot call enough to your attention.” \(^ {163}\) In short, concerns about French national honor and prestige made backing down in Tokin appear very difficult to leaders in Paris. \(^ {164}\)

Furthermore, the geopolitical risk associated with retaining the territories, and even pushing further into Tonkin, appeared to be manageable to most leaders in Paris. There were few great power interests at stake in Tonkin, \(^ {165}\) and the threat of China forcibly resisting a French advance was consistently down played or ignored. In the view of many French leaders, China had acquiesced to the annexations of Cochinchina in the 1860s without protest, and similarly accepted the 1874 treaty with Hue, which stated that it was to be


\(^ {163}\) No. 163: “Mr. de Mahy, Interim Minister of the Navy and Colonies, to Mr. Jules Ferry, Interim Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 20 February 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 64.

\(^ {164}\) Taboulet, La Geste Française en Indochine II, p. 787.

\(^ {165}\) Power, Jules Ferry, pp. 164, 177-179.
“independent of all foreign powers,” including China. As contemporary chronicler of events in Tonkin Charles B. Norman put it, to most French leaders, “China was considered une qualité négligeable.”

These views were present in the years and months preceding Rivière’s conquest of Hanoi as well. For instance, in July 1880, when Prime Minister Freycinet agreed to the plan to occupy Tonkin just before his ministry fell, he wrote to Naval and Colonial Minister that there “would be no complications to fear on the side of China, which perhaps would even gladly see that it is relieved of the intermittent policing that it is currently conducting” on the Red River. Cochinchina Governor Le Myre de Vilers similarly argued in a letter to Paris in December 1881 that, if they occupied Tonkin, the “government of China will abstain; we won’t provide it with a basis for intervention because we will make no declaration of war…” This argument was passed on almost verbatim from Naval and Colonial Minister Jauréguiberry to Prime Minister Freycinet during his second ministry on 4 March 1882.

This downplaying of the China threat persisted in the aftermath of Rivière’s April 1882 conquest of the Hanoi Citadel. For instance, in a letter from Governor Le Myre de Vilers to Minister Jauréguiberry on 22 May, the governor wrote, referring to the possibility of Hue seeking the aid of Beijing, that it “is possible even probable; but it is not dangerous, for the


167 Norman, *Tonkin*, p. 177-178.

168 No. 70: “Mr. Freycinet, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Paris, 26 July 1880,” in *Documents Diplomatiques* I, pp. 156-157.


moment at least…” In another letter on 19 July, reporting on Chinese troop increases on the Tonkin border, Le Myre de Vilers wrote, “I don’t think that… the Chinese demonstration is of serious importance,” and this message was passed on to Prime Minister Duclerc in September. In response, the prime minister wrote on 26 September that France had “every reason to hope that our good relations with China will not be seriously disturbed by our expedition on the Song-koi [Red River],” and added that the reported troop increase on the border was likely “a measure taken by the Government of Beijing to inspire the confidence in the Court of Hué, and to maintain in it the illusion of an intervention.”

This isn’t to say that there were no concerns in the French government. Frédéric Bourée, the French minister to China, sent a series of letters and cables to Paris through the fall and winter of 1882, reporting on Chinese troop increases and infiltration into Tonkin. At one point he even claimed he saw war as essentially “inevitable,” which led him to initiate negotiations in late November and early December 1882. However, even Bourée had played a part in minimizing the China threat, claiming in an October 1882 letter to the prime

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173 No. 129, Annex: “Mr. Le Myre de Vilers, Governor of Cochinchina, to Mr. Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Saigon, 19 July 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, pp. 296-297.

174 No. 129: “Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, to Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 12 September 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 296.

175 No. 131: “Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and the Colonies, Paris, 26 September 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, pp. 299, 300. See also: No. 132: “Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Mr. Bourée, Minister of France in China, Paris, 29 September 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 302.


177 No. 140: “Mr. Bourée, Minister of France in China, to Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris, (Telegram), Shanghai, 5 December 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 318. See also: Eastman, Throne and Mandarins, pp. 58-59; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, pp. 196-197.
minister that he was “almost certain that the Chinese Government will not care to expose its soldiers to compete with ours and that the imperial forces will retreat everywhere at our approach.” This downplaying of the geopolitical risk posed by China led to some wildly optimistic views among leaders in Paris. For instance, Minister Jauréguiberry wrote to Prime Minister Duclerc in October 1882 that the Chinese “would have nothing to lose, but everything to gain, on the contrary, from recognizing our Protectorate.” In sum, while there were pockets and periods of concern, the general trend among government officials in Paris and Saigon was to perceive relatively little geopolitical risk posed by China’s interests in Tonkin.

Paris Decides

The cabinet of Prime Minister Jules Ferry decided, in their 5 March meeting, that France would establish a full protectorate over Tonkin, by military force if necessary. Minister Bourée in Beijing was recalled and the results of his negotiations, which had ceded a sphere of influence in northern Tonkin to China, were disavowed. Foreign Minister Challemel-Lacour was tasked with explaining the cabinet’s decision to the French legislature, which he did on 13 March. In his remarks, the foreign minister leaned heavily on themes of French national honor, claiming that “France had obligations that it could not shirk,” and that prolonging the situation in the region would only cause “a deep attack on our authority in Annam, in Tonkin, and in Cochinchina.” He further argued that a “retreat” from Tonkin

178 Note that this letter only arrived in Paris in late December 1882. No. 142: “Mr. Bourée, Minister of France in China, to Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Peking, 21 October 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 322.

179 No. 137: “Admiral Jauréguiberry, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, to Mr. Duclerc, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 31 October 1882,” in Documents Diplomatiques I, p. 310.

180 Billot, L’Affaire du Tonkin, p. 35; Power, Jules Ferry, p. 163.
would result in “the certain ruin of our influence, and the loss of our prestige throughout the Orient.”\footnote{181} And the government’s optimism with respect to the China threat continued apace. On 14 March, Challemel-Lacour wrote to the recently-recalled Minister Bourée (who wouldn’t leave Beijing until his replacement arrived a few months later) that the establishment of a French protectorate in Tonkin “can only be profitable to China itself, by ensuring order on its borders.”\footnote{182}

The decision on Tonkin having been made, all that was left for the Ferry cabinet was to put forward a specific plan and to request the necessary funds from the Chamber of Deputies, which it did on 26 April. Along with the request, Foreign Minister Challemel-Lacour included an explanatory statement for French legislators, where the government, again, heavily emphasized the importance of protecting French honor and prestige. France’s inaction, he noted, “could be considered as marks of indecision or weakness and have not been without damaging the reputation of France in Asia.” “A new abandonment of Tonkin,” the foreign minister continued, “would be considered an abdication in these regions of the Far East, where our flag appears with honor among those of the main trading powers…” Thus, Challemel-Lacour noted in closing, the government’s policy was to “establish ourselves firmly in Tonkin, and to affirm in the eyes of all our resolution to stay there.”\footnote{183}

The Chamber of Deputies voted on a request of 5.5 million francs to cover 3,000 French soldiers, 1,000 locals, and nine additional gunboats for Tonkin on 15 May 1883. The


\footnote{182} No. 168: “Mr. Challemel Lacour, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Mr. Bourée, Minister of France to China, Paris, 14 March 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 72.

measure passed by the wide margin of 351-48. The bill was amended in the days that followed, and was returned to the Chamber for second vote on 26 May—the very day that news of Rivière’s killing and beheading at the hands of the Black Flags had reached Paris.

This time it passed unanimously, with Naval and Colonial Minister Brun writing to Cochinchina Governor Thomson that the legislature had “voted unanimously on credit for Tonkin. France will avenge its glorious children!”

French Minister Bourée finally left Beijing in mid-May 1883. This put an end to any consistent warnings of the risks of war with China for good. In his instructions to Bourée’s successor, Foreign Minister Challemel-Lacour casually noted that recent events had “cooled our relations with China” and asked the new minister to “facilitate a rapprochement between our two countries.” In a separate set of instructions, the foreign minister pointed out that China had “no valid motive to take umbrage with a project which it will naturally be called upon to take advantage [of]” and argued that China’s “military preparations… should only be considered as attempts at intimidation.” The new minister in Beijing, for his part, took an entirely more laid back approach than his successor had. He reported on 18 June that China’s military preparations “have been exaggerated,” and argued a few days later that a

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188 No. 197: “Mr. Challemel Lacour, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Mr. Tricou, Special Envoy of France in China, Paris, 18 May 1883,” in *Documents Diplomatiques* II, p. 115.

189 No. 215: “Mr. Tricou, Special Envoy of France in China, to Mr. Challemel Lacour, Minister of Foreign Affairs, (Telegram), Shanghai, 18 June 1883,” in *Documents Diplomatiques* II, p. 139.
“powerful maritime diversion made on the coasts of the Celestial Empire would suffice” to keep it from intervening. In early July, the French minister similarly argued in a letter to Foreign Minister Chalamel-Lacour that the Chinese “will be careful not to declare war, because peace is too advantageous to them.” And even if it came to conflict, he continued, “China’s forces on land and sea are singularly overrated… poorly armed, most of them undisciplined, they would certainly not hold in front of six battalions supported by a strong artillery.” Prime Minister Ferry had a similar impression. In a 21 June conversation with the Chinese minister in Paris, Ferry was told that “China has no thoughts of aggression; it knows that France is strong enough to do what it wants in the Kingdom of Annam,” and that China “will not consider [French] actions in Tonkin as a cause of war or rupture.” This conversation, along with the messages he was getting from other members of his ministry, gave Prime Minister Ferry the impression that France’s “firm attitude and known resolve” was working—he saw China as backing down.

Conquest & War

The initial French force of 3,000, along with its native recruits, reached the Tonkin shores in early July 1883. After taking a few coastal territories and working its way through the

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190 No. 236: “Mr. Tricou, Special Envoy of France in China, to Mr. Chalamel Lacour, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shang-hai, 22 June 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 179.

191 No. 225: “Mr. Tricou, Special Envoy of France in China, to Mr. Chalamel Lacour, Minister of Foreign Affairs, (Telegram), Shanghai, 5 July 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, pp. 153-154.

192 No. 218: “A Conversation of Marquis Tseng, Minister of China in Paris, with Mr. Jules Ferry, President of the Council, Minister, Interim Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 21 June 1883,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 142.

193 No. 221: “Mr. Jules Ferry, President of the Council, Charge, Interim Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Mr. Tricou, Special Envoy of France to China, in Shanghai, (Telegram), 22 June 1883, 9:30 p.m.,” in Documents Diplomatiques II, p. 149.

194 Norman, Tonkin, p. 221; Ennis, French Policy and Developments in Indochina, p. 48; McAleavy, Black Flags in Vietnam, pp. 211-212; Power, Jules Ferry, p. 164.
Tonkin Delta, the determination was made in Paris in late July to bring the invasion to the heart of Annamese power, in Hue.\textsuperscript{195} On 16 August, French naval forces assembled in the harbor of Danang, and two days later initiated a bombardment of the Thuan-An fortresses, which protected the imperial palace at the entrance to the Hue River.\textsuperscript{196} On 20 August, an armistice was agreed to, and on 25 August 1883, France and Annam signed the Treaty of Hue, establishing a French protectorate over both Annam and Tonkin.\textsuperscript{197} The entirety of what is now Vietnam was in French hands, where it would remain until after France’s catastrophic loss at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

France’s conquest of Tonkin and Annam would, indeed, spark the war with China that French leaders had seen as so unlikely. Beijing’s refusal to withdraw its forces from northern Tonkin, as well as its continued support for the Black Flags, led French forces to attack the Black Flag stronghold at Son Tay in December 1883, sparking the Sino-French War. At its peak, France had some 35,000 forces engaged in the war, which remained undeclared through its entirety for fear of antagonizing the other great powers.\textsuperscript{198} As the war progressed through 1884 and into early 1885, public opinion soured at home, and opposition politicians—most notably, future prime minister Georges Clemenceau—began attacking Prime Minister Ferry and his cabinet.\textsuperscript{199} On 30 March 1885 the Ferry ministry collapsed due

\textsuperscript{195} No. 231: “Mr. Charles Brun, Minister of the Navy and Colonies, to Mr. Harmand, Commissioner General to Tonkin, (Telegram), Paris, 19 July 1883,” in \textit{Documents Diplomatiques} II, p. 169.


\textsuperscript{198} Thompson, \textit{French Indo-China}, p. 67; Munholland, “Admiral Jauréguiberry,” p. 106.

to widespread dissatisfaction with the handling of the war, as well as opposition to his radically-secular domestic agenda. Ferry was dubbed “Le Tonkinois” by his domestic political opponents, and the opposition had whipped up such a frenzy that the prime minister was threatened by a mob outside the Palais Bourbon in Paris. On the very day of the collapse of Ferry’s ministry, China and France signed an armistice in Vietnam that would ultimately hold. With the Treaty of Tientsin in June 1885, the war was formally brought to a close and China recognized France’s protectorate over Annam and Tonkin. Between the French conquest of Tonkin and Annam and the Sino-French War that followed, France lost 4,222 killed and wounded in combat, as well as an additional 5,223 French and colonial soldiers lost to disease. Chinese and Vietnamese deaths are estimated to have exceeded 10,000.

Alternative Explanations

Three alternative explanations that might account for the cases of Tonkin in 1873-74 and 1882-83 are strategic expansion theory, state institutional weakness, and leader interests. First, neither of the Tonkin cases are characterized by strategic expansion. In both cases, actors on the periphery—Dupré and Garnier in 1873, and Rivière in 1882—engaged in territorial conquest in the face of clear and explicit orders from the capital to the contrary. While the decisions by Broglie to return Tonkin, and by Ferry to retain it and expand further, were strategic in nature—based on considerations of perceived geopolitical risk—

200 Thompson, French Indo-China, p. 68; Roberts, The History of French Colonial Policy, p. 428.

201 Power, Jules Ferry, p. 188-189.

these leaders were only in a position to make these decisions due to actors and processes that were entirely out of their control. And there is no obvious reason to assume that Ferry would have ordered the conquest of Tonkin had Rivière not gotten the process in motion first. In short, these are cases of inadvertent expansion, through and through.

Second, state institutional weakness doesn’t appear to explain the unauthorized peripheral expansion in the two Tonkin cases either. While France experienced a great deal of domestic-political instability in these years, its state institutions were relatively strong compared to those of the other great powers. France had introduced universal conscription with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1798, relied upon it throughout the Napoleonic Wars, and brought back selective conscription in the Franco-Prussian War. By this point in its history, France was also able to extract considerable amounts of revenue in the form of a variety of direct and indirect taxes, averaging around 11 percent of the value of its gross national product (GNP) between 1873 and 1883. France had also created a civil registry, a state statistical agency, and began to institute a regular census during the revolutionary period, giving it ample information about its populace. Thus, French state institutions were relatively strong, so a weak state clearly can’t account for France’s tendency to so regularly engage in inadvertent expansion. As presented in Table 3.4 in Chapter 3,


France was likelier than any other great power to do so, with over 40 percent of its expansion being inadvertent.

Third, the two cases are indeterminate with respect to leader interest serving as an alternative explanation for subsequent central authorization, for both leader interests and perceived geopolitical risk point in the same “direction” in each case. In 1873-74, the Broglie ministry didn’t want Tonkin, and their perceptions of geopolitical risk discouraged them from accepting it. In 1883, the Ferry cabinet was far more open to acquiring Tonkin, and they perceived few geopolitical risks associated with its acquisition. Thus, the adjudication of the interest-based alternative argument for subsequent central authorization is not possible with these cases.

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This chapter has presented comparative case studies of inadvertent expansion and non-expansion by France in Tonkin in 1873-74 and 1882-83. Both cases strongly support the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2. First, both cases show how inadvertent expansion is a manifestation of a principal-agent problem—that divergent preferences and information asymmetries favoring the periphery enabled agents to engage in unauthorized conquest. Second, the 1882-83 case supports the argument that even partial conquest of territory can activate mechanisms that make withdrawal exceedingly difficult—in this case, concerns over French national honor and prestige. And third, in both cases the decision in the capital of whether to accept or reject the fait accompli was crucially determined by the perceived geopolitical risk associated with doing so. In the 1873-74 case, French leaders were so concerned with how Britain and Germany would react to the acquisition of Tonkin, that, given their weak position in Europe, they opted for an expeditious withdrawal. In contrast, in the 1882-83 case, there were no other great power interests at stake, and
French leaders consistently downplayed the risk of China intervening, leading them to accept the *fait accompli* and establish a protectorate over Tonkin and Annam. It turned out, in this case, that they were wrong—China would fight over Tonkin and the war was ultimately quite costly for France. But the perceptions that informed the decision to accept the *fait accompli* are in line with the theory’s expectations.

Much of the power of this chapter’s evidence is in the striking similarity between the two cases. It presented the same great power, in the same region, dealing with the very same territory, in both cases involving an insubordinate French naval officer, who engaged in the same process of acquisition, and in which the officer was killed by the same enemy in largely the same manner on almost the very same spot, separated by fewer than ten years. While there is no such thing as a perfect comparative case, and, in reality, all else is never held equal, the similarities across these two cases should give us confidence that the important variation observed in perceived geopolitical risk played a critical role in the variation observed in the outcomes—non-expansion in 1874 and expansion in 1883.
CHAPTER 7

THE DILEMMA OF INADVERTENT EXPANSION: JAPAN & ITALY

This chapter examines two of the dissertation’s more “modern” cases of inadvertent expansion: Japan and Italy. The first case presents the Japanese government’s acquisition of Manchuria in 1931-32. The second presents the Italian government’s decision to reject the territorial *fait accompli* presented by its peripheral agents in the port city of Fiume in 1919-20. The primary value of this pair of cases is threefold. First, it presents the dissertation’s fourth pair of comparative, theory-testing cases, showing the important role perceived geopolitical risk plays in enabling or preventing inadvertent expansion. Second, both cases occur well-into the era of modern communications, showing how inadvertent expansion can occur even with all of the benefits of instantaneous communication. And third, the chapter highlights the painful dilemmas that inadvertent expansion can thrust upon leaders’ laps, what I referred to in Chapter 2 as the “dilemma of inadvertent expansion.” In both cases, leaders in the capital simultaneously perceived significant geopolitical risk associated with acquiring the territories in question and the threat of severe domestic political punishment for backing down. And while in both cases the leaders’ initial instinct was to reject the territorial *fait accompli*, the varying outcomes observed—expansion for Japan, non-expansion for Italy—highlights the delicate balance leaders must strike in these circumstances, and how they periodically fail to do so.

This chapter presents the dissertation’s only direct cross-country comparison. However, for four reasons Italy and Japan in the early 20th century is a useful comparison to test the theory of inadvertent expansion. First, for most of their history, Japan and Italy were the “least of the great powers,” existing largely in the shadows of more powerful partners and
rivals in Europe and the Western Hemisphere.\(^1\) Second, both Japan and Italy were relatively late to modernize, and were therefore more recent entrants to the great power club, having to catch up quickly to contend with their more established peers.\(^2\) Third, politically, both were “mixed regimes,” experimenting with electoral democracy but soon taking sharply-authoritarian turns—for Italy under Benito Mussolini in 1922, and for Japan under military dictatorship in 1932. Fourth, in both cases the territory in question was relatively close to the capital under conditions of rapid communications technology, ameliorating some of the more severe principal-agent problems on display in previous chapters. Therefore, while no comparison is perfect, Japan and Italy are highly-comparable along many important dimensions, holding a number of factors fixed while their outcomes vary.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the case of Japan in Manchuria, where leaders perceived significant geopolitical risk associated with accepting the territory, yet were ultimately proven wrong when no great power intervention occurred, resulting in the acquisition of Manchuria. Second, I move onto the case of Italy in Fiume, showing how a similar perception of risk led successive Italian leaders to reject the *fait accompli*, ultimately accepting the port city’s status as a “free state.” Third and finally, I conclude with a brief consideration of alternative arguments, as well as a discussion of the importance of these cases for the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2.

“*Ishiwara’s War*: Japan in Manchuria, 1931-1932

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The Japanese Empire acquired Manchuria between September 1931 and March 1932. The conquest of Manchuria was independently planned and orchestrated by mid-ranking officers of the colonial Kwantung Army, defying the orders of their civilian and military superiors in Tokyo. The theory of inadvertent expansion makes three central arguments that are borne out in this case. First, that unauthorized peripheral expansion results from a principal-agent problem, combining a divergence of preferences between leaders in the capital and their agents on the periphery and information asymmetries favoring the peripheral agents. In this case, there was a strong divergence of preferences between civilian leaders in Tokyo and the Kwantung Army in Manchuria, and the Kwantung Army had access to, and was able to manipulate, information that would have been of value to its superiors in the capital. Second, that once a territory is partly or wholly acquired, a number of mechanisms are activated that make it difficult to quickly and easily relinquish the acquisition. In the case of Japan in Manchuria, the Kwantung Army’s early successes drastically drove down the costs of its acquisition, and there were some truly severe domestic political costs associated with withdrawal.

And third, that the perception of significant geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will discourage leaders in the capital from acquiring the territory in question, leading to non-expansion. This argument is, in some ways, doubly supported in this case. In the opening weeks of the conquest, concerns over the possibility of military intervention by the Soviet Union, as well as the reactions of the great powers, led civilian leaders in Tokyo to try to rein in the Kwantung Army and to withdraw from newly-acquired territories in Manchuria. However, these leaders’ perceptions and expectations were ultimately mistaken—the Soviets

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3 Contemporary China’s Northeastern provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, and the northeastern portion of the Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia.
refrained from intervening and the great powers’ reactions were largely muted. Once this started to become clear, resistance to the conquest by the central government began to weaken, and the case for subsequent central authorization became progressively stronger. This led to a fall of the government, its replacement with a more expansion-oriented leadership, and, ultimately, the establishment of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo on 1 March 1932.

Historical Background

On the eve of the invasion of Manchuria in September 1931, Japan had had a continuous presence on the Chinese mainland since its surprise victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Under the Treaty of Portsmouth, the Russian Empire ceded to Japan its lease of the Liaodong Peninsula (which would be renamed the Kwantung Leased Territory) as well as the South Manchuria Railway, a 1,129 km rail system with lines running from Port Arthur to Changchun and from Mukden to Antung. Manchuria as a whole totaled roughly 985,000 km² in China’s northeast region, bordering the Korean Peninsula to the south and the Soviet Far East to the north and east. It had a population of 30 million, approximately 220,000 of which were Japanese migrants who had traveled there to work for the South Manchuria Railway or to pursue other opportunities. This was shortly after the “Warlord Era” in China (1916-1928), when Manchuria had been ruled by the influential warlord Zhang Zuolin. While


China would be weakly unified after Chiang Kai-shek’s “Northern Expedition” in 1928, Manchuria still had a great deal of autonomy from the Nationalist regime in Nanjing.\(^7\)

Stationed in the Kwantung Leased Territory, and all along the South Manchuria Railway, was the Kwantung Army, a colonial branch of Imperial Japanese Army, headquartered in Port Arthur.\(^8\) Totaling just 10,400 personnel, it was composed primarily of the 2nd Infantry Division and the Independent Garrison Unit, six battalions that were spread along the South Manchuria Railway.\(^9\) The Kwantung Army was commanded by a series of generals on two-year rotations, and staffed by a few hundred mid-ranking officers, the most important of which was a 42-year old Lieutenant Colonel by the name of Ishiwara Kanji.\(^10\)

Ishiwara had arrived in Manchuria to take up his position in the Operations Section of the Kwantung Army in October of 1928. A career army officer of samurai lineage, Ishiwara got his start in the Imperial Japanese Army at the Sendai Military Preparatory School at the age of 13. After attending a number of military prep schools and academies through his teen years, he served in a variety of posts, from rural Tohoku, Japan, to Japanese-occupied Korea, to the Central China Garrison in Hankow, to a three-year study tour in Berlin, Germany.\(^11\) An intense and idealistic officer, Ishiwara was intellectually gifted, finishing second in his class at the Army Staff College in 1918 and being described by contemporaries as “the most


\(^9\) Coox, *Nomonhan*, p. 27 (Table 2.1).

\(^{10}\) Note that this and other names in this chapter are listed according to Japanese tradition, with the surname preceding the given name.

brilliant student in the history of the college.”  

He read widely in fields as diverse as military history, politics, religion, and philosophy, and would become one of the most popular instructors at the Army Staff College where he returned in the mid-1920s, lecturing on European military strategists such as Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Moltke, and Schlieffen.  

Yet he was also impulsive, often strident and argumentative, was known to bristle at authority, and to be deeply contemptuous of Japan’s Taishō-era political leadership.  

After converting to Nichiren Buddhism in his early thirties, Ishiwara also developed radical, apocalyptic views of a future world-changing clash between Japan and its enemies in the West, particularly the United States.  

Preparing Japan for such an eventuality became his life-defining mission, the first step of which was to take place in Manchuria.  

Ishiwara was joined on the Kwantung Army staff in June of 1929 by his prep school friend and classmate, Itagaki Seishirō. Four years Ishiwara’s senior, Itagaki differed from him in many respects. While Ishiwara was eccentric and impulsive, Itagaki was conventional and deliberate. Ishiwara could be rigid and uncompromising, while Itagaki was flexible and open-minded. And while Ishiwara was the grand strategizer, Itagaki was much more the practical implementer.  

However, despite these personal and stylistic differences, what they came to share in common was the deep conviction that Manchuria presented threats and  

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16 On the comparison between these two individuals, see: Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, pp. 42-43, 134-143; Peattie, Ishiwara Kanji, p. 95; Seki “The Manchurian Incident,” p. 139; Hata and Coox, “Continental Expansion,” p. 294.
opportunities for Japan, and that outright occupation was the necessary response. Ishiwara and Itagaki were the actors on Japan’s imperial periphery who played a crucial role in the planning and execution of the invasion of Manchuria.\footnote{Obviously, Ishiwara and Itagaki didn’t act on their own. At least 26 officers are believed to have participated in planning for the invasion, or knew of it in advance. See: James Weland, “Misguided Intelligence: Japanese Military Officers in the Manchurian Incident, September 1931,” Journal of Military History, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July 1994), p. 446.}

The prime minister of Japan at this time was Wakatsuki Reijirō. His second stint at the premiership, he and many members of his cabinet tended to take a dovish view of Japan’s relations with China and Manchuria. Chief among these was the famed diplomat and foreign minister, Shidehara Kijūrō, whose very name came to be associated with the liberal views that defined Japanese foreign policy in the 1920s. Standing somewhat outside this more liberal consensus was War Minister Minami Jirō, an army general and former commander of the Korea Army, whose foreign policy views, naturally, hewed more closely to those of the Imperial Japanese Army. Finally, there was the head of state, the Shōwa Emperor Hirohito, who was only a few years into his reign but was proving to be a more activist emperor in the realm of politics than his recent predecessors.\footnote{Herbert P. Bix, Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan (New York: Perennial, 2001), pp. 207-208.} Japan did have a Colonial Ministry, established in 1929, though it was a weak institution with little real influence on foreign or imperial policy.\footnote{And, in any case, Prime Minister Wakatsuki held the post of colonial minister when the invasion of Manchuria was launched in September 1931. The Ministry of Colonial Affairs would be abandoned after the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1942. See: Mark R. Peattie, “The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945,” in Peter Duus, ed., The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 6: The Twentieth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 244.} These were the leaders in the capital Tokyo who would be dragged unwillingly, and mostly unwillingly, into further territorial acquisitions on the Chinese mainland.
In and around Manchuria, the Kwantung Army faced a number of important potential threats. Manchuria, on the eve of the Japanese invasion, was ruled by Zhang Xueliang, the son and successor of the warlord Zhang Zuolin. While the father, Zuolin, had been an ally of the Japanese in Manchuria against the government in Nanjing, his unauthorized 1928 assassination by a member of the Kwantung Army would push his son, Xueliang, to cooperate more closely with Nanjing against the Japanese. Zhang Xueliang was the head of what was known as the Fengtian Army, a force of approximately 250,000 personnel. In addition, anti-Japanese sentiment in Manchuria was intensifying in these years, with clashes between Chinese, Korean, and Japanese soldiers and citizens occurring with increasing frequency. To the south, on the other side of the Great Wall, was the recently-established Nationalist Kuomintang regime of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, with its capital in Nanjing. And to the north of Manchuria was the Soviet Union, which had been established less than a decade earlier at the conclusion of the Russian Civil War. In any case of armed conflict involving the Kwantung Army, the key questions were what kind of resistance Zhang’s forces would put up, and whether the Kuomintang or the Soviet Red Army would intervene.

**Tokyo & Manchuria**

Leaders in Tokyo faced severe principal-agent problems vis-à-vis the Kwantung Army in Manchuria as a result of information asymmetries favoring the army and a preference divergence between the two organizations. In terms of information asymmetries, the Kwantung Army itself was the primary source of information coming out of Manchuria.

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While there were Japanese Foreign Ministry consulates in Mukden, Andong, Dairen, and other major cities in the region, they were lightly staffed and often had to rely on army sources themselves. There was also the South Manchuria Railway, however its management was generally sympathetic to the views of the Kwantung Army, and therefore willing to put a similar “spin” on information it sent to Tokyo. And while this was an era of rapid communications technology, and while Manchuria was relatively close to the Japanese capital, the modest distance from Tokyo still afforded the Kwantung Army some informational advantages. In these years, travel from Tokyo to Mukden in Manchuria still took place by boat and train, and took 60 hours at the very fastest. This meant that sending someone from the capital to investigate matters directly would take time, and risked creating new principal-agent problems to contend with.

Second, there was a sharp divergence of preferences between the leaders in Tokyo and the Kwantung Army in Manchuria. Prime Minister Wakatsuki and much of his cabinet were highly cautious when it came to China policy. As noted above, this was the era of “Shidehara Diplomacy,” whose core tenets were international cooperation, economic diplomacy, and non-intervention in China’s domestic political affairs. Wakatsuki and Foreign Minister


24 Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, p. 156n14.

Shidehara therefore advocated for maintaining the territorial status quo and solving any existing problems between the U.S. and China through negotiation. War Minister Minami's policy views for Manchuria were more hawkish than his cabinet colleagues, though he did want to tread carefully, was concerned with discipline within the Kwantung Army, and was willing to restrain its more radical elements.\textsuperscript{26} And while Emperor Hirohito’s specific policy views with respect to Manchuria were not entirely clear or consistent, he did seem to favor a more conciliatory approach, and repeatedly argued for the need to maintain discipline within the army.\textsuperscript{27}

The Kwantung Army, in contrast, was much less cautious in its China policy. They were far less concerned about the possibility of a Soviet intervention, or of the reactions of the other great powers. Being away from the main islands, the Kwantung Army was largely isolated from the domestic politics of Japan.\textsuperscript{28} With little knowledge of, or experience dealing with, international trade and finance, they were far less concerned about the risk of economic sanctions.\textsuperscript{29} And many Kwantung Army officers were largely indifferent to the opinions of the other great powers and their publics.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, many members of the Kwantung Army, and most particularly, officers such as Ishiwara and Itagaki, advocated for


\textsuperscript{27} For instance, he clearly favored the more diplomatic Hamaguchi cabinet to the more hawkish Tanaka cabinet. See: Bix, \textit{Hirohito}, pp. 208, 219, 228-232.

\textsuperscript{28} Crowley, \textit{Japan's Quest for Autonomy}, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{29} Hata and Coox, “Continental Expansion,” p. 293

the complete annexation of Manchuria.\textsuperscript{31} Manchuria was a rich source of valuable natural resources, which would be necessary in the approaching war of attrition with the West.\textsuperscript{32} And invading Manchuria would forestall what Ishiwara saw as an inevitable Soviet occupation, preventing, in his terms, the “communization of Asia.”\textsuperscript{33}

In short, leaders in Tokyo embodied what I referred to in Chapter 2 as “the view from the capital.” Their responsibilities were broad and weighty, being concerned, not only with policy in and around Manchuria, but the well-being and defense of Japan, the interests of the empire as a whole, and relations with other regional states and global great powers. And being cloistered away in the capital Tokyo, they felt few of the daily effects of the nationalist upheaval in Manchuria, and saw little urgency to act.\textsuperscript{34} Ishiwara and many of his Kwantung Army colleagues, in contrast, clearly embodied the “view from the frontier.” Their responsibilities were relatively narrow, being concerned with defending the roughly 3,700 km\textsuperscript{2} Japan possessed in Manchuria, rather than the empire as a whole.\textsuperscript{35} And their sense of urgency to take action in Manchuria was great, as they faced the Chinese nationalist upheaval daily and directly. As historian and Ishiwara biographer Mark Peattie puts it, “Ishiwara in a very real sense was stationed on a sort of Japanese ‘imperial frontier,’ a semi-colonial

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\item \textsuperscript{33} Peattie, \textit{Ishiwara Kanji}, p. 97.
\end{itemize}
environment in which the proximity of danger and opportunity served to reinforce the conviction that the clearest solution to national problems lay close at hand.  

However, the most important source of Tokyo’s inability to control the Kwantung Army, and the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy more broadly, was its substantial institutional autonomy from civilian rule. According to Articles 11 and 12 of the Meiji Constitution of 1889, the Army and Navy were overseen by the Emperor himself, not the Cabinet or the Japanese Diet (parliament). These same constitutional provisions formally institutionalized the military’s traditional “right of supreme command” (dokudan senkō), the principle allowing staff officers of field armies autonomy from civilian control in the areas of operational planning and execution. Japanese law also mandated that the military had to approve ministers of the army and navy for appointment, and that the resignation of either of these officers could lead to the dissolution of the cabinet. These legal and constitutional structures gave the Kwantung Army a high degree of institutional independence, greatly hampering civilian or even central military control.

*The “Mukden Incident”*

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While the idea of separating Manchuria from China by force had emerged within the Kwantung Army as early as 1916, planning in earnest for an invasion began in July of 1929.\textsuperscript{40} Ishiwara organized a series of reconnaissance trips, in which he, Itagaki, and other members of the Kwantung Army staff traveled around Manchuria in civilian clothes to get a direct sense of the terrain, infrastructure, and the Fengtian Army forces and capabilities.\textsuperscript{41} The Kwantung Army was numerically and materially inferior to its adversaries, lacking mechanized forces and aircraft, and being lightly equipped in artillery, engineering, and transport.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, it was essential that the plans be meticulously organized, stressing the importance of intelligence, rigorous training, and the use of surprise, speed, and the concentration of force.\textsuperscript{43} The idea was to devise a series of tightly-interlinked operational plans that would trigger one-another in a sequential fashion, creating a process that, once set in motion, would be very difficult to stop or reverse. Then, all that would be needed was a crisis of a sufficient magnitude to light the fuse, which would be easy to orchestrate. As Ishiwara put it in May 1931, “When the military preparations are completed we do not need to go to great lengths to find the motive or occasion… [the Kwantung Army can] create the occasion for this with a plot and force the nation to go along.”\textsuperscript{44} Operational plans were finalized by the summer of 1931.


\textsuperscript{41} Peattie, \textit{Ishiwara Kanji}, pp. 102-106.


\textsuperscript{43} Peattie, \textit{Ishiwara Kanji}, p. 106; Coox, \textit{Nomonhan}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{44} Peattie, \textit{Ishiwara Kanji}, p. 112.
Despite the information asymmetries favoring the army in Manchuria, it would prove difficult to keep the conspiracy a secret for long. In August and early September of 1931, rumors began to circulate in the capital that trouble was brewing in Manchuria, prompting reporters to regularly press the prime minister and foreign minister for more information. On 18 August, a top advisor to Emperor Hirohito said to an aide, “I can’t help but think the imperial army is cooking something up in Manchuria, Mongolia, and China.” On 4 September, the Foreign Ministry received a telegram from Manchuria warning that “a plot is afoot among young officers in the Kwantung Army to thrash the Chinese army.”

These rumors were taken so seriously that, on 11 September, the Emperor himself summoned Minister of War Minami to question him on the state of military discipline. While Minami assured him that things were under control, the Emperor admonished him to “be even more cautious.” On the fifteenth, Foreign Minister Shidehara received a telegram from the Consul General in Mukden, informing him that the “Kwantung Army [is] assembling troops and bringing out munitions[,] seem likely to start action in the near future.” That same day, the War Ministry dispatched General Staff Intelligence Section chief Major General Tatekawa Yoshistugu to Manchuria, to remind the Kwantung Army of the cabinet’s policy of non-intervention in China and to put a stop to any impending plots. Yet news of Tatekawa’s trip was cabled from an accomplice of Itagaki’s in Army

45 Ogata, *Defiance in Manchuria*, p. 57.


48 Bix, *Hirohito*, p. 231.

Headquarters in Tokyo, warning: “Plot discovered. Tatekawa coming; strike first to avoid implicating him.”

Ishiwara and Itagaki took this advice to heart. While the invasion of Manchuria had been planned for 27 September, they moved it up to the evening of eighteenth, the day that Tatekawa was supposed to arrive. On the day of his arrival, Itagaki met Tatekawa on the train a few stops before Mukden, where they disembarked together at 7:05 PM. From there, Itagaki had one of his staff officers whisk Tatekawa away to be wined and dined at a local restaurant, where Tatekawa would ultimately pass out. Just a few hours later, the invasion of Manchuria was launched.

At 10:20 PM on 18 September 1931, there was an explosion on the southbound track of the South Manchuria Railway at Liutiaokou, just north of Mukden. The charge had been set by a lieutenant in the Kwantung Army, with the aim of framing Zhang Xueliang’s army with the sabotage. Local Kwantung Army conspirators then rushed to the scene, claimed they were fired on by Chinese soldiers and that they returned fire, and pursued the enemy while calling for reinforcements. In accordance with Kwantung Army plans established by Ishiwara and Itagaki, a local battalion commander then ordered an attack on the Fengtian Army barracks at Mukden, which housed as many as 10,000 personnel. As Zhang had recently ordered his troops to under no circumstances resort to force in any confrontation with the Japanese, the barracks were overrun within a few hours and at minimal cost to the

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52 The extent to which Tatekawa may have been aware of the plot is not entirely known. See: Yoshihashi, *Conspiracy at Mukden*, p. 159; Seki “The Manchurian Incident,” p. 227; Ogata, *Defiance in Manchuria*, p. 59.

53 On the differences between Kwantung Army claims and the truth that would ultimately come out after the Pacific War, see: Coox, *Nomonhan*, pp. 30-32.
Kwantung Army. Just four hours after the initial explosion, the Imperial Japanese Army in Korea received a request from the Kwantung Army to dispatch reinforcements, which began to mobilize immediately. By 1:00 PM the next day, Mukden as a whole was under Kwantung Army control, and by 3:00 PM, the South Manchuria Railway’s terminal city of Changchun, to the north, was occupied. Within less than 24 hours, the invasion of Manchuria was well under way.

Tokyo Reacts

The first meeting of Prime Minister Wakatsuki’s cabinet to deal with what became known as the “Mukden Incident” was held in Tokyo on 19 September at 8:00 AM, the morning after the explosion. It was agreed, in line with Wakatsuki’s, Foreign Minister Shidehara’s, and Emperor Hirohito’s preferences, that the crisis should be localized, the spread of hostilities contained, and the dispute settled as expeditiously as possible. As Wakatsuki put it that morning, the plan was to “immediately instruct the commanding officer of the Kwantung Army not to enlarge the theater of conflict nor to bombard and occupy government buildings and fortifications.” War Minister Minami was more sympathetic to the Kwantung Army’s position, but felt bound by the cabinet’s, and especially the emperor’s, wishes, and so he relayed these orders to the Kwantung Army at 6:00 PM that evening.

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54 Seki “The Manchurian Incident,” pp. 217, 222; Coox, Nomonhan, pp. 30, 32; Nish, Japan’s Struggle with Internationalism, p. 23; Nish, Japanese Foreign Policy, p. 75.

55 Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, p. 170.


57 Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, pp. 6-7.

58 Coox, Nomonhan, p. 34; Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, pp. 123-124; Ogata, Defiance in Manchuria, pp. 60-61.
promptly settle the crisis, and to contain and even reverse the Kwantung Army’s expansion to the greatest extent possible, would be the Wakatsuki cabinet’s position for the remainder of its tenure.

The cabinet’s primary concern was the perceived geopolitical risk associated with expanding further into Manchuria. As noted above, the Soviet Union shared a lengthy border with Manchuria and had interests in northern Manchuria, operating the Chinese Eastern Railway there. While the Soviets only had approximately 100,000 military personnel east of the Ural Mountains, it was industrializing rapidly, being midway through its first five-year plan. In 1929, just two years earlier, the Red Army had intervened and routed Zhang Xueliang’s Fengtian Army when it threatened the Chinese Eastern Railway. Thus, the Soviet Union seemed to have both the capabilities and the will to intervene effectively when its interests in the region were threatened. While many military planners saw the risks of Soviet intervention to be relatively low, Tokyo’s position was one of caution regarding this possibility. This was especially the case when it came to the possible extension of hostilities north of the South Manchuria Railway. To try to head off this potential, the cabinet issued a resolution on 23 September, ordering the Kwantung Army to stay out of the


60 Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, p. 111.

61 Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, p. 127; Coox, “The Kwantung Army Dimension,” p. 422; Nish, Japanese Foreign Policy, pp. 71-72.

62 Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, p. 128; Ogata, Defiance in Manchuria, p. 54.

63 Peattie, Ishinara Kansū, p. 98; Ogata, Defiance in Manchuria, p. 110.
north. These concerns were enunciated repeatedly by Prime Minister Wakatsuki, Foreign Minister Shidehara, and even War Minister Minami over the course of the crisis.

The cabinet was also deeply concerned with the reaction of the other great powers, the members of the Nine Power Treaty, and the League of Nations at large. In the cabinet’s first meeting dealing with the crisis, on the morning of 19 September, Prime Minister Wakatsuki rhetorically queried Minister of War Minami: if the Mukden incident turned out to be “an act of conspiracy by the Japanese army, what do you propose we do about our nation’s standing in the world?” In the decade running up to the invasion of Manchuria, Japan’s trade as a percentage of its gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to approximately 35 percent, and, thus, the threat of sanctions loomed particularly large. In early October, in response to the suggestion of setting up an autonomous regime in Manchuria, Wakatsuki said that, in doing so, Japan would not only “be violating the Nine-Power Treaty, we would be making enemies of the whole world. We stand a chance of being isolated by economic sanctions…” That same month, Wakatsuki warned that “if Japan does not act with due consideration of her international position, Japan in the end will be isolated, and this will bring an unexpected misfortune upon the nation.” Similar concerns of economic sanctions

64 Barnhart, Japan Prepares for Total War, p. 33.

65 On Wakatsuki, see: Nish, Japan’s Struggle with Internationalism, p. 46; Nish, Japanese Foreign Policy, p. 76. On Shidehara, see: Crowley, Japan’s Quest for Autonomy, p. 141. On Minami, see: Shimada, “The Extension of Hostilities,” pp. 263-264.

66 Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, pp. 6-7.


68 Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, pp. 210-211.

and diplomatic isolation were shared by Foreign Minister Shidehara, Emperor Hirohito, and central army authorities as well.\footnote{On Shidehara, see: Crowley, \textit{Japan's Quest for Autonomy}, p. 141. On Hirohito, see: Bix, \textit{Hirohito}, p. 245. On the General Staff, see: Ogata, \textit{Defiance in Manchuria}, pp. 131, 177.}

Thus, the perceived geopolitical risk associated with further acquisitions in Manchuria led the government in Tokyo to oppose the invasion of Manchuria, and to try to rein in the Kwantung Army. However, the very fact of the Kwantung Army’s unauthorized expansion activated two mechanisms that would put the cabinet in a serious bind, and would ultimately make withdrawal impossible to achieve. First, the Kwantung Army’s quick successes in its operations in Manchuria dramatically drove down the costs of acquisition. By 21 September, the Kwantung Army had secured all major centers along the South Manchuria Railway and had occupied Kirin, a city roughly 100 km east of Changchun. In mid-November, the army moved on Tsitsihar in north Manchuria,\footnote{Tsitsihar would be evacuated a few days later on orders of the cabinet, only be recaptured in February 1932. See: Peattie, \textit{Ishiwara Kanji}, p. 133.} and in early January 1932, it took Chinchow and Shanhaikwan, completing the occupation of the south right up to the Great Wall.\footnote{Peattie, \textit{Ishiwara Kanji}, p. 133; Ogata, \textit{Defiance in Manchuria}, p. 117; Marius B. Jansen, \textit{The Making of Modern Japan} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 584.} On 5 February, Harbin was occupied, effectively completing the conquest of Manchuria.\footnote{Coox, \textit{Nomonhan}, p. 44.} These territories had been acquired at remarkably little cost. In taking the barracks at Mukden, the Kwantung Army suffered only 24 casualties in an assault on as many as 10,000 personnel.\footnote{Coox, \textit{Nomonhan}, p. 31.} The Kwantung Army suffered 155 casualties in its occupation of Changchun just days later.\footnote{Coox, \textit{Nomonhan}, p. 32.}
Kirin was then occupied without firing a shot. And Tsitsihar was taken over the course of less than two days, and the entry into the city itself was bloodless. Overall, the Imperial Japanese Army suffered 2,530 killed in its conquest of Manchuria, a low figure given the area of the territory acquired, the size of the forces it faced, and the kinds of casualties it had suffered in past wars.

These successes were facilitated, not only by the rigor of the Kwantung Army’s training and the detail of its planning, but also by the Fengtian Army’s policy of non-resistance and the lack of intervention by the Soviet Union and the other great powers. The Soviet Union was far more concerned with domestic political issues, and with its European flank, than with events in Manchuria at this time. The Soviets’ defensive intentions were strongly signaled in their December 1931 proposal of a non-aggression pact with Japan, just as the Kwantung Army was beginning to wrap up the conquest of Manchuria. And the reactions of the United States and the other great powers were similarly muted. This was, in part, because they were still preoccupied with the continuing fallout of the Great Depression of 1929. However, it is also clear that within a few days of the invasion, both the United States and the United Kingdom were aware that the central government had lost control of the

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76 Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, pp. 179-180.
78 Louise Young, Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 106.
Kwantung Army, and this, too, likely tempered their responses.\textsuperscript{81} This absence of effective resistance severely weakened the arguments for restraint from leaders in the capital.\textsuperscript{82} And it made the hawks, who had doubted the great powers’ willingness to intervene, look prescient. Thus, the reservations of leaders in the capital would dissipate as the conquest progressed, as, one-by-one, their greatest fears failed to come to pass.\textsuperscript{83} And with every act of defiance committed by the Kwantung Army, the cabinet, court, and Diet was rendered progressively weaker.

A second mechanism that would crop up and make retrenchment difficult was the overwhelming support among the public and the press that the Kwantung Army’s actions received.\textsuperscript{84} In a severely economically-depressed Japan, the idea of a resource-rich Manchuria as an “economic lifeline” came to be widely accepted among the populace, particularly in rural areas. In fact, Ishiwara, Itagaki, and other conspirators had deliberately sought to shape elite and public opinion at home and in Manchuria in the months and weeks leading up to the invasion.\textsuperscript{85} They did so by producing and distributing pamphlets and organizing speaking

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Beasley, \textit{Japanese Imperialism}, p. 198.
\end{itemize}
tours throughout Japan, with the support of some members of the General Staff in Tokyo.\textsuperscript{86} They were greatly aided in this by the Manchurian Youth League, a nationalist organization formed with Kwantung Army backing in 1928. The League traveled widely throughout Japan in the months preceding the invasion, arguing for a stronger policy in Manchuria.\textsuperscript{87}

Once the invasion was underway, the Kwantung Army continued to foster this support, setting up a propaganda office, holding regular briefings, distributing pamphlets, and broadcasting patriotic songs and messages over the radio.\textsuperscript{88} All of this public support generated significant pressure on the cabinet to protect and defend Japanese nationals and soldiers in Manchuria. And the Kwantung Army exploited this pressure masterfully, using “false flag” operations as an excuse to occupy Manchurian cities. In Kirin, for instance, Kwantung Army agents were dispatched to foment unrest, which was then used as an excuse to invade in September 1931, in order to “protect” Japanese property and nationals.\textsuperscript{89} A similar strategy was attempted in Harbin that same month, though in this case the cabinet stood firm for the time being.\textsuperscript{90} As time went by, the public and the press became increasingly unified behind the Kwantung Army’s invasion of Manchuria, to the point of the press voluntarily turning itself into a “propaganda machine for the army.”\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{86} Yoshihashi, \textit{Conspiracy at Mukden}, pp. 132-133.


\textsuperscript{91} Young, “Imagined Empire,” p. 95.
The overwhelming public support for the army’s actions created easy avenues of attack for the cabinet’s opponents in and out of government, severely raising the risk of domestic political punishment. The first attacks on the Minseitō Party cabinet of Prime Minister Wakatsuki came from the opposition Seiyūkai Party and its leaders. Alredy prone to see the ruling cabinet’s Shidehara diplomacy in China as “weak-kneed,” the opposition was quick to capitalize on the opportunity of a popular war in Manchuria to attack. And these attacks ultimately paid off at the ballot box. While Wakatsuki came to office with his Minseitō Party holding a large majority in the Diet, the party would be absolutely trounced in the February 1932 elections, losing 127 seats (and their majority) to the opposition Seiyūkai. This was a strong endorsement of the Kwantung Army’s actions in Manchuria, and a vote against the Minseitō cabinet’s cautious policy in China.

Other forms of potential domestic political punishment faced by the cabinet were far more radical. For instance, the Sakurakai (Cherry Blossom Society), a secret ultranationalist organization within the Imperial Japanese Army, staged coup attempts against Minseitō cabinets in March and October of 1931. Since their formation in September 1930, they had advocated for a much more forceful policy in Manchuria and the establishment of totalitarian government in Japan. While in neither case did the coup succeed, these were clear expressions of opposition to Shidehara Diplomacy in China, and would have a chilling

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95 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, p. 79.

effect on the cabinet, leading the foreign minister and others to soften their resistance to the Kwantung Army’s insubordination.\textsuperscript{97}

Besides coup plots, there were also assassinations. In November of 1930, Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi was shot by an ultranationalist who was opposed to his signing of the London Naval Treaty, reducing Japan’s naval armaments.\textsuperscript{98} While Hamaguchi would survive the initial attempt, he would never recover his health, and died from related complications less than a year later. It would also come to light that the abortive October 1931 coup included planned assassinations of both Prime Minister Wakatsuki and Foreign Minister Shidehara.\textsuperscript{99} And Inukai Tsuyoshi, the Seiyūkai party leader who would succeed Wakatsuki as prime minister in December 1931, would himself be killed in office in May 1932. His residence was stormed by young officers of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy who, despite the Inukai cabinet’s more forward-leaning policy in Manchuria, were opposed to his attempts to subject the military to stricter civilian control.\textsuperscript{100} The very real risks of coup and assassination in these years had a profound effect on Japanese leaders. As Shimada notes, “The spectacle of army terrorism was reducing the cabinet, and even the supreme command, to impotence.”\textsuperscript{101}

One final additional means by which the Kwantung Army manipulated the cabinet in Tokyo and enhanced their relative influence was through veiled threats of secession from

\textsuperscript{97} Crowley, \textit{Japan’s Quest for Autonomy}, pp. 82-83; Ogata, \textit{Defiance in Manchuria}, p. 100; Shimada, “The Extension of Hostilities,” p. 279.


\textsuperscript{99} Ogata, \textit{Defiance in Manchuria}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{100} Nish, \textit{Japanese Foreign Policy}, p. 85.

Japan. In mid-October 1931, rumors began to circulate in government and military circles in Tokyo of the possibility of the Kwantung Army seceding and independently establishing itself in Manchuria. While the origin of these rumors is a matter of dispute, during the invasion of Manchuria Ishiwa Kanji is believed to have sent a telegram to Tokyo stating that “if the Japanese government constantly interferes… [then] we will have to break the glorious history of the Imperial army and separate ourselves from the empire.” The purpose of these threats was to put pressure on the government in Tokyo to support the Kwantung Army’s expansionist policy in Manchuria. And whatever doubts may have existed in Tokyo as to the credibility of these threats, central army authorities took them seriously enough to investigate carefully. Thus, a combination of the Kwantung Army’s early successes and fervent support for their actions among the press and the public would effectively bind the hands of leaders in Tokyo, making restraining or withdrawing the Kwantung Army incredibly difficult.

Wakatsuki’s Dilemma

Thus, the cabinet in Tokyo was faced with conflicting pressures in Manchuria. On the one hand, the risk of Russian intervention and the expected reactions of the other great powers pushed them to tighten the reins on the Kwantung Army. On the other hand, the Kwantung Army’s initial successes and the overwhelming support their exploits received from the public and the press created incentives for leadership to swim with the tide and accept their

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102 Ogata suggests the rumor began with Cho Isamu, a member of the Sakurakai, whereas Yoshihashi suggests it may have originated with Doihara Kenji, a member of the Kwantung Army staff. See: Ogata, Defiance in Manchuria, p. 93; Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, p. 210.

103 Peattie, Ishiwa Kanji, p. 128.

104 Ogata, Defiance in Manchuria, pp. 94, 97.

105 Coox, Nomonhan, p. 48.
faits accomplis. The cross-pressures created by these conflicting incentives presented the cabinet with a deeply distressing dilemma. The Prime Minister himself was discouraged, even despairing. As he told a secretary to the court the day following the invasion, “Under these circumstances I am quite powerless to restrain the military. How can his majesty’s military act without his sanction? What can I do? …I am in serious trouble.”\textsuperscript{106} Almost a month later, the Prime Minister was even more exasperated. As he told this same secretary on 12 October,

“We are in real trouble. In the interest of Japan, I have done all I can to improve her relations with other nations… I have constantly endeavored to base the conduct of our foreign relations on good faith. I would summon the Minister of War to explain to him at great length the necessity of maintaining orderly conduct of our troops abroad… Then what would happen? The troops stationed abroad would commit acts which would run completely counter to the agreement that the Minister of War and I had just made. This is followed by immediate repercussions at Geneva. I am as good as betrayed. Too, they are blemishing Japan’s reputation. I am at a loss as to what to do. I cannot go on like this. Yet, I cannot very well resign at this point. Indeed, matters have come to a serious pass.”\textsuperscript{107}

The dilemma facing the cabinet weighed heavily on Foreign Minister Shidehara as well. The Mukden consul-general met with Shidehara on 16 November, and described him as follows:

\textsuperscript{106} Bix, Hirohito, pp. 236-237.

\textsuperscript{107} Yoshihashi, Conspiracy at Mukden, p. 193.
“His demeanor seemed discouraged, disappointed, and dejected. One could recognize without words how much he was suffering in this unprecedented emergency. I had unbound sympathy for him in his predicament.”

*Tokyo Decides*

These pressures were ultimately more than the leadership could bear. On 12 December 1931, having lost the confidence of the imperial court, the Wakatsuki cabinet fell. They were replaced the following day, as noted above, by the opposition Seiyūkai cabinet of Inukai Tsuyoshi. By this point it had become clear that the geopolitical risk involved in acquiring Manchuria was far less severe than first supposed, allowing the Inukai cabinet to adopt a more forward-leaning Manchuria policy than its predecessors. The rise of Inukai effectively ended serious resistance by the central government to the Kwantung Army’s conquest of Manchuria.

Yet, the Inukai cabinet faced their own struggles with the Kwantung Army. Inukai, a hawk on Manchuria policy, was nonetheless concerned about the reactions of the great powers, and was intent on restoring discipline within the army. This was not just his preference—he was under orders to do so. As Emperor Hirohito admonished him upon his appointment as prime minister, the “meddling of the army in domestic and foreign affairs is something which, for the welfare of the nation, must be viewed with apprehension. Be mindful of my anxiety.” The Emperor again warned Inukai in late December to “maintain international trust” and to be aware of the impact the Kwantung Army’s actions were having

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108 Nish, *Japan’s Struggle with Internationalism*, p. 47.
109 Nish, *Japan’s Struggle with Internationalism*, p. 70.
110 Crowley, *Japan’s Quest for Autonomy*, p. 150.
in international affairs.\textsuperscript{111} Inukai would try; and he would worry. As he wrote to a senior army official in a 15 February 1932 letter:

“what is most worrisome is that the will of the senior officers is not thoroughly observed by their subordinates. For example, the action in Manchuria seems to have been brought about by the united power of the field-grade officers, who made their superiors acquiesce automatically... It is feared that it might became customary to act single-mindedly upon the belief that should those who hold direct command over regiments unite and cause a disturbance, the superiors would finally give ex post facto approval to all matters, and that [such a trend] might create a major change in military control and discipline... Therefore I wish the elders of the army to take remedial measures now, when the malady has not yet spread widely.”\textsuperscript{112}

But Inukai, too, was only minimally in control of events in Manchuria. With popular opinion surging behind the Kwantung Army, and having appointed the radical, “fire-eating” Araki Sadao as minister of war, in the long run Inukai had few options but to swim with the tide.\textsuperscript{113} The invasion and occupation of Manchuria was an accomplished fact.

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The Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo was proclaimed on 1 March 1932, marking the end of Japan’s conquest of Manchuria. It was nominally independent, but was, in fact, under the strict control of the Kwantung Army. As an internal document from January 1932 put it, Manchukuo would adopt “the external form of a constitutional, republican government...
but maintain the internal reality of a centralized dictatorship imbued with the political authority of our empire.”

The Inukai cabinet would initially hold off on formally recognizing Manchukuo; notably, out of concern for the reactions of the other great powers. Though, this, too, would occur in September 1932 with the same sense of inevitability that had permeated the entire affair. Inukai’s cabinet would be the last party-led government in pre-war Japan, and his May 1932 assassination was an important milestone in Japan’s turn toward military dictatorship.

Despite their insubordination, Ishiwara Kanji and Itagaki Seishirō would be generously rewarded for their actions in Manchuria, and would continue to rise through the ranks of the Imperial Japanese Army. Ishiwara was given the Order of the Golden Kite, third class, for the invasion of Manchuria, and was promoted to full colonel ahead of most of his Army Staff College classmates. He retired from the Imperial Japanese Army at the rank of lieutenant general in March 1941, just a few months before the outbreak of the Pacific War. Itagaki rose to even greater heights, being promoted to the rank of general and serving as chief of staff of the Kwantung Army and the China Expeditionary Army, as well as a short stint as minister of war. Yet no individual had been as important to the Japanese conquest of Manchuria as Ishiwara. With the aid of Itagaki and others, he had been deeply involved in nearly all aspects of the invasion, from the Mukden Incident in September 1931

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115 Ogata, Defiance in Manchuria, p. 138; Nish, Japan’s Struggle with Internationalism, p. 88; Kupchan, The Vulnerability of Empire, pp. 319-320; Bix, Hirohito, p. 249; Ward, “Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism,” p. 634.

116 Peattie, Ishiwara Kanji, pp. xviii, 139; Coox, Nomonhan, p. 56.
to the establishment of Manchukuo in March 1932. As Itagaki had told a friend a few weeks into the invasion, this isn’t the Kwantung Army’s war, “it’s Ishiwara’s war.”

**D’Annunzio’s Sacra Entrada: Italy and Fiume, 1919-1920**

Italy refrained from acquiring the Adriatic port city of Fiume between September 1919 and December 1920. The ultimately failed conquest of Fiume was independently planned and carried out by disgruntled members of the Italian armed forces, led by an eccentric literary figure and World War I veteran. The theory of inadvertent expansion makes two arguments that are borne out in this case. First, that once a territory is acquired, a number of mechanisms are activated that make it very difficult for leaders in the capital to easily withdraw and return the territory. In the case of Italy in Fiume, early domestic political support for the venture effectively bound the hands of the leadership in Rome. And second, that the perception of significant geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will discourage leaders in the capital from retaining the territory, leading to non-expansion. In the case at hand, Italy’s WWI allies stood firm, absolutely refusing to accept the conquest of Fiume. These perceived risks would ultimately be decisive, leading the Italian government to sign the Treaty of Rapallo in November of 1920, paving the way for the city’s independence as the “Free State of Fiume.”

**Historical Background**

Fiume in the early twentieth century was a small, bustling port city of approximately 50,000 in the northeast corner of the Adriatic Sea, where the Dalmatian coast meets the Istrian

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118 Contemporary Rijeka, Croatia.
Peninsula. As a port city nestled between Austrian and Hungarian territories within the Dual Monarchy’s multi-ethnic empire, and sitting just 120 km from Italy’s pre-World War I border, Fiume’s political and cultural identity had long been diverse and cosmopolitan. A 1910 census recorded the population as consisting of 49 percent Italian, 31 percent Slav, 13 percent Magyar (Hungarian), as well as a smattering of Germans and other ethnicities.\(^{119}\) Fiume was strategically and economically important, as a regional economic hub with rail lines connecting Belgrade, Prague, Budapest, and Zagreb to the coast.\(^{120}\)

With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the aftermath of World War I (1914-18), the Allies established a joint occupation of the city, consisting of American, British, French, and Italian forces.\(^{121}\) The Italians, for their part, were intent on ultimately annexing the city. While Fiume was not promised to Italy in the 1915 Treaty of London, which had conditioned its entry into the war, many surrounding territories were, and the city would have added to Italy’s growing dominance of the Adriatic. After 462,000 dead, 954,000 wounded, and three-and-a-half years of fighting, many in Italy only hoped to receive what they saw as their due.\(^{122}\) Yet the status of Fiume would have to await the negotiations of the Paris Peace Conference, which were to begin in January of 1919. And as it would turn out,

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this port city of roughly 30 km² would be a major stumbling block in Italy’s negotiations with its allies at Versailles.\(^\text{123}\)

Italy’s territorial ambitions in Fiume and beyond ran headlong into the Allies’—and particularly, American President Woodrow Wilson’s—interest in what was known as “national self-determination,” the idea that nationalities should have the right to freely choose their sovereignty. Wilson flatly refused to accept the Treaty of London, arguing in the first of his Fourteen Points that only “Open covenants… openly arrived at” should be recognized in the postwar international order. The President also claimed, for Italy specifically, that adjustment of its borders “should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality,” a clause that weakened many of Italy’s territorial claims, Fiume included.\(^\text{124}\) While, as noted above, Fiume proper had a plurality of Italians in its population, if the adjacent and deeply interconnected suburb of Suzak was added, the plurality went to the Slavs. And estimates based on political party affiliation in Fiume suggest that a narrow plurality favored annexation to the newly formed Kingdom of Yugoslavia, rather than to Italy.\(^\text{125}\) In short, Italy’s territorial claims rested on shaky ground, and the American president simply wouldn’t budge.

The conflict over Fiume at Versailles would spark protest and unrest in Italy and in Fiume itself. Italy faced severe economic hardship in the aftermath of the war. It owed the


\(^{125}\) With Suzak included, the area was approximately 45 percent Slavic and 40 percent Italian. And 36 percent of the population was affiliated with the party advocating annexation to Yugoslavia, 34 percent affiliated with the party advocating annexation to Italy, and 30 percent advocating autonomy and independence. MacDonald, *A Political Escapade*, pp. 35-37.
Allies the equivalent of $3.5 billion in wartime loans, saw greater inflation than anywhere in Europe with the exception of Russia, and demobilization had resulted in widespread unemployment.\(^{126}\) This was the beginning of Italy’s *Biennio Rosso*, or “Two Red Years,” a period marked by mass strikes, land seizures, factory occupations, and violent conflict between socialist, anarchist, and nationalist political organizations.\(^{127}\) Fiume, as well, saw roving nationalist gangs, deadly riots, and armed clashes between Italian and Allied forces in the spring and summer of 1919.\(^{128}\)

Amid the political turmoil of these months, Fiume emerged in Italy as a potent symbol of Italian pride and honor; and its failure to acquire it, a symbol of national humiliation. As Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando told his colleagues at Versailles in April 1919, “Italian public opinion is very excitable. I am doing what I can to calm it; but the consequences of disappointment of this kind would be very grave.”\(^{129}\) The nationalist press pushed for the annexation of Fiume, while placards were posted and walls painted throughout the country with similar demands. When Orlando eventually withdrew from the Conference over disagreements regarding Fiume, he was greeted in Rome with cries of “Viva Fiume!”\(^{130}\)

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Prominent among those agitating for the annexation of Fiume was the Italian poet, playwright, novelist, and philosopher, Gabriele D’Annunzio. A gifted and prolific writer from an early age, D’Annunzio was Italy’s most esteemed literary figure. The Irish novelist James Joyce would rank D’Annunzio alongside Rudyard Kipling and Leo Tolstoy as one of the “most naturally talented writers” of the era.\(^{131}\) So broad was his fame and success that most Italians simply referred to him as *Il Vate*, or “The Poet.”\(^{132}\) D’Annunzio was not a physically attractive man. He was short, thin, totally bald, with close-set eyes, a bulbous nose, and crooked, decaying teeth. Yet he walked with confidence, wore well-cut clothes, donned copious amounts of cologne, and was irresistibly charming.\(^{133}\) He was notoriously eccentric and famously promiscuous, carrying on dozens of affairs throughout his adult life, most notably with Italy’s most acclaimed actress of the time, Eleanora Duse. He flouted convention and had a flair for the dramatic, possessing an almost-hypnotic effect on those around him. He was also an ardent nationalist, had an immensely inflated sense of his own importance, and had a great deal of contempt for the political class in Rome.\(^{134}\)

Besides writing and womanizing, D’Annunzio had a short parliamentary career, serving in the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 1897 to 1900, where he often seemed far more interested in gaining publicity than engaging in the mundane business of governing.\(^{135}\) After spending a few years in France, having fled creditors in Italy in 1910, D’Annunzio returned

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\(^{132}\) Rusinow, *Italy’s Austrian Heritage*, p. 133.


to his native country to enlist with the outbreak of World War I, where he had a roving commission between Italy’s army, navy, and air force. D’Annunzio lost an eye landing an airplane during the war, and was ultimately decorated for his service.\textsuperscript{136} Back in Italy after the war, at the age of 55, he became engaged in nationalist causes and organizations and was unmatched in his ability to whip crowds up into a frenzy with rousing speeches and pungent language. D’Annunzio was the actor on the periphery who would aim to drag Italian leaders in Rome into acquiring Fiume.

\textit{Fiume}

Within a week of the armistice on 11 November 1918, D’Annunzio was contacted by local Italian authorities in Fiume seeking his aid in facilitating its acquisition.\textsuperscript{137} Planning for some sort of march on the port city began in earnest between the winter of 1918 and early spring of 1919.\textsuperscript{138} Financing for the operation, largely through nationalist organizations and Italian industrialists, was secured in the spring of that year, as were the forces necessary to carry out the conquest. By May 1919, D’Annunzio was enlisted to lead the march. Rumors began to circulate in Rome that summer that a conspiracy involving Fiume was being cooked up.\textsuperscript{139} The Italian Prime Minister, Francesco Nitti, repeatedly reminded his generals in the region that the government’s policy was to avoid any precipitous action in Fiume at all costs.\textsuperscript{140} Naturally, D’Annunzio did nothing to calm nerves in Rome, asking, in a public address on 7


\textsuperscript{137} Hughes-Hallett, \textit{Gabriele D’Annunzio}, p. 402.

\textsuperscript{138} Ledeen, \textit{The First Duce}, p. 48.


\textsuperscript{140} Rusinow, \textit{Italy’s Austrian Heritage}, p. 135; Ledeen, \textit{The First Duce}, p. 73.
May, “Down there, on the roads of Istria, on the roads of Dalmatia, do you not hear the footsteps of a marching army?”141

The conquest of Fiume was ultimately set for 11 September 1919. D'Annunzio considered the eleventh of each month to be lucky, as it coincided with a successful WWI mission he participated in (as well as a past sexual exploit).142 D'Annunzio was to travel from Ronchi in Italy’s northeast corner, across the Istrian Peninsula, arriving in Fiume in the morning, a distance of about 100 km. He began with just 186 members of the First Battalion of the 2nd Grenadiers, based out of Sardinia, but had a Fiuman militia that was to join his forces upon arrival.143 He and his grenadiers set off from Ronchi at midnight on the eleventh, D'Annunzio leading the column in a bright red Fiat 501. Before departing, D'Annunzio sent then-nationalist journalist Benito Mussolini the first of hundreds of letters the two would exchange in the months that followed:

“My dear companion, the die is cast. I depart. Tomorrow morning I will conquer Fiume. May the God of Italy help us.”144

Along the way, D'Annunzio and his forces were met by numerous Italian soldiers who were under orders to stop, and even fire on, the Poet if he tried to pass. However, most were sympathetic to his cause and instead cheered him as he passed, with many abandoning their posts to join his column.145 By the time he arrived at the outskirts of Fiume on the morning

143 MacDonald, A Political Escapade, p. 56; Rusinow, Italy’s Austrian Heritage, p. 133; Ledeen, The First Duce, pp. 65-6.
145 Rusinow, Italy’s Austrian Heritage, pp. 134, 139.
of the twelfth, D’Annunzio was at the head of between 2,000 and 2,500 personnel, with dozens of trucks, tanks, and armored cars.146 D’Annunzio was met outside of the city by the commander of Italian forces in Fiume, General Pittaluga, who implored him to turn back. In typically dramatic fashion, D’Annunzio replied, “I understand you will have to open fire on my soldiers…, but if you must do this, fire first upon me!” as he pulled back his coat, revealing his WWI decorations.147 Seeing no other option, the general let D’Annunzio and his forces into the city, and by noon the conquest of Fiume was complete. With characteristic grandiosity, D’Annunzio would refer to his acquisition of Fiume as the Sacra Entrada, his “Sacred Entrance.”148 That evening, at 6:00 PM, D’Annunzio appeared on the balcony of the governor’s palace, and addressed the crowd: “Italians of Fiume!... I proclaim: I, a soldier, a volunteer, a wounded veteran of the war, believe that I interpret the will of the people of Italy in proclaiming the annexation of Fiume!” a declaration that was met with an eruption of celebration.149

Rome Reacts & Decides

When Prime Minister Nitti learned of events in Fiume, he was visibly shocked and absolutely livid, forcefully pounding his fist on his desk.150 He was not surprised by D’Annunzio’s attempt to take Fiume; he had, after all, been receiving reports on this possibility for months. What surprised him was the Poet’s success—and the defection of thousands of Italian soldiers that it had required. The following day, on 13 September, Nitti made a statement before the

146 Ledeen, The First Duce, p. 66.
147 MacDonald, A Political Escapade, pp. 95-96.
148 MacDonald, A Political Escapade, p. 92; Hughes-Hallett, Gabriele D’Annunzio, p. 413.
150 Ledeen, The First Duce, p. 73; Hughes-Hallett, Gabriele D’Annunzio, p. 417.
Italian parliament, expressing publicly his anger and disapproval, and assuring his colleagues that “the Government had taken appropriate measures.” A few days later, on 18 September, Nitti’s cabinet ordered a blockade on Fiume, with the Italian Third Army surrounding the city by land and the Italian navy blocking the entrance to its harbor. Then Nitti took the extraordinary step of requesting Italian King Victor Emmanuel III to call a meeting of his privy council, which was held a week later, on 25 September. It was attended by leading Italian political figures, top military leaders, the king and his closest advisors, and the prime minister, and they were unanimous in their opposition to D’Annunzio’s unauthorized conquest. With this strong backing, the prime minister returned to parliament and called for snap elections to be held in November. The leadership’s position was firm. D’Annunzio’s fait accompli could not be accepted.

The primary reason for the government’s strenuous opposition was the perceived geopolitical risk associated with accepting the city. As noted above, D’Annunzio’s fait accompli occurred in the context of a joint Italian occupation of Fiume alongside the U.S., Britain, and France. After receiving assurances from Rome that the matter would be dealt with expeditiously, Italy’s great power allies agreed to have their forces make a hasty exit, though no one was pleased with the situation. Prime Minister Nitti initially thought that the situation could be used to Italy’s advantage, and that D’Annunzio’s escapade might help strengthen his position in negotiations over Fiume. Yet while the British and French were

151 Rusinow, Italy’s Austrian Heritage, pp. 135-136.
152 MacDonald, A Political Escapade, pp. 103-104; Ledeen, The First Duce, p. 77.
154 MacDonald, A Political Escapade, pp. 102-103, 122; Ledeen, The First Duce, p. 79.
155 Ledeen, The First Duce, p. 77.
somewhat more sympathetic, President Wilson was absolutely firm: D’Annunzio had to go, and Fiume was to become a free city under League of Nations auspices.\textsuperscript{156} The president made his view clear to Italian Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni just days after D’Annunzio’s march on Fiume,\textsuperscript{157} and Britain, France, and the United States penned a joint memorandum on 9 December pointing to the “urgent necessity” of creating an independent Fiuman state.\textsuperscript{158} When he delivered this memorandum to the Italians, French President Georges Clemenceau noted that “There could be no peace in Europe till this question was settled.”\textsuperscript{159} It was clear to Nitti that the allies were in no mood to make concessions.\textsuperscript{160}

And Italy had few options. For one, it was militarily much weaker than any of its allies, let alone all three of them together, so it couldn’t exactly stand and fight.\textsuperscript{161} But more importantly, in its dire postwar economic state, it needed its great power allies, and the U.S. in particular, more than ever. As noted above, Italy had borrowed billions from its allies, and the U.S. was continuing to extend it credit. Rupture with the United States at this point


\textsuperscript{160} Ledeen, \textit{The First Duce}, p. 131.

would have meant true economic calamity for Italy, something Prime Minister Nitti, as a trained economist, understood only too well.\textsuperscript{162}

However, the decision was complicated by the fact that D’Annunzio’s conquest of Fiume itself activated mechanisms that made withdrawal difficult from the perspective of Rome. The first was the simple fact of his success. Fiume had been acquired by D’Annunzio at no cost in human life, driving down the costs of acquisition for leaders in the capital. But second, and more importantly, the conquest of Fiume had the backing of a significant portion of the Italian military, as well as the press and public more broadly. A perceived risk of popular backlash led Prime Minister Nitti to soften the blockade of Fiume after just a few days.\textsuperscript{163} Its resulting leakiness meant that soldiers, sailors, and air personnel continued to desert to Fiume in droves to enlist in D’Annunzio’s army and join the cause. The Fiuman forces numbered as many as 9,000 at its peak, and at a certain point D’Annunzio had to begin turning military defectors away for lack of accommodations.\textsuperscript{164} The press, too, seized on the march on Fiume, painting D’Annunzio as an Italian folk hero.\textsuperscript{165} And important sections of the public backed D’Annunzio’s venture as well.

The domestic political threats that leaders in Rome faced were not merely electoral. For instance, former Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando claimed during the Paris Peace negotiations that a secret society had pledged to assassinate him if he returned without Italy’s irredentist claims.\textsuperscript{166} Furthermore, in June 1919 a nationalist coup plot seeking to overthrow

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{163} Hughes-Hallett, \textit{Gabriele D’Annunzio}, p. 426.
\item \textsuperscript{164} MacDonald, \textit{A Political Escapade}, p. 106; Rusinow, \textit{Italy’s Austrian Heritage}, p. 139.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Gumbrecht, “On Fiume’s Place,” p. 265.
\item \textsuperscript{166} MacMillan, \textit{Paris 1919}, p. 293.
\end{itemize}
the Italian government was uncovered and broken up.\textsuperscript{167} And there were rumors circulating about assassins sent from Fiume to kill Prime Minister Nitti and Foreign Minister Tittoni.\textsuperscript{168} Thus, members of the Nitti cabinet were aware that rising nationalist sentiment in Italy represented a threat, not only to their electoral fortunes, but to Italian political institutions and even to their lives.\textsuperscript{169}

This combination of strenuous allied opposition and public and military support created a real dilemma for the Nitti cabinet.\textsuperscript{170} President Wilson was unwilling to give an inch on Fiume, and had significant economic leverage over the prime minister. Yet there were military and nationalist forces pressing him on, threatening, not only his prime ministership, but possibly his life. It was as if the ground beneath Nitti’s feet, as he put it, “had been mined.”\textsuperscript{171} Under these trying circumstances, the prime minister adopted a patient and delicate strategy of assuring the allies that Italy would clean up the Fiuman mess, while negotiating with D’Annunzio to resolve the situation.

\textit{D’Annunzian Fiume & its End}

For the fifteen months of its existence, Fiume under Gabriele D’Annunzio reflected all of the eccentricities of its leader. The outlaw city attracted curious visitors from all over Europe—gangsters and prostitutes, politicians and war heroes, famed musicians and Nobel


\textsuperscript{169} Rusinow, \textit{Italy’s Austrian Heritage}, p. 142.


\textsuperscript{171} Hughes-Hallett, \textit{Gabriele D’Annunzio}, p. 417.
Prize-winning scientists.\textsuperscript{172} There were parades and political rallies by day, and banquets and torchlit processions by night. The city was said to have reverberated with the sounds of love-making, and local hospitals reported seeing ten patients with venereal disease for every one patient with other ailments.\textsuperscript{173} Drugs—particularly, cocaine—were everywhere, and alcohol flowed like water.\textsuperscript{174} And the Poet was at the center of it all, addressing throngs of admirers, glad-handing his loyal supporters, and hosting debaucherous soirees at the governor’s palace. Yet there was a much darker side to it all, as well. For D’Annunzio would turn out, not only to be a hopeless administrator, but also a deeply authoritarian leader.\textsuperscript{175} The Poet embraced a charismatic form of personalistic rule, in which he was entirely above the law and dissent was made a capital crime.\textsuperscript{176} Before long, the prisons in Fiume began to overflow, and extrajudicial expulsions, kidnappings, and killings became commonplace.\textsuperscript{177} Security forces were on every corner, and anti-Slavic pogroms were a regular feature of life. The results of unfavorable petitions and plebiscites were ignored, and other local political forces marginalized. In his raucous public addresses, D’Annunzio used a dialogical style that would eventually become associated with Italian and German fascism, employing violent and vulgar language, and having crowds hurl obscenities at his political enemies in Fiume and Rome. And Benito Mussolini was watching carefully, visiting the city as a journalist on a


\textsuperscript{175} Rusinow, \textit{Italy’s Austrian Heritage}, p. 137; Hughes-Hallett, \textit{Gabriele D’Annunzio}, p. 424.

\textsuperscript{176} Ledeen, \textit{The First Duce}, pp. 101-102.

\textsuperscript{177} MacDonald, \textit{A Political Escapade}, pp. 121, 151.
number of occasions and corresponding with D’Annunzio regularly. Referring to this period, the Italian statesperson and diplomat Carlo Sforza would refer to D’Annunzio as the true “inventor of fascism.”

Back in Rome, as well as in Fiume, the D’Annunzian spectacle soon began to lose its luster. In November 1919, Italians went to the polls where Nitti was confirmed in his leadership, the nationalist party won just a handful of seats, and not a single fascist candidate was elected to office. In the prime minister’s view, as he communicated to D’Annunzio shortly after the election, the results were a strong indication that Italians were “against any adventurous policy” in Fiume and beyond. And while it would be more than a year of on-again, off-again negotiations before the Poet was finally removed, it was clear by early 1920 that his days in Fiume were numbered. Francesco Nitti would resign from office in June 1920 to be replaced by Giovanni Giolitti, a more decisive politician who soon entered into negotiations with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia over the fate of Fiume. The resulting Treaty of Rapallo, signed on 12 November 1920, established the Free State of Fiume as an independent city-state between Italy and Yugoslavia. Despite the treaty passing by overwhelming majorities in the Italian parliament, D’Annunzio clung to power in Fiume and continued to call for its annexation to Italy.

181 Rusinow, Italy’s Austrian Heritage, p. 137.
182 Hughes-Hallett, Gabriele D’Annunzio, p. 463.
183 Rusinow, Italy’s Austrian Heritage, p. 147; Hughes-Hallett, Gabriele D’Annunzio, p. 471.
But enough was enough. Prime Minister Giolitti had to take action. On 20 December 1920, he sent D’Annunzio an ultimatum, demanding his exit. In response, the following day the D’Annunzio declared war on Italy. On Christmas Eve, the Italian army and navy were ordered into action. After a few dozen casualties were taken by both sides, the Italian navy cruiser Andrea Doria fired two shells on D’Annunzio’s palace on 26 December. This was ultimately decisive. On 28 December, D’Annunzio left Fiume for good.\footnote{Rusinow, \textit{Italy’s Austrian Heritage}, pp. 149-152; Hughes-Hallett, \textit{Gabriele D’Annunzio}, pp. 475-480.}

D’Annunzio would not be punished for his open defiance of Italian authorities. Despite his reduced stature, he was still deemed too popular among important segments of the Italian public. This, and the fact that Giolitti chose 24 December for D’Annunzio’s ouster to minimize press and public attention, indicates the popular constraints under which Italian leaders were operating.\footnote{Hughes-Hallett, \textit{Gabriele D’Annunzio}, pp. 479-480.} D’Annunzio may have ultimately failed in his greatest ambitions, but his example would play an important role in the success of some of his descendants in Italy and Portugal, Spain and Germany.\footnote{Gumbrecht, “On Fiume’s Place.”}

Less than two years later, Benito Mussolini seized power with his “March on Rome,” establishing fascist dictatorship in Italy and adopting many of the repertoires of rule he observed in Fiume. D’Annunzio, for his part, effectively retired to his home on Lake Garda at the government’s expense. He evidently still had his hypnotic charm, and Mussolini saw him as a potential political threat in his emerging fascist movement. As Il Duce explained, “When you have a rotten tooth, you have two possibilities open to you: either you extract the tooth or you fill it with gold. With D’Annunzio I have chosen the latter treatment.”\footnote{Pearce “D’Annunzio, Fiume, & Fascism,” p. 29.}
**Alternative Explanations**

Three alternative explanations that might account for the cases of Japan in Manchuria and Italy in Fiume are strategic expansion theory, state institutional weakness, and leader interests. First, it is obvious that neither Japan in Manchuria nor Italy in Fiume are cases of strategic expansion. In Manchuria, the invasion was planned and conducted by the Kwantung Army against explicit orders to the contrary from leaders in Tokyo. In Fiume, Gabriele D’Annunzio managed to pass, and even to recruit, soldiers who had been told to fire on him as he approached. There is no evidence, in either case, of orchestration or collusion by important leaders in Tokyo or Rome. And while the decisions to retain Manchuria by Tokyo and to reject Fiume by Rome were strategic in nature—based on considerations of domestic political costs and perceived geopolitical risks—these leaders were forced to make these decisions by actors and processes over which they had vanishingly little control. Manchuria and Fiume are clear-cut cases of inadvertent expansion.

Second, state institutional weakness doesn’t appear to explain unauthorized peripheral expansion in either Manchuria or Fiume. Japan and Italy both had many of the institutional features of relatively strong states. Both had established universal male military conscription decades earlier—in 1861 in the case of Italy, and in 1873 in the case of Japan. Both were able to extract significant amounts of revenue in the form of taxes from their publics. Italy’s tax revenue averaged at approximately 15 percent of the value of its GDP between 1918 and 1920, and Japan’s average was 29 percent between 1929 and 1931. And both states had a

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189 Italian data from: “G6 Europe: Central Government Revenue and Main Tax Yields” (pp. 4672-4733) and “J1 Europe: National Account Totals” (pp. 4818-4875), and Japan data from: “G6 Asia: Central Government Revenue and Main Tax Yields” (pp. 4651-4696).
great deal of reliable information about their populaces. Italy had decades of experience running a population statistics agency, a civil registry, and a decennial census. Japan also had decades of experience with a statistics agency and a civil registry, and had instituted a regular census in 1920. While clearly both states suffered problems of civilian control over their militaries, these were two states with relatively strong institutions.

Third, the cases of Japan in Manchuria and Italy in Fiume are at odds with a simple explanation based on leader interests. Leaders in Japan—most notably, Prime Minister Wakatsuki and Foreign Minister Shidehara—didn’t exactly want Manchuria in its entirety, and certainly not in the way that it was ultimately acquired. And yet, due to domestic political pressure and the ultimate fall of their cabinet, Japan ended up with Manchuria nonetheless. Italian leaders clearly did want Fiume, and their efforts to negotiate for it at Versailles is a clear indication of this. And yet, due to perceptions of severe geopolitical risk, Italian leaders ended up rejecting the territorial fait accompli. In short, leader interests can’t explain these two cases.

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This chapter has presented comparative cases of inadvertent expansion and non-expansion in Manchuria and Fiume. Both cases strongly support the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2. First, in both cases unauthorized peripheral expansion resulted from inadequate monitoring and control over agents on the periphery—the Kwantung Army in Manchuria and D’Annunzio and segments of the Italian Army in Fiume. Second, in both

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cases peripheral expansion activated mechanisms that made it difficult for leaders in the capital to easily withdraw—in both Japan and Italy, the most important of these were domestic-political risks and costs associated with doing so. And third, in both cases the ultimate decision of whether to accept the fait accompli was crucially determined by the perceived geopolitical risk associated with doing so. In the case of Japan in Manchuria, perceived geopolitical risk pushed Prime Minister Wakatsuki to work strenuously to put a halt to the conquest and to rein in the Kwantung Army. Yet, once it became clear that such risks wouldn’t come to fruition, his government was replaced by the more pliant Inukai cabinet, and the invasion of Manchuria moved forward. In the case of Italy in Fiume, the strong stance of Britain, France, and particularly the United States in opposition to D’Annunzio’s conquest gave the Italian government little alternative but to roll it back, which it ultimately did by force. In both cases, what I referred to in Chapter 2 as the “dilemma of inadvertent expansion” was illustrated powerfully—the agonizing situations in which leaders simultaneously face severe domestic political costs associated with territorial withdrawal as well as significant geopolitical risk associated with territorial acquisition. Showing how leaders navigate these perilous circumstances has been a central aim of this chapter.
CHAPTER 8

INADVERTENT ANNEXATION: GERMANY IN EAST AFRICA

“As my comrades and I sailed to Zanzibar in 1884, the German government wanted nothing to do with the founding of a colony in East Africa and she did everything in her power to prevent such a thing from happening.”

Carl Peters

This chapter examines inadvertent expansion through two examples from the German Empire in East Africa. The first case focuses on the German acquisition of what would become German East Africa in 1884-85. The second examines Germany’s non-acquisition of a number of territories in modern-day Kenya and Uganda in 1889-90. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it presents the dissertation’s fifth and final pair of comparative theory-testing case studies, showing how variation in perceived geopolitical risk led to divergent outcomes, with expansion in the first case but non-expansion in the second. But second, and more importantly, this chapter presents the dissertation’s only cases of inadvertent expansion via political annexation, as all qualitative cases to this point have focused on armed conquest. While the data presented in Chapter 3 includes many observations of inadvertent expansion via political annexation, this chapter allows the reader to observe how the theory works in practice in two in-depth case studies of annexation.

These two German cases are a useful comparison in that they hold many factors fixed—the same great power, operating in the same region, separated by only five years, and driven by the very same peripheral actor—while the outcomes across the two cases vary. One important difference between the two cases, which presents an inferential opportunity, is a leadership change that takes place in the German capital, Berlin. In March 1890, after 28 years at the helm of Prussian and then German power, the “Iron Chancellor” Otto von Bismarck was dismissed by the new German emperor, Wilhelm II, in the midst of a process of inadvertent expansion. The fact that Bismarck, the famously-reluctant imperialist, accepts his peripheral agent’s _fait accompli_ in 1885, whereas the more expansionist Wilhelm ultimately rejects the territorial _fait accompli_ in 1890, helps highlight the crucial role played by domestic political pressure and perceived geopolitical risk in these cases.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the case of Germany in East Africa, where, despite efforts to discourage a private organization from territorial annexations ex ante, Berlin ultimately accepts the territory, gaining what would become its largest and most populous colony. Second, I present Germany’s non-acquisition of a number of territories in modern-day Kenya and Uganda, where the very same peripheral actor’s _fait accompli_ is rejected in Berlin before he even has a chance to make his case. And third and finally, I conclude with a brief consideration of alternative arguments, as well as a discussion of the importance of these cases for the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2.

*Germany in East Africa, 1884-1885*
The German Empire acquired what would become German East Africa between November 1884 and February 1885. A series of annexations in the core of East Africa were independently planned and carried out by a private German colonial organization, despite repeated efforts at discouragement by Berlin. This case supports three of the central arguments of the theory of inadvertent expansion. First, that inadvertent expansion results from a principal-agent problem, due to divergent preferences between the capital and the periphery and information asymmetries in favor of the latter. In the case of Germany in East Africa, the actors on the frontier were far more interested in colonial expansion than the leaders in Berlin, and a lack of telegraphic communications made it difficult to control their behavior. Second, that once a territory is partly or wholly acquired, a number of mechanisms are activated that make it difficult for leaders in the capital to simply withdraw. In the case at hand, the successful annexation of these territories drove down the costs of acquisition and generated domestic political pressure on leaders in Berlin to accept them. And third, that the absence of perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will encourage leaders in the capital to accept the fait accompli, resulting in territorial expansion. In the case of German East Africa, Britain was simply in no position to resist the German advance, and would quickly acquiesce to the annexations. These facts strengthened the case for subsequent central authorization, which would occur when Kaiser Wilhelm I signed the imperial charter on 27 February 1885, adding East Africa to the German colonial empire.

Historical Background

On the eve of the annexations in November and December 1884, what would become German East Africa was divided among dozens of small chiefdoms, many of which were

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2 Contemporary Burundi, Rwanda, and mainland Tanzania.
under the loose control of the Sultanate of Zanzibar, just across the Zanzibar Channel from central Africa’s east coast. Up the north coast lay more of the Sultanate’s territory in modern-day Kenya, and to the south lay Mozambique, where the Portuguese had had a presence since the early 16th century. To the west, in the heart of Africa, sat what would soon become the Congo Free State, a colony that would be privately owned by King Leopold II of Belgium. These were the early days of the European “Scramble for Africa,” when a great deal of territory, particularly in the interior, remained unclaimed.

There were two key leaders in the German capital, Berlin, responsible for issues of territorial expansion and empire. The fist was the emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm I, the German head of state who had ultimate authority and the final word on any decisions regarding territorial acquisition and control. The second was the “Iron Chancellor,” Otto von Bismarck. As the chancellor of the German Empire and, effectively, its foreign minister, Bismarck’s personal influence on foreign and imperial policy in this era is difficult to overstate. A leader whose very name has become synonymous with Realpolitik, Bismarck was tough, energetic, brilliant, and uniquely rational and strategic in his thinking about international affairs.3 The German Second Reich did have a State Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Paul von Hatzfeldt, but his was much more of a supporting role, drafting memos and executing decisions made by the Chancellor. The empire also had a Colonial Secretary in Heinrich von Kusserow, but this position was under the authority of the foreign ministry, not itself at the cabinet level.4 Finally, until the end of World War I, Germany didn’t have a

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single national war or defense ministry, with this role being divided among several major states, such as Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg. Kaiser Wilhelm I and the Chancellor Bismarck were the crucial leaders in the capital who would be inadvertently dragged into the acquisition of East Africa.

The early 1880s saw the emergence of a number of German civil society organizations advocating for colonialism. Prominent among these was the *Deutscher Kolonialverein* (DKV) or “German Colonial Association,” which was formed in December 1882 and had approximately 3,500 members by early 1884. The DKV’s primary modes of advocacy were the creation of colonial propaganda, rallying of public opinion, and lobbying within the Reichstag (German parliament). A more radical alternative organization was formed in March 1884, the *Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation* (GfdK) or “Society for German Colonization.” In contrast to the more-moderate roles of the DKV, the GfdK advocated for, funded, and organized private expeditions and activities directly aimed at attaining colonies for the empire.

The GfdK was co-founded-and-led by a 28-year-old historian and philosopher by the name of Carl Peters. Peters was the eighth of the nine children of a clergyman from Neuhaus, a small town on the Elbe, just upriver from Hamburg. By all accounts, he was intellectually gifted. He was accepted at prestigious schools, performed well, and ultimately

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6 Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism*, p. 35.

7 Smith, *The German Colonial Empire*, p. 25.

received a doctorate in history from the University of Berlin in 1879. He was also charismatic, had exceptional talent for persuasion, and a passion to succeed in whatever endeavor he pursued. Heinrich Schnee, the last governor of German East Africa, described him as “one of the sharpest-men and one of the most stimulating companions I have ever met in my life.”

However, Peters didn’t exactly appear to be the type of person you might expect to be founding a new German empire in Africa. He was small and frail, with a gaunt face, a protruding nose, a prominent, waxed moustache, and large, pale blue eyes, ringed by pince-nez-style glasses. His health and stature were such that he had been turned down for lack of fitness when he applied for German military service at the age of twenty. Yet Peters was an ardent German nationalist, a firm believer in the colonial cause, and saw the need for German territorial expansion in life-or-death terms. And, as his leadership of the GfdK and his time in East Africa would show, he was arrogant to the point of being megalomaniacal, could be brutal and dictatorial in his treatment of others, and was deeply and profoundly racist. Peters and the GfdK were the key peripheral actors who would present Berlin with the East African fait accompli.


Peters made himself something of a known quantity in German Foreign Office circles. This was due not only to his leadership role in the GfdK, but also to his pitching of various colonial schemes to foreign office personnel. His first plan, put forward in the spring of 1884, was to establish a German colony on the Zambezi River in Africa’s south-central interior. This plan was rebuffed by the foreign office, according to Peters, because they saw the territory as within Britain’s sphere of influence.16 His second pitch, sent to the foreign office on 13 August 1884, was for a colony in the hinterlands of Angola. This plan too, was turned down on the grounds that it was within Portugal’s sphere.17 By the fall of 1884, time was passing and Peters and the GfdK were feeling pressure to get some sort of expedition under way. Having raised funds from their now-roughly 350 members, the organization’s leadership felt it had to move forward or potentially face an open revolt among shareholders.18

In mid-September 1884, Peters and the GfdK came up with a third plan: to acquire territory on the East African mainland across from the Island of Zanzibar. On 20 September, Peters once again wrote the foreign office, but this time he phrased his message as an announcement rather than a request. Then, without awaiting a reply, Peters and his colleagues hastily packed their belongings and departed.19 The rag-tag expedition consisted

16 Meritt, “Bismarck and the German Interest in East Africa,” p. 98; Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, pp. 35-36.


19 Peters would later claim that he was given “confidential hints” that the government was behind him, and some scholars have echoed these claims, arguing he was given a “tentative go-ahead” by the government (see: Smith, The German Colonial Empire, p. 32; Mary Evelyn Townsend, The Rise and Fall of Germany’s Colonial Empire, 1884-1918 (New York: MacMillan, 1930), p. 132). But a careful examination of the evidence indicates this was not the case. Peters, it turned out, likely overinterpreted some oblique statements made by a retired government
of Peters and three companions: Count Graf Joachim von Pfiel, a German aristocrat; Carl Jühlke, a lawyer; and August Otto, a young businessperson. On 1 October, they boarded the steamer Titania at Trieste bound for Aden, and from there they were to board the Baghdad bound for Zanzibar. For the five-week journey, the quartet traveled as deck passengers and pretended they were English in order to conceal their identities. Just like that, Peters’ fait accompli had been launched.

Berlin & East Africa

Leaders in Berlin faced important principal-agent problems with respect to these actors on the periphery, due to a divergence of preferences and information asymmetries favoring the periphery. For one, Bismarck was less keen on imperial ventures than many of his European contemporaries, a sentiment well summed up by his 1881 statement that “As long as I am Reichskanzler, we shall not pursue a colonial policy.” This promise wouldn’t hold, and Germany had recently burst upon the imperial scene, claiming South West Africa in April 1884, Togoland and Cameroon in July, and New Britain and northeastern New Guinea in

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21 Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, pp. 51-52, 55.


November. Yet Bismarck was often reluctant in these acquisitions, and had very little interest in what Peters and his colleagues were planning in East Africa. Just two days after Peters’ departure, on 3 October, the German Foreign Office composed a response to the announced expedition, which was awaiting him upon arrival in Zanzibar on 4 November. The cable, which had been personally approved by Bismack, stated explicitly that the government had given them no encouragement or assistance for their venture, and that they could not count on protection for any territorial claims they might stake out—they were there at their own risk and on their own responsibility.

There were also important information asymmetries between Berlin and the East African periphery. While Zanzibar had been connected to the global telegraph network in 1879, the East African coast wouldn’t see telegraphic connection until 1890, at Dar-es-Salaam. This meant that once Peters and his colleagues were on the mainland, and particularly in the interior, they would be very difficult to communicate with, and thereby control. Thus, the combination of diverse preferences for expansion and information asymmetries favoring the periphery made unauthorized peripheral expansion all the more likely.

East Africa

26 Contemporary Papua New Guinea.


Once in Zanzibar, Peters and his colleagues hastily prepared for their expedition to the mainland. They hired 36 porters, six servants who would double as interpreters, and purchased food, arms, and other equipment. They continued to try to conceal their identities and the purpose of their visit while in Zanzibar, but they weren't fooling many. As a local German merchant later recalled, “After a few days it was an open secret that these gentlemen wanted to annex territory.” In the early morning of 10 November, they set out on a hired dhow across the Zanzibar Channel toward the mainland. They ultimately left behind much of the food they had purchased for the expedition, in order to make room for gifts for local chiefs, and they lacked medicine and other essentials for tropical travel. They disembarked at Saadani on the East African coast, and after some organizing, began their expedition into the interior on 12 November.

Peters and his colleagues moved with impressive speed. In a little over a month, they covered hundreds of kilometers of ground and concluded twelve treaties with local chiefs in the regions of Usagara, Nguru, Uzigua, and Ukami. The process of treaty-making followed a consistent pattern. They would, first, ask permission to camp on a chief’s territory. They would then circulate rumors among the people of Peters’ extraordinary power and influence. This was followed by offering the locals rum and gifts. Then the treaty would be signed and


the German flag hoisted. Peters followed this by giving a short speech, before the ceremony closed with a cheer for the Kaiser and the firing of three volleys. Then, the expedition would move onto the next chiefdom, and the process would begin anew. Peters and his colleagues ultimately claimed some 140,000 square kilometers of territory in this manner.

Yet, in almost all other respects, the expedition was an utter fiasco. Otto, the merchant, was constantly drunk, and bad blood developed between Peters and Pfiel, to the point of Pfiel apparently firing his revolver at Peters during a particularly nasty quarrel. Peters severely burnt his foot a few weeks in, and thereafter had to be carried by porters in a hammock. The effects of a lack of food, medicine, and equipment quickly began to show themselves, with porters falling ill and abandoning the expedition, and the Germans suffering severe and recurrent fever. Otto would ultimately die in an Usagara goat shed, and Pfiel almost certainly would have died as well, had he not been stumbled upon by a traveling French scientist after he had been abandoned by Peters. After 37 days in the interior, Peters and Jühlke, starving and grievously ill, staggered into a French mission church in the coastal town of Bagamoyo on the evening of 17 December. Peters later recalled that, when he saw the cross and heard the resonant sound of the organ, he “broke down in convulsive sobs and all the tension of the last weeks dissolved in a stream of tears.”

Berlin Reacts


After a few days of recovery on the coast, Peters returned to Zanzibar and telegraphed the GfdK in Berlin with news of his acquisitions. The GfdK then contacted on the foreign office and a representative of the organization met with Colonial Secretary Heinrich von Kusserow on 29 December, requesting government protection for Peters’ claims.\(^\text{38}\) Kusserow decided to await a more comprehensive report on the acquisitions before informing and making a recommendation to Bismarck, which would arrive in the form of a formal letter of request from Peters about a month later. In the meantime, Peters embarked on the long journey home, where he would arrive in early February 1885.\(^\text{39}\) The GfdK followed up with the foreign office a week after Peters’ return, again requesting protection, but also authorization for further annexations in the area. At this point, it had been almost seven weeks without a definitive response from the government, and Peters started to get anxious.\(^\text{40}\)

By 15 February, Kusserow felt that he had enough information, and sent a detailed memo to the chancellor.\(^\text{41}\) The timing of Peters’ \textit{fait accompli} was complicated by the fact that the imperial powers were just wrapping up the Berlin-hosted West Africa Conference, which delineated a free-trade area in the Congo basin and established the principle of “effective occupation” in European colonialism in Africa.\(^\text{42}\) Suddenly springing an East Africa protectorate upon the other great powers, after having said nothing about it through months

\(^{38}\) Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, p. 63n190.


of discussion of colonial matters, would undoubtedly come as a surprise, and to some, an 
unwelcome one.

Despite the awkward timing, the very fact of Peters’ annexations helped generate two 
mechanisms that made returning the territories difficult for leaders in Berlin. For one, the 
job was already half done. While Bismarck and the foreign office had tried to dissuade Peters 
with the strongly-worded cable of 3 October referenced above, now the picture had changed 
considerably. Peters and his colleagues had laid claim, without resistance, to a large portion 
of East Africa, and they were likely to press on to the borders of King Leopold’s newly-
constituted Congo Free State. They had also promised, in letters and memos to the 
government, that the colony could be operated at minimal expense, that governance and 
development of East Africa could be handled by the GfdK, and that the territory was 
suitable for the cultivation of a wide variety of valuable crops. 43 Thus, Peters’ success and his 
persuasive arguments meant that the perceived costs of acquisition had been dramatically 
lowered.

The second reason Bismarck would have trouble rejecting the fait accompli was political. 
While the core of the colonial movement in Germany was relatively small, colonialism and 
empire were increasingly popular in some influential German circles. 44 A federal election had 
been held in late October 1884, and the Bismarck-aligned Conservative and National Liberal 
parties had made colonial policy an important theme of their campaigns. Their relative gains, 
and the losses of the Left Liberal party, were widely perceived to be due, in important part,

43 Meritt, “Bismarck and the German Interest in East Africa,” p. 104; Smith, The German Colonial Empire, p. 33; 
Pakenham, The Scramble for Africa, p. 292; Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, p. 64.

44 Smith, The German Colonial Empire, pp. 29-30; Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, pp. 8, 66.
to their divergent views on Germany’s growing overseas empire.\(^{45}\) By accepting German East Africa, Bismarck could strengthen his own domestic political support, and that of his allies in the Reichstag, at relatively low cost. As the chancellor had written to a colleague just three weeks before the East Africa decision landed on his desk, for “reasons of domestic policy the colonial problem is a vital question for us… At present public opinion emphasizes colonial policy so strongly in Germany that the position of the Government within Germany largely depends on its success.”\(^{46}\)

Besides these incentives to retain the territories, there were also few perceived geopolitical risks associated with doing so. While clearly the British might be surprised, even alarmed, by German gains in the region, they had made very clear to Bismarck in correspondence in January and February 1885 that their interests were mainly confined to the Island of Zanzibar itself, not the East African mainland.\(^{47}\) London was also not in a strong position to resist any German moves in East Africa. In what would become known as Germany’s “Egyptian lever” or its “bâton égyptien,” the British were heavily reliant upon German diplomatic support for their occupation of Egypt, and the German government used this to their advantage repeatedly.\(^{48}\) As British Prime Minister William Gladstone acknowledged in December 1884, the Germans “could do extraordinary mischief to us at our one really

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vulnerable point, Egypt.” And Bismarck, reflecting on this fact in January 1885, noted that “Egypt... is merely a means of overcoming England’s objections to our colonial aspirations.”

The timing of Peters’ *fait accompli* was also fortuitous with respect to potential geopolitical risk for Berlin. British imperial forces under General Charles Gordon had been under siege at Khartoum since March 1884, and in February 1885, Russian forces occupied the border town of Panjdeh in Afghanistan (then a British protectorate), sparking a major crisis between the two powers. Under these circumstances, London could, and likely would, do little to forestall Berlin’s gains in the region. As historian Arne Perras notes, “The attractiveness of Peters’ scheme [for Bismarck] lay in the fact that it made a further colonial claim possible without provoking an imperial showdown” with London.

**Berlin Decides**

Therefore, after some brief correspondence with his consul-general in Zanzibar and a few meetings with Kusserow, Bismarck decided on 24 February to establish a protectorate over Peters’ acquisitions in East Africa—just nine days after becoming aware of them. Two days later, Bismarck informed Kaiser Wilhelm I of the acquisitions, and advised him to accept them as a protectorate. The following day, the Kaiser signed an imperial charter, proclaiming

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52 Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism*, p. 66.

53 Some scholars have argued that Bismarck had “misgivings” and was “reluctant” in accepting East Africa, and that the territory was “unwanted” (see: Townsend, *The Rise and Fall of Germany’s Colonial Empire*, p. 133; Smith, *The German Colonial Empire*, pp. 32-33, 36-37, 91; Steven Press, *Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europe’s Scramble for Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 217). But Bismarck asked few questions about the territory itself, and came to his decision very quickly. See: Meritt, “Bismarck and the German Interest in East Africa,” p. 106; Wesseling, *Divide and Rule*, p. 142; Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism*, pp. 64-65.
East Africa as a German protectorate, and this fact was made public on 3 March 1885.\textsuperscript{54} Without having planned on it or having played any role in its actual annexation, the German Empire had just acquired what would soon become its largest and most populous imperial holding.\textsuperscript{55}

Bismarck would approve further annexations sought by the GfdK, informing Peters on 11 July 1885 that “the company should take what it feels confident to take… We shall see later what we can back officially.”\textsuperscript{56} But Peters was already well ahead of him. He had ordered his subordinates to engage in further annexations in East Africa on 24 February—three days \textit{before} East Africa was officially made a German protectorate—and by July they had extended the territory hundreds of kilometers in each direction.\textsuperscript{57} The Sultan of Zanzibar would raise a protest over the claims, but, in reality, there was little he could do without overt and forceful British backing. After Bismarck sent five German warships into the harbor of Zanzibar on 7 August 1885, the Sultan formally recognized all German claims on the mainland.\textsuperscript{58} East Africa was to remain German, and would go on to be the Second Reich’s most important colony—a status it would retain until it was invaded by a joint British-Belgian force in November 1914, in the opening months of the First World War.

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\textsuperscript{54} Freeman-Grenville, “The German Sphere, 1884-98,” p. 436.

\textsuperscript{55} Meritt, “Bismarck and the German Interest in East Africa,” p. 97.

\textsuperscript{56} Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, p. 105.


In November 1885, Germany and Britain agreed to set up a joint commission to determine the limits of Zanzibar’s territories on the mainland, and to demarcate their respective spheres of influence there.\textsuperscript{59} The following October, the two sides came to an agreement, with Kenya, to the north, falling within the British sphere, and Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi, in the south, falling within the German sphere.\textsuperscript{60} And while the Sultan of Zanzibar retained control over the East African coast, Germany was able to lease the ports of Pagani and Dar es Salaam, providing it important “windows” to coastal trade.\textsuperscript{61} However, the treaty left many areas of possible contention unsettled, the most important of these, as the following case will show, being Uganda.\textsuperscript{62}

For his part, Peters would retain a central position in Germany’s new East African empire. Far from being ostracized or punished for his disregard of official orders, he was instead tapped to organize and ultimately lead the chartered company that was to run the East Africa protectorate, the \textit{Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft} (DOAG) or “German East Africa Company.”\textsuperscript{63} However, titles and responsibilities were not nearly enough to put a leash on the young administrator, as Peters was much more interested in expanding the empire than running it competently.\textsuperscript{64} And when stories began to circulate in European

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\textsuperscript{59} Pakenham, \textit{The Scramble for Africa}, p. 296; Chamberlain, \textit{The Scramble for Africa}, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{60} Wesseling, \textit{Divide and Rule}, p. 145; Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, p. 112.


\textsuperscript{62} Wesseling, \textit{Divide and Rule}, p. 149; Pakenham, \textit{The Scramble for Africa}, pp. 312, 344.

\textsuperscript{63} Smith, \textit{The German Colonial Empire}, pp. 35, 76; Wesseling, \textit{Divide and Rule}, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{64} Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, p. 113.
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capitals of a certain German national under siege in southern Sudan by a large Mahdist army, Peters—among others—saw it as a golden opportunity to strike out once again.

**Germany and Kenya & Uganda, 1889-1890**

The German Empire refrained from acquiring a number of territories throughout Kenya and Uganda between June 1889 and July 1890. A series of annexations were independently executed over the course of a privately-sponsored German expedition, despite efforts by the German government to discourage its launch and hamper its progress. This case provides support for the three central arguments of the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2. First, that inadvertent expansion results from a principal-agent problem, rooted in diverse preferences between the capital and periphery and information asymmetries favoring the latter. In the case of Germany in Kenya and Uganda, a sharp divergence of preferences for expansion would develop as the expedition’s launch neared, and a lack of telegraphic communications hampered central government control. Second, that once a given territory is claimed, a number of mechanisms are activated that make it difficult for metropolitan leaders to easily relinquish it. In the case under examination, the annexations drove down the costs of acquisition of these territories and generated some domestic political pressure on leaders in Berlin to authorize the *fait accompli*. And third, that perceptions of unacceptable geopolitical risk associated with acquisition will discourage leaders in the capital from authorizing territorial claims, resulting in non-expansion. In the case at hand, the importance of the Nile Valley to Britain’s entire imperial strategy meant that Uganda was seen as strategically vital to London, and this was well understood in Berlin. These perceived geopolitical risks strongly discouraged territorial acquisition among German leaders, leading
to the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty of July 1890, in which Germany renounced all territorial claims in Kenya and Uganda.

**Historical Background**

Kenya and Uganda were largely independent in these years, divided up among numerous kingdoms and chiefdoms of varying size. Since 1885, Germany had had a small coastal protectorate around the mouth of the River Tana in Kenya, known as “Wituland,” with the remainder of Kenya being considered as falling within the United Kingdom’s sphere of influence.\(^{65}\) Uganda’s status had yet to be defined by the colonial powers. To the south, of course, lay the new German protectorate of East Africa, and to the east lay Belgian King Leopold’s Congo. To the north from Lake Victoria flows the Nile River, through Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt, before emptying in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, just 50 km west of the Suez Canal. Much of the interior of these territories was unknown to the imperial powers, though this was rapidly changing with all of the private chartered companies operating in the area.

For the time being, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck retained his position as the key leader in Berlin responsible for German imperial policy. However, with the death of Kaiser Wilhelm I in March 1888, the German throne was to be occupied by a new emperor—first in the form of Frederick III, who himself died just three months later, passing the title of Kaiser to his son, Wilhelm II. Wilhelm II’s accession was viewed by many with apprehension, not least by Bismarck himself. At just 29 when he acceded to the throne, Wilhelm was young, brash, and self-confident to an extent not nearly warranted by his practical and intellectual abilities. He was stubborn and impulsive, with only superficial

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\(^{65}\) Wituland, itself, had been acquired by inadvertent expansion. See: Townsend, *The Rise and Fall of Germany’s Colonial Empire*, p. 131.
knowledge of government, military, and international affairs. Yet he was also stridently nationalistic and expansionist in his foreign policy views, seeking to reorient the Empire’s foreign policy toward a more aggressive *Weltpolitik*. It was Wilhelm II who would make the ultimate decision regarding the fate of any territory claimed in Kenya or Uganda.

The key actor on the periphery was, again, Carl Peters. Still only in his early thirties by the late 1880s, he remained very much the unconstrained peripheral agent, and a thorn in Berlin’s side. As the local head of the German East Africa Company (DOAG)—the chartered company that administered German East Africa—he would prove to be a hopeless administrator, with the company operating on the verge of bankruptcy until they were bailed out by the German government in 1887. Peters was also a cruel administrator, having further developed the strong sadistic streak that had been evident during his earlier annexations in East Africa. He and his subordinates regularly committed atrocities against the local population in and around the company’s stations throughout East Africa, including arbitrary detention, torture, murder, and sexual slavery. At the end of 1887, Peters was recalled to Berlin by the DOAG, though it wouldn’t be long before he returned.

The occasion for Peters’ return to East Africa was what became known as the “German Emin Pasha Relief Expedition.” Emin Pasha (born Eduard Schnitzer) was a physician and colonial administrator of German-Jewish origin, who had converted to Islam while living in

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Ottoman Albania. While traveling in Egypt he became a medical officer for the British colonial official General Charles Gordon, who he ultimately succeeded as governor of the Sudanese province of Equatoria in 1878, then an unofficial protectorate of the British Empire.\(^70\) With the fall of Khartoum and the death of Gordon in 1885, the spread of the Mahdist Army throughout Sudan forced Emin to retreat to southern Equatoria, near the Uganda border.\(^71\) From there he put out a call for help to the British government in July 1886, as he was under siege and running low on ammunition and other supplies.\(^72\)

Word of Emin Pasha’s plight reached London in late September 1886, and the news quickly spread to other European capitals.\(^73\) His story captured the imagination of European publics and publishers, and advocacy organizations and relief committees quickly sprang into being, pushing for rescue expeditions.\(^74\) For colonial organizations and private chartered companies in the region, this was clearly an opportunity, and a British Emin Pasha Relief Committee was established in November 1886, with the famed Welsh explorer and colonial official Henry Morton Stanley as the planned expedition leader.\(^75\) Despite some reluctance,

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\(^71\) Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism*, p. 132.


British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury and his cabinet gave their approval (though no official support), and the expedition set off in January 1887.76

The idea of a rival German expedition developed more slowly. The German Emin Pasha Relief Committee only formed in June 1888, with Peters—having been recently recalled from East Africa—very much at the center of it.77 Publicly, Peters would claim that the expedition’s purpose was “to furnish Emin Pacha, in his isolated position in the Equatorial Province, with ammunition and men, and to enable him to maintain his position.”78 Privately, however, he was more candid, noting that the “German Emin Pasha expedition was no pleasure trip, but a large-scale colonial, political enterprise.”79 Emin Pasha’s rescue was a mere pretext. The broader aim on the part of Peters and the Committee was the extension of Germany’s East African empire, to encompass Uganda, southern Sudan, and the Nile basin.80

Like Salisbury, Bismarck was reluctant to get involved. When the Committee made a formal request of the chancellor for German government funding in July 1888, Bismarck would decline, noting that “the rescue of Emin Bey would be primarily an Egyptian-English interest.”81 Yet many around him were more receptive. The expedition, for instance,

76 For an overview of the British expedition, see: Pakenham, The Scramble for Africa, pp. 316-335.


81 Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, p. 137.
garnered the support of prominent figures from each of the major parties in the Reichstag.\textsuperscript{82} And the young Kaiser himself, in August 1888, had the foreign office pass on his “warmest sympathies for the success of the enterprise” to the Committee.\textsuperscript{83} Under these conditions, Bismarck felt that he had to play along, writing the Committee on 15 August 1888 that, while the expedition was “alien to our colonial interests,” he recognized its “high-minded purpose” and similarly wished that “the patriotic efforts of the committee may succeed in carrying out this difficult venture.”\textsuperscript{84} Peters would later write that, at this point, he and the Committee felt that “His Majesty the Emperor and Prince Bismarck [were] sympathetically welcoming the carrying out of a German Emin Pasha Expedition.”\textsuperscript{85} With these endorsements, they felt they had all the backing they needed.

\textit{Berlin \& East Africa}

In Kenya and Uganda, leaders in Berlin faced important principal-agent problems with respect to actors such as Peters on the frontier. First, a divergence of preferences would develop between Bismarck and the expedition. While Bismarck was, at first, reluctantly supportive, events on the ground soon changed, leading the chancellor to alter his stance. In September 1888, a rebellion broke out on the coast of German East Africa.\textsuperscript{86} The introduction of new taxes on commerce, as well as the heavy-handedness of German

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83 Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, p. 137.
84 Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, p. 137.
colonial administration, led to an armed uprising that quickly spread to the interior. By the end of the year, all territory under the control of the DOAG was in open revolt. Bismarck was dismayed by this turn of events, and in December 1888 and January 1889, he managed to convince the Reichstag to fund a military operation to suppress the rebellion. As part of the pacification campaign, the chancellor announced a naval blockade of the East African coast, and Prime Minister Salisbury agreed to send British naval vessels to participate.

Under these conditions, an officially-endorsed expedition to the interior seemed out of the question, and Bismarck began erecting barriers to its success.

On 14 September, Bismarck wrote a lengthy memorandum to the Kaiser, arguing against the expedition and claiming to see no advantage of “such an eccentric extension” of Germany’s African territories. The following day, the chancellor informed the DOAG that he would take “no further interest” in the expedition unless they got rid of Carl Peters—who Bismarck blamed for the mess in East Africa—arguing that Peters was “entirely incapable of leading such a difficult venture” due to his “lack of caution, and excessive self-confidence.” Bismarck then began planting stories in German newspapers, critical of Peters and the expedition, in an effort to sway public opinion. The Chancellor also began meeting with

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88 Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, pp. 143-144.


90 Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, p. 139.

91 Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, p. 140.
members and supporters of the committee, individually lobbying them to turn against the enterprise.  

Thus, Bismarck quickly became strongly and openly opposed to the expedition.

A second problem was that there were information asymmetries favoring the German Emin Pasha Expedition in the periphery. As in the case of East Africa, the closest telegraph station was still in Zanzibar, as coastal Kenya would not see a connection until the following year, at Mombasa. This made the expedition difficult to communicate with, and potentially control, once they were on the mainland. As Peters remarked in recounting events there, once they were in the interior the expedition would be “masters of the situation.”  

Thus, the principal-agent problems facing Berlin made unauthorized peripheral expansion more likely.

**Kenya & Uganda**

Peters and the Committee would not be discouraged by Bismarck’s opposition, completing their preparations in Berlin over the course of January 1889. And, frankly, as a private organization funding a private expedition, there were limits to what Bismarck could do to stop them. On 25 February, Peters left for East Africa. In contrast to his cheerful departure of five years earlier, this time he seemed to leave with a sense of foreboding, later writing that his departure “was characterized rather by seriousness and emotion than by joyful hope.”

Peters arrived in Zanzibar on 31 March 1889, and immediately ran into trouble. For one, the Somali soldiers he had recruited in Aden for the expedition were barred from disembarking by Zanzibari authorities, forcing Peters to leave them, for the time being, on

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93 Glover, “Cable Timeline: 1850-2018.”


the East African coast at Bagamoyo. Peters also quickly learned that the six hundred local porters he had planned on hiring had been prohibited from joining his expedition by the Sultan of Zanzibar. Just days before Peters’ arrival in Zanzibar, Bismarck had also notified Prime Minister Salisbury that their joint blockade should apply to all armed vessels in the area, which led to the confiscation of all the weapons Peters had purchased for the expedition. When Peters went and complained to the British naval officer who was holding his weapons, the captain’s response was, simply, “C’est la guerre!” And the local German consul proved to be of no help either, refusing to mediate Peters’ conflicts with the British and Zanzibari authorities.

After nearly a month of frustration, Peters telegraphed the Emin Pasha committee in Berlin on 29 April, asking them to contact the German Foreign Office and plead his case. When he hadn’t heard back, he telegraphed again on 6 May, and then, receiving no reply, again on 10 May. On 13 May he finally received a curt telegraphic response from the committee, informing him that the “Foreign Office refuses all mediation and support.” Peters was livid. “If the Imperial Government did not wish that the German Emin Pasha Expedition should be undertaken,” he replied on 17 May, “it should have forbidden the project” from the start. He added that “to have allowed the development of the project to

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96 Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, p. 23; Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, pp. 144-145.

97 Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, p. 27.


99 “That’s war!” Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, p. 32.

100 Pakenham, The Scramble for Africa, p. 351.

101 Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, p. 28.
the present point, and now to permit its being hindered under every imaginable pretext, …and even with the co-operation of the German authorities, is certainly a very peculiar method of advancing German interests and German honour.” However, while Peters was outraged, he was not deterred. As he continued in the very same telegram:

“in the face of the difficulties in every direction, in face of the intrigues with which we have to fight daily, all of us here, I am proud to say, are only the more firmly resolved to carry on the undertaking to the utmost verge of possibility.”

The German Emin Pasha Relief Expedition would go on.

On 1 June, Peters crossed from Zanzibar to Bagamoyo, on the mainland, in a privately-chartered vessel. From there he continued south to Dar-es-Salaam. Peters’ resolve would only strengthen with time and distance, later recalling that he “considered it more consonant with our national honour and our national interest to perish, on the sea or on the land, with my whole expedition, than to retreat before this paltry mass of obstacles and intrigues.”

From Dar-es-Salaam, the expedition was officially launched on 7 June, heading north up the East African coast by boat, with plans to land on the Kenyan coast near Kiwayu Island, just north of the German protectorate of Wituland. Since, by this point, Bismarck had instructed local German officials to neither let the expedition through the blockade at sea nor to pass through Wituland, this seemed the most promising approach. After a treacherous journey up the coast—characterized by heavy seas, a near capsize, a fire on board which nearly blew

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102 Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, p. 29.


104 Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, p. 32.

up the ammunition (and all passengers along with it), roving naval blockade vessels, and a shortage of potable water—the expedition arrived at Kiwayu Bay on 15 June. While Peters and the committee had initially planned for an expedition of upwards of seven hundred, the various hurdles put in their way by the German government had shrunk their numbers to a little over one hundred. The 25 Somali soldiers Peters retained were armed only with hunting rifles, and the expedition had no goods whatsoever with which to buy passage through tribal territories. It was not exactly an auspicious beginning.

The expedition began its march toward and then up the River Tana on 26 July 1889. Their ultimate destination was Wadelai, some 1,200 km away in northern Uganda, where Emin Pasha was supposedly fending off attacks from the Mahdist Army. Once the expedition got underway, it became clear that Peters’ faculties for brutality had developed considerably since his East African expedition five years earlier. Conditions were difficult early on, as the expedition lacked supplies, and as porters began to disappear in the night, Peters had some of them flogged, others of them shot, and, ultimately, all of them put in chains to prevent further escape. For the local population as well, the German Emin Pasha Relief Expedition would amount to a veritable campaign of terror. Peters and his followers plundered and razed villages, raided thousands of cattle, held dozens of captives, and battled

106 Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, p. 39; Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, p. 147.

107 Peters, “From the Mouth of the Tana,” p. 113; Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, pp. 144, 147-148.


anyone who resisted their advance.¹¹¹ Peters had no evident misgivings about the conduct of the expedition either, claiming to have “found that in the end only the bullets of a repeater… make an impression on these wild sons of the steppe.”¹¹²

While the ultimate aim was to find Emin Pasha, and to annex his province of Equatoria, Peters would claim various territories for the German Empire as he progressed. His first protectorate treaty was with the Wapokomo people in what he referred to as the “Massa Country” on 12 September 1889.¹¹³ From here, the expedition claimed territory via treaty of protection—often coerced—every few weeks, planting a series of German flags in their wake as they advanced. Peters would discover along the way that Emin Pasha had long been rescued by the British expedition, having left from Wadelai for the East African coast in April 1889, months before Peters’ expedition had even begun.¹¹⁴ However, this ultimately mattered little. He resolved to press on to Uganda, where he had heard that the Kabaka (king) of Buganda was in need of help against internal challenges, and Peters saw this as an opportunity to claim an even greater prize for the empire.¹¹⁵ Peters would be frustrated in this final ambition—the Kabaka had no interest in a treaty of protection—and he had to settle for a treaty of amity and cooperation, which was signed on 28 February 1889.¹¹⁶


¹¹² Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, p. 160.


¹¹⁶ Peters, New Light on Dark Africa, pp. 379-390, 585-586; Perras, Carl Peters and German Imperialism, pp. 165-166. This treaty has been widely misidentified as a protectorate in the historical literature, such as in: Townsend, The Rise and Fall of Germany’s Colonial Empire, p. 137; Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism, p. 116; Henderson,
Buganda would be the culmination of the expedition, and in mid-March, Peters and his followers began their journey back to the coast, traveling south on Lake Victoria and returning through German East Africa.\textsuperscript{117} They reached the coast at Bagamoyo on 16 July 1889, after having traveled over 3,000 km in a few weeks shy of a full year.\textsuperscript{118} Over the course of the expedition, Peters had signed between eight and ten of treaties of protection.\textsuperscript{119} The question now was what Berlin would do with them.

\textit{Berlin Reacts}

By April 1890, it was clear in Berlin that Peters had made it as far as Uganda, and by June news of his treaties began to reach European capitals.\textsuperscript{120} While Bismarck and other German leaders had clearly tried to prevent the expedition before it was launched, now that it had seen a measure of success, Peters’ actions had generated some reasons to consider retaining the territories he had claimed. For one, the privately-funded expedition had driven down the costs of acquiring these territories for the German Empire. Peters would be returning in mere months with a handful of admittedly-dubious, though likely-defensible, treaties of protection that stretched through Kenya and Uganda. If German leaders wanted these territories, they were theirs for the taking. And Peters’ martial successes in dealing with local

\hspace{1cm}“German East Africa, 1884-1918,” p. 130; Wesseling, \textit{Divide and Rule}, pp. 149, 153; Pakenham, \textit{The Scramble for Africa}, p. 356.

\textsuperscript{117} Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, p. 166.

\textsuperscript{118} Distance estimated using the “Measure Distance” tool in Google Maps (Google Maps (2021), Available at: \url{https://www.google.com/maps}), as well as Peters, \textit{New Light on Dark Africa}, “Map of the German Emin Pasha Expedition.”


\textsuperscript{120} Langer, \textit{The Diplomacy of Imperialism}, p. 119; Sanderson, \textit{England, Europe, \& the Upper Nile}, p. 53.
tribes, though troubling to many from a humanitarian standpoint, showed that resistance may not be as heavy as might have been expected.

Perhaps a more important reason it may have appeared difficult to readily relinquish Peters’ claims, however, was that the expedition itself generated domestic political pressure in favor of imperial expansion. Peters was among Germany’s most famous colonial figures, and he and the expedition were glowingly presented in the press and public as the embodiment of German courage and national honor.\(^{121}\) This was also the height of the “Scramble for Africa,” and the German public, like most European publics, was swept up in the rising tide of colonial enthusiasm.\(^{122}\) Expansionist fervor was strongest among some of Bismarck’s most important supporters in the Reichstag, narrowing the chancellor’s latitude in response.\(^{123}\) And Britain’s participation in the blockade only served to inflame these passions. As Herbert von Bismarck, the chancellor’s son and foreign minister, wrote to their ambassador in London on 27 July 1889, news of the confiscation of Peters’ weapons “had caused extreme excitement among the German public” and had “triggered a press campaign against England.”\(^{124}\) Peters and the Committee did their own part to foster this public support. For instance, before leaving, Peters made public statements emphasizing the extent of support for the expedition in the Reichstag, in an effort to put pressure on Bismarck.\(^{125}\) The Committee in Berlin also helped stoke moral outrage over the confiscation of Peters’


\(^{124}\) Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism*, p. 150.

\(^{125}\) Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism*, p. 141.
supplies by publicizing the issue, and using it to raise further funds.\footnote{Perras, \textit{Carl Peters and German Imperialism}, pp. 149-150.} In short, the very fact of Peters’ having launched the expedition created incentives for leaders in Berlin to consider accepting the territories he claimed.

However, there were also severe geopolitical risks associated with retaining Peters’ territorial claims. The key problem, of course, was the United Kingdom. While much of Kenya was formally independent, it clearly lay within Britain’s sphere of influence according to an agreement the two powers had come to in October and November 1886. This first agreement was followed up by what was known as the “hinterlands agreement” of July 1887, in which Prime Minister Salisbury and Chancellor Bismack agreed that they should discourage territorial annexations in the hinterlands of each other’s spheres.\footnote{Gillard, “Salisbury’s African Policy,” p. 633; G. N. Sanderson, “The Anglo-German Agreement of 1890 and the Upper Nile,” \textit{The English Historical Review}, Vol. 78, No. 306 (January 1963), p. 57; Sanderson, \textit{England, Europe, & the Upper Nile}, p. 44.} Thus, Bismarck was on record, multiple times, recognizing many of these territories claimed by Peters as lying within the British sphere.

Another key factor was that Germany’s position vis-à-vis the United Kingdom, while strong in 1885 when the East Africa claims were settled, had weakened considerably. With Britain looking increasingly likely to stay in Egypt for the time being, Bismarck’s support there became less crucial, and his “bâton égyptien” began lose its bite.\footnote{Kennedy, \textit{The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism}, p. 200.} Germany’s own conflicts with both France and Russia, as well as a visible rapprochement between those two great powers, also meant that Germany increasingly needed Britain on its side.\footnote{Sanderson, \textit{England, Europe, & the Upper Nile}, p. 47. See also: Townsend, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Germany’s Colonial Empire}, pp. 115, 138; Wesseling, \textit{Divide and Rule}, pp. 145, 159.}
von Holstein, an influential member of the German Foreign Office, wrote in October 1888 that “Our colonial crises lie upon us like a nightmare, and we need England of all places. Our relations with the English government are being most carefully cultivated.” This sentiment was echoed at the highest levels, with Bismarck writing in early 1889, “At present we need England if peace is to be maintained.” In January of that year, Bismarck went as far as to make an offer of a formal alliance to Prime Minister Salisbury. While Salisbury would politely decline, it was an unmistakably clear signal of Bismarck’s view of his diplomatic position at the time.

Yet, perhaps the most important reason Germany faced geopolitical risk in considering Peters’ annexations was that the United Kingdom began to view the entire Nile Valley, which included large portions of Uganda and Sudan, as a core geostrategic interest. When Britain invaded and occupied Egypt in 1882, it gained control of the Suez Canal, a crucial chokepoint in passage between Europe and British India. And the security of Egypt was seen as depending critically on that of the Nile. Genuine, though perhaps not all that well-founded, fears of a rival great power coming in and diverting or obstructing the flow of the Nile thus led the British to view the entire course of the Nile—from Lake Victoria in Uganda, through Sudan, and into Egypt—as a crucial imperial interest. Once the United

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Kingdom had determined it would stay in Egypt—which was publicly announced in November 1889—and Uganda became utterly indispensable. Even Germany’s protectorate in Wituland began to be looked upon with increasing anxiety. And the British made their feelings known. For instance, in December 1888, Prime Minister Salisbury asked Bismarck to define his attitude to the German Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, a veiled notification of Britain’s special interests in the area. And during a visit to London in March 1889, Herbert Bismarck was astonished by how quickly each of his interlocutors brought up East African affairs and potential colonial crises there. As Prime Minister Salisbury put it in March 1890, his government was firmly resolved to defend the “Nile Valley against the dominion of any outside power.”

A Dismissal and a Decision

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Chancellor Bismarck was sensitive to these risks early on. In his September 1888 memorandum to the Kaiser, he argued against supporting the Emin Pasha Expedition on the grounds that it was likely to antagonize the British, which regarded Egypt as a vital interest. In December 1888, Bismarck personally assured Prime Minister

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140 Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism*, p. 139.
Salisbury that he would give the Peters expedition no official support whatsoever. The following June, with the expedition just about to commence, Bismarck had his ambassador in London assure Salisbury that “Uganda, Wadelai, and other places to the east and north of Lake Victoria Nyanza are outside the sphere of German colonization.” And to make his views known more publicly, in August 1889 Bismarck stated in the German newspaper *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* that his government was opposed to the expedition on the grounds that “England regards [it] as an interference in her sphere of interest.” “English friendship,” he added in the article, “is far more valuable for us than anything which the expedition could hope to achieve.” The chancellor had made up his mind before Peters’ expedition even got its start.

However, a change was to come that would shake the *Wilhelmstrasse* to its core. As noted above, with the death of Wilhelm I in March 1888, the German throne was soon occupied by his grandson, Wilhelm II. The young, nationalistic Kaiser had dramatically different foreign policy views from Bismarck, and was less pliant than his grandfather had been on these issues. After clashing with Bismarck for 21 months, particularly on Russia policy, Wilhelm dismissed the Chancellor in March 1890, while Carl Peters was still annexing territory deep in the East African interior. This change was seen with alarm in many


European capitals, not least in London. Salisbury had been deeply concerned with the rise of Wilhelm II, and referred to Bismarck’s dismissal as “an enormous calamity, of which the sinister effects will be felt in every part of Europe.” Wilhelm II was also more sympathetic to the Peters expedition than his grandfather or Bismarck had been, raising new questions about how he would respond to Peters’ fait accompli.

As it would turn out, the new government in Berlin would see things much like the old one, desiring to avoid conflict with London rather than claim new East African territory. In fact, leaders in Berlin wanted to move rapidly toward a settlement of their outstanding conflicts with London in the region, before, as their ambassador in London put it, “an intolerable situation” develops. In early May 1890, the new foreign minister, Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein, gave his British interlocutors “the positive assurance that any action… taken by Dr. Peters would be considered as null and void by the German government.” He was echoed a few days later by another foreign office official, who, in conversation with a British interlocutor, affirmed that his government recognized that “Uganda at least as far as one degree south is in the British sphere.” And news that Peters had signed some sort of treaty with the Kabaka of Buganda, which arrived in Europe in late

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149 Sanderson, England, Europe, & the Upper Nile, p. 58.


151 Sanderson, England, Europe, & the Upper Nile, p. 54.
May 1890, made leaders in Berlin only more eager to get an agreement with London as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{152}

While the back-and-forth between the two governments would last a few more weeks, the ultimate result was the Anglo-German Treaty of 1 July 1890.\textsuperscript{153} According to the terms of this agreement, the United Kingdom gained the German protectorate of Wituland, territory between Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika, and recognition of its sphere of influence over Uganda and its protectorate over Zanzibar. In return, Germany gained some small concessions in West Africa as well as Heligoland, an archipelago of less than 2 km\textsuperscript{2} off of Germany’s North Sea coast.\textsuperscript{154} With this agreement, Germany’s presence in the area was limited to German East Africa proper, which, after the failures of the DOAG, had recently been converted to a full-fledged, state-run colony.\textsuperscript{155} Thus, Britain effectively gained everything it wanted, and stopped the threat of German expansion in East Africa in its tracks.\textsuperscript{156} Peters’ \textit{fait accompli} had been firmly and thoroughly rejected before he had even made it out of the interior.

When Carl Peters arrived back on the coast at Bagamoyo on 16 July 1890, and learned that his claims had been relinquished, he was so enraged that he was rendered speechless.\textsuperscript{157}

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\textsuperscript{156} Wesseling, \textit{Divide and Rule}, p. 159.

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As he later recalled the experience, “I remained two hours in the salon to regain my composure, and begged the gentlemen to say nothing more on the whole subject.” Upon his arrival in Zanzibar a few days later, he cabled Berlin, trying to get the decision reversed, but it was no use. What was done was done. He shortly thereafter departed for home, arriving on German soil on 18 August 1890.

German leaders recognized, however, that they would have to handle Peters with caution. He still had a large popular following, was well-connected with the German press, and had proven himself to be an able political agitator. To both placate his anger and indulge his narcissism, the new chancellor, Leo von Caprivi, personally telegraphed Peters, promising that he would be rewarded by the Kaiser if he could remain on his best behavior. A few weeks later, Wilhelm II would bestow upon Peters the Order of the Crown, 3rd Class, and he received other decorations from the King of Saxony and the Grand Duke of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach. Peters would be back in East Africa just one year later, serving as an imperial commissioner for German East Africa in the Kilimanjaro region. However, he was soon forced to resign in disgrace after his penchant for brutality helped spark yet another popular armed uprising against German rule.

**Alternative Explanations**

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Three alternative explanations that might account for the cases of Germany in East Africa in 1885 and Kenya and Uganda in 1890 are strategic expansion theory, state institutional weakness, and leader interests. First, clearly neither German case is an example of strategic expansion. In both East Africa and in Kenya and Uganda, Carl Peters was acting without government sanction or support, and in the latter case, against active efforts to stop him. While the ultimate decisions made by Bismarck in 1885 and by Wilhelm II in 1890 were strategic in nature—based on calculations of domestic-political benefits and perceived geopolitical risks—these decisions were forced upon them by actors and processes that were beyond their control. In short, these two German cases of annexation are clearly inadvertent in nature.

Second, state institutional weakness doesn’t appear to explain unauthorized peripheral expansion in the two German cases, as late-19th century Germany is often considered to be an archetypal “strong” state. While, as a federal state, its central government tax revenue was relatively small,163 its Prussian predecessor had experimented with various forms of military conscription since the 17th century, and it had been universal and permanent since 1813.164 Prussia had also had a civil registry since the 18th century, a statistical agency since the early 19th century, and a regular census since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, giving it ample


reliable information about its population and territory.\textsuperscript{165} Given the relative strength of German state institutions, institutional weakness is an unlikely explanation for these cases.

Finally, a simple appeal to leader interests is not in line with the evidence regarding subsequent central authorization in these two cases. In the case of East Africa in 1885, Bismarck was incentivized to accept the \textit{fait accompli}, even after sending Peters a cable stating that the government would not support him in any territorial claims there. In the case of Kenya and Uganda in 1890, by contrast, Wilhelm II had to reject the \textit{fait accompli}, despite his interest in the expedition and after extending his “warmest sympathies” for its success. In short, while not completely irrelevant, leader interests are an insufficient explanation for the two German cases.

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This chapter has presented the comparative case studies of inadvertent expansion and non-expansion by Germany in East Africa in 1885 and in Kenya and Uganda in 1890. This chapter is unique in the broader project, in that it presented the dissertation’s only two cases of inadvertent expansion via political annexation, as opposed to armed conquest. Both cases support the theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2. First, both cases showed unauthorized peripheral expansion to be a manifestation of a principal-agent problem: a divergence of preferences between Berlin and the East African periphery and a lack of telegraphic communications hampered Berlin’s ability to communicate with, and potentially control, the expedition. Second, in both cases the very act of engaging in territorial expansion activated mechanisms that made withdrawal appear difficult from the

perspective of leaders in the capital. Peters’ *faits accomplis* both drove down the perceived costs of territorial acquisition and helped general domestic political pressure on leaders in Berlin in favor of acceptance. And third, both cases showed how perceptions of geopolitical risk play a crucial role in driving decisions of whether to ultimately accept or reject the territorial *fait accompli*. In the case of East Africa in 1885, a lack of perceived geopolitical risk, when combined with domestic political pressure, convinced Bismarck that the potential costs of accepting the territory were sufficiently low as to merit its acquisition. In contrast, in the case of Kenya and Uganda in 1890, perceived geopolitical risk in the form of the British Empire convinced both Bismarck, and then Wilhelm II, that the costs of acceptance were far too great, resulting in territorial relinquishment.

At least part of what is striking about these two cases are the key leaders in the capital that ultimately accept and reject the *faits accomplis*. In the case of German East Africa in 1885, it was Otto von Bismarck, the reluctant imperialist and practitioner of *Realpolitik*—who famously said “All this colonial business is a sham”166—who made the ultimate decision to retain the territory his agents had claimed.167 In contrast, in the case of Kenya and Uganda in 1890, it was Wilhelm II, the aggressive nationalist and proponent of *Weltpolitik*—who would aim to give Germany its “place in the sun”168—who exercised restraint in deciding to relinquish the territorial claims. The cases of Bismarck and Wilhelm II, and the theory of inadvertent expansion more broadly, illuminate the various constraints—both domestic and


international—that leaders operate under, leading them to make decisions that are at odds with what might be expected based on their foreign policy views.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

“Leadership, calculation, control over events—these are merely the illusions of statesmen and scholars. The passions of men and momentum of events take over and propel societies in novel and unanticipated directions.”

—Robert Gilpin

This dissertation has examined inadvertent expansion in the modern history of great power politics. It has introduced the concept of inadvertent expansion, has put forward a theory to explain when and why it occurs, and has supported the theory with a great deal of quantitative and qualitative evidence. This brief, final chapter concludes the dissertation. It has two central purposes. First, to recap what has been learned in the pages above, summarizing the concept and theory of inadvertent expansion and highlighting key findings in each of the quantitative and qualitative empirical chapters. Second, to discuss some of the implications of the arguments and evidence presented for both international relations scholarship as well as the practice of foreign policy.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I summarize the concept and theory of inadvertent expansion, and review the key findings presented in each empirical chapter. Second, I present the most important implications of the arguments and evidence for international relations scholarship. Third and finally, I present the implications of this project for the practice of foreign policy.

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Arguments & Primary Findings

Inadvertent expansion is territorial expansion that is planned and executed by actors on the periphery of a state or empire, without the foreknowledge or involvement of leaders in the capital. In Chapter 2, I argued that instances of inadvertent expansion tend to unfold in two basic steps. The first step is what I referred to as “unauthorized peripheral expansion.” This occurs when state and non-state actors on the periphery of a given state or empire plan and execute instances of territorial expansion, without the foreknowledge, authorization, and support of leaders at home in the capital. The second step is what I referred to as “subsequent central authorization.” This occurs when these peripheral actors, having claimed foreign territory with the authority to do so, present leaders in the capital with their claims as a fact accompli, and these leaders are forced to decide whether to accept or reject the territorial claim in question.

The theory of inadvertent expansion presented in Chapter 2 made three central arguments. First, that the most important explanation for unauthorized peripheral expansion is the degree of control by leaders in the capital over the periphery. Unauthorized peripheral expansion is best understood as a principal-agent problem, where diverse preferences between the capital and the frontier, and information asymmetries favoring the latter, help create the conditions for frontier actors to engage in unauthorized expansion. When leaders in the capital have the ability to regularly monitor the behavior of their peripheral agents—typically, though not exclusively, in the form of rapid communications technology—unauthorized peripheral expansion is much less likely to occur. In contrast, when leaders in the capital lack the ability to regularly monitor their peripheral agents, unauthorized peripheral expansion will be far more likely. Thus, this first step of inadvertent expansion is
very much about control. It should be most likely to occur where centralized control is at its weakest.

The second key argument in the theory of inadvertent expansion is that the very act of unauthorized peripheral expansion changes “the facts on the ground,” and thereby alters the strategic calculus facing leaders in the capital. Peripheral expansion helps generate powerful incentives for these leaders to consider retaining the territory that they wouldn’t have otherwise, and it does so for three basic reasons. First, unauthorized peripheral expansion will often dramatically drive down the costs of acquiring the territory in question. Since these peripheral actors have paid most of the costs of expansion “up front” and on behalf of the state or empire, all leaders will often have to do is agree to accept what they are presented with and the territory will be theirs. Second, unauthorized peripheral expansion will frequently generate domestic political pressure on the leaders to support their own agents and nationals, regardless of their insubordination or how unscrupulous they may have been. Leaders themselves may feel a sense of personal or professional responsibility to support their own subordinates, or the public at large may become aware of events on the frontier and rally to the cause of their co-nationals, putting pressure on the leaders. Third, unauthorized peripheral expansion tends to engage the state or empire’s prestige, honor, and reputation in a way it simply wasn’t engaged before. Once a territory has been partly or wholly acquired, it often appears difficult, if not impossible, to back down and relinquish the claims without an unacceptable stain on the national honor. Thus, unauthorized peripheral expansion tends to generate its own incentives for territorial retention.

The third central argument of the theory of inadvertent expansion is that leaders’ ultimate decision to either accept or reject the territorial fait accompli is crucially conditioned by their perceptions of the geopolitical risk associated with doing so. When there is significant
perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquisition—in the form of crippling economic isolation, armed conflict with a regional power, or encroaching upon the interests of a rival great power—leaders will be far less likely to accept the fait accompli and retain the territory. In contrast, when there is little perceived geopolitical risk associated with acquisition, these leaders will be far more likely accept the territorial fait accompli, thereby completing the process of inadvertent expansion.

These arguments were supported with a variety of different kinds of empirical evidence. Chapter 3 focused on the broad patterns of strategic and inadvertent expansion over the past two hundred years. It presented new data on great territorial expansion from 1816 to the present, and included three central findings. First, that inadvertent expansion is a surprisingly-general phenomenon, occurring in nearly one-in-four cases of territorial expansion by the great powers. Second, that cases of territorial expansion are significantly more likely to be inadvertent when the territory in question lacks a connection to the global telegraph network. And third, that cases of territorial expansion are significantly less likely to be inadvertent when they involve considerable geopolitical risk. These last two findings remain strong and significant even when controlling for a number of important, potential confounding variables, including the passage of time, the distance from the capital to the territory in question, whether the expansion took place as part of a broader conflict, the strength of the great power’s institutions, the great power’s regime type, its relative power, and whether the expansion took the form of annexation rather than conquest.

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2 See: Tables 3.3 & 3.4.

3 See: Figure 3.2.

4 See: Table 3.7.
Chapters 4 through 8 then presented a series of paired, comparative case studies of inadvertent expansion and non-expansion in the history of great power politics. Chapter 4 presented two cases of the United States in the American south. In the case of Florida, a lack of control by Washington over its southern frontier allowed Andrew Jackson to independently claim Spanish Florida for the United States, and perceptions of only modest amounts of geopolitical risk within the Monroe Administration encouraged them to retain his territorial claims in 1818-19. In the case of Texas, by contrast, the desire to avoid what was seen as a likely war with Mexico pressured the administration of now-President Andrew Jackson to pass up the opportunity to acquire the newly-independent republic in 1836-37.

Chapter 5 presented two cases of Russia on the Central Asian Steppe. In the case of the Khanate of Kokand, a lack of control by St. Petersburg over its peripheral agents enabled Mikhail Cherniaev to independently conquer the cities of Chimkent and Tashkent, and the absence of perceived geopolitical risk associated with doing so led to their retention in 1864-66. In the case of the Ili Region, by contrast, a similarly unauthorized claim by Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman was turned back by St. Petersburg after a nearly-ten-year occupation, out of fear of war with China over the distant territory.

Chapter 6 presented two cases of France in the Southeast Asian region of Tonkin. In the first case, occurring in 1873-74, a lack of control by Paris over its peripheral agents allowed Francis Garnier to independently claim Tonkin for the French Empire. However, after his death and beheading, Paris would return the territory to local Vietnamese authorities due to concerns over the potentially-adverse reactions of Germany and the United Kingdom. In the second case, occurring in 1882-83, a similar lack of central control enabled Henri Rivière to, again, claim Tonkin on behalf of the empire without authorization from Paris. In this case, however, leaders perceived few serious geopolitical risks associated with retaining the
territory, and consistently downplayed the risks of Chinese intervention, leading to Tonkin’s acquisition. While French leaders were ultimately mistaken, and war with China would, indeed, result, the perceptions and behavior of leaders in Paris were consistent with the theory of inadvertent expansion.

Chapter 7 presented the comparative cases of Japan in Manchuria and Italy in the port city of Fiume. These two cases were noteworthy, in that it was relatively-weak civil-military relations, rather than rudimentary communications technology, that led to a lack of control by these capitals over their peripheral agents. In the Japan case, the independence of the Kwantung Army vis-à-vis Tokyo allowed them to launch the invasion of Manchuria in late 1931. And while perceptions of geopolitical risk were initially very high among leaders in Tokyo, over time these concerns dissipated, leading to the territory’s retention by March the following year. In the Italy case, in contrast, Gabriele D’Annunzio’s unauthorized conquest of the port city of Fiume was supported by much of the Italian military, but leaders in Rome quickly decided to turn the city back out of concern over the harsh reactions of France, the United Kingdom, and, most importantly, the United States.

Chapter 8 was the final empirical chapter of the dissertation, presenting two cases of Germany in East Africa. These two cases were also noteworthy, in that they presented the dissertation’s only two cases of inadvertent expansion via territorial annexation, the previous cases having all consisted of armed conquest. In the first case, a lack of control by leaders in Berlin over a colonial organization operating in the region enabled Carl Peters to annex a number of territories in what would become German East Africa in 1884-85. And the absence of perceived geopolitical risk associated with the annexations encouraged Otto von Bismarck to retain these territorial claims. In the second case, by contrast, Peters’ unauthorized annexations through Kenya and Uganda in 1890 would ultimately be rejected
by Kaiser Wilhelm II in Berlin, largely due to concerns over a potential conflict with the United Kingdom over them. In sum, the theory of inadvertent expansion was given strong support using both comprehensive quantitative data as well as a variety of comparative historical case studies.

The key alternative arguments considered throughout the dissertation have been strategic expansion theory, state institutional weakness, and leader interests. Strategic expansion theory found little support in Chapters 3 through 8. The simple fact is that not all instances of territorial expansion can be characterized as strategic in nature. Roughly one-in-four cases of territorial expansion by the great powers are inadvertent, and these include six of the nine great powers, occur across a large swath of time, in a wide variety of regions, and involve many different types of territory. And upon careful examination, none of the historical case studies presented could reasonably be considered instances of strategic expansion. Inadvertent expansion is an important—and as-yet underappreciated—form of territorial expansion by the great powers.

State institutional weakness was also not well supported as an alternative explanation for unauthorized peripheral expansion. In Chapter 3, I presented data that showed little meaningful difference between strategic and inadvertent expansion with respect to the expanding great power’s “information capacity,” a new and important measure of state institutional capacity, and this held in the more formal regression analysis as well. Each of the qualitative chapters also examined state institutional weakness as a potential alternative explanation. In most of the cases—including France, Japan, Italy, and Germany—the state institutions of the great power experiencing inadvertent expansion were, in fact, relatively

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5 See: Table 3.6.
strong, casting doubt upon this alternative explanation. And even in cases where the great power’s institutions were relatively weak, the overall infrequency of inadvertent expansion by that great power (in the case of the U.S.), and its sharp decline once telegraph technology becomes widespread (in the case of Russia), further call the institutional explanation into question.

Leader interests, too, did not receive much support as an alternative explanation for subsequent central authorization. While this alternative explanation was not able to be examined using the quantitative evidence presented in Chapter 3, it was considered in each of the qualitative cases, and did not find consistent support. In some chapters—such as the U.S. cases presented in Chapter 4—leader interests were constant, but the outcomes observed varied. In the many other chapters—including the United Kingdom case in the Introduction, the Russia cases in Chapter 5, the Japan and Italy cases in Chapter 7, and the Germany cases in Chapter 8—leader interests pointed to the opposite of what we would expect. They were opposed to acquisition in the cases in which territory was ultimately gained, and were supportive of acquisition in the cases in which territory was turned down. The two French cases in Chapter 6 were indeterminate on this front, as the incentives of both leader interests and geopolitical risk pointed “in the same direction.” But the lack of support for leader interests as an explanation for central authorization across the remainder of the cases rules it out as a serious alternative.

Table 9.1 (below) summarizes the evidence presented for the central arguments of the theory of inadvertent expansion as well as for alternative explanations, indicating which

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6 See: Table 3.4.

7 See: Table 3.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Principal-Agent Problems</th>
<th>Geopolitical Risk</th>
<th>Strategic Expansion</th>
<th>State Institutional Weakness</th>
<th>Leader Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.K. in Sind</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion Data (Ch. 3)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. in Florida</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. in Texas</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia in Kokand</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia in the Ili Region</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France in Tonkin (1873-74)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France in Tonkin (1882-83)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan in Manchuria</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy in Fiume</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany in East Africa</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany in Kenya &amp; Uganda</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✓: supported  ×: not supported  —: not examined/not relevant
were supported and which were not. As is clear, those associated with the theory of inadvertent expansion—principal-agent problems and geopolitical risk—receive much broader and more consistent support than these alternative explanations.

**Theoretical Implications**

The theory of inadvertent expansion and the evidence presented in this dissertation have two important implications for international relations theory. The first is that they should lead us to be cautious when attempting to infer the intentions of great powers. If such high-risk great power decisions as territorial expansion can routinely be inadvertent, it complicates our ability to reliably define certain states as “revisionist” or “greedy” and others as “status quo oriented” or “security seeking.” Certainly, the behavior of states engaging in inadvertent expansion is ultimately classifiable as revisionist in nature, but the intentions behind it are far less clear. This should lead us to be modest regarding the extent to which we can safely infer preferences from behavior.

The second theoretical implication is that the arguments and evidence support what Richard Betts has long argued: that strategy is often (though not always) an “illusion.” As Edelstein and Krebs put it more recently, in “the complex and highly uncertain world of international politics, it is all but impossible to identify the ideal strategy ahead of time” and

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that descriptions of state strategy often “confuse cause with after-the-fact rationalization.”\textsuperscript{11} Given such important and abundant non-strategic behavior, perhaps it is worth considering that in many instances, strategic behavior will be less deliberate and more like what Mintzberg and Water refer to as “emergent strategy,” consisting of patterns of behavior realized despite, or even in the absence of, intentions.\textsuperscript{12}

**Policy Implication**

The arguments and evidence presented above also have one crucial policy implication. This is that they should lead foreign policy practitioners to be cautious in how they interpret each and every behavior they see another state engage in. “A common misperception,” Robert Jervis notes in his classic work on the subject, “is to see the behavior of others as more centralized, planned, and coordinated than it is.”\textsuperscript{13} This article has indicated one crucially-important historical phenomenon— inadvertent territorial expansion—where such assumptions would be wholly misplaced. A clearer understanding of the nature of inadvertent foreign policies, and the conditions under which they are most likely, will reduce the tendency for misperceptions to drive foreign policy decision making. And this, it is hoped, will help us avoid the potentially-gravest of misunderstandings in world politics.


Balance Test for Case Selection (Chapter 2)

The following table compares the cases selected with the remainder of the cases of inadvertent expansion by the great powers between 1816 and 2014. Note that the “cases” here only include positive cases of inadvertent expansion, including: Sind (1843), Florida (1819), Chimkent (1864), Tashkent (1865), Annam (1883), Tonkin (1883), East Africa (1885), and Manchuria (1932). Definitions of, and details on, these variables can be found in Chapter 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Cases (n=8)</th>
<th>Rest of Population (n=48)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year (median)</td>
<td>1818-1932</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regions (count)</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra_regional</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance (km)</td>
<td>1,033-18,817</td>
<td>5,064</td>
<td>7,262</td>
<td>-2,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risky</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>+0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annexation</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev_GNP (%)</td>
<td>1.97-35.95</td>
<td>12.56</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>+2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info_capacity</td>
<td>0.18-0.73</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>+0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autocracy</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>+0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed_regime</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polity</td>
<td>(-10)-9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyarchy</td>
<td>0.02-0.57</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINC</td>
<td>0.03-0.33</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values refer to averages unless otherwise noted.

The table shows the balance between the sample of cases selected and the broader universe of cases of inadvertent expansion to be fairly even. There is little or no meaningful
difference between the sample selected and the universe of cases with respect to: the year in which the expansion observation took place; the number of regions represented; the risk involved in the expansion observation; the great power’s state revenue as a percentage of its gross national product; the great power’s information capacity; whether the great power was a democracy or an autocracy; the great power’s polity score; the great power’s polyarchy score; or the great power’s CINC score. There are only moderate differences between sample and universe with respect to: whether the territory acquired was connected to the global telegraph network.

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at the time of acquisition,\(^8\) whether the expansion was part of a broader conflict,\(^9\) and whether the great power had a mixed domestic political regime.\(^10\)

The only variables on which there is a substantial difference between the sample selected and the broader universe is: whether the expansion occurred in a region beyond the great power’s own region; the distance between the territory acquired and the great power’s capital;\(^11\) and whether the expansion took the form of annexation rather than conquest. The difference with respect to annexation, as noted in Chapter 2, is by design. I mostly selected cases of conquest in order to facilitate cross-case comparison. And the difference with respect to region and distance, if anything, should be biased against my own arguments. Given that the theory is importantly about monitoring and control, the fact that the cases selected are, on average, close to the great power’s capital should make them a slightly more difficult test of the theory.

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\(^8\) Much of the telegraph data is from: Bill Glover, “Cable Timeline: 1845-2018” in History of the Atlantic Cable & Undersea Communications (2021), Available at: https://atlantic-cable.com/; Anton A. Huurdeman, The Worldwide History of Telecommunications (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), ch. 8, Appendix A.


\(^11\) Distance is measured using the “Measure distance” tool in Google Maps to ensure as accurate a measure between locations as possible. See: Google Maps (2021). https://www.google.com/maps.
Robustness Tests for Data Analysis (Chapter 3)

The following table is a robustness test of the main model presented in Chapter 3 (Table 3.7). The results are mostly unchanged, though the coefficient on Telegraph is now only statistically significant at the 0.1 level.

### Table A3.1: Logistic Regression Analysis of Inadvertent Expansion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable:</td>
<td>inadvertent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telegraph</td>
<td>-1.013*</td>
<td>(0.535)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risky</td>
<td>-1.113**</td>
<td>(0.557)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year</td>
<td>-0.014*</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extra_regional</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>(0.670)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict</td>
<td>0.439</td>
<td>(0.454)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>info_cap</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>(1.324)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>democracy</td>
<td>-0.166</td>
<td>(0.405)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gainer_cinc</td>
<td>-4.725*</td>
<td>(2.422)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>27.155**</td>
<td>(13.849)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                           |             |                |
| Observations              | 233         |                |
| Log Likelihood            | -108.912    |                |
| Akaike Inf. Crit.         | 235.825     |                |

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
This next table is a robustness test of the main model presented in Chapter 3, but with *Distance* instead of *Extra_regional* as the control for distance from the capital. The results are mostly unchanged, and *Distance* is not statistically significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A3.2: Linear Probability Analysis with Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable: inadvertent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>info_cap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gainer_cinc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Statistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
This last table reruns the main model presented in Chapter 3, but with alternative measures for the great power’s domestic political regime type, including whether it was an Autocracy, its Polity score, and its Polyarchy score. The main results are unchanged, and none of these alternative measures is statistically significant.

### Table A3.3: Linear Probability Model with Alternative Regime Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable: inadvertent</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.083)</td>
<td>(0.083)</td>
<td>(0.084)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telegraph</td>
<td>-0.185**</td>
<td>-0.186**</td>
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Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01