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In regard to China-Japan relations, reactions among youths, especially students, are strong. If difficult problems were to appear still further, it will become impossible to explain them to the people. It will become impossible to control them. I want you to understand this position which we are in.

— Deng Xiaoping, speaking to senior Japanese officials, June 28, 1987

Policeman A: When do they arrive?
Policeman B: 10:00 A.M. is the official start time. They’ll arrive around 9:45.
Policeman A: Has it been approved?
Policeman B: Definitely not approved, but the government has given tacit consent. This group plays by the rules. Before coming, they call the government and say, “tomorrow at 10?”

— Overheard by the author outside the Japanese Embassy, Beijing, China, June 2007

Recent research in international relations has shown that domestic constraints provide an important source of leverage in international disputes. Democratic leaders often claim that their hands are tied by constituents or parliamentarians (Schelling 1960; Milner 1997) who will punish them at the polls for backing down during diplomatic negotiations. These potential “audience costs” have been said to give democracies an advantage in international negotiations (e.g. Fearon 1994; Schultz 2001b). With a few recent exceptions (e.g. Weeks 2008), however, the literature has neglected the role of domestic audiences in autocratic states. Yet in many autocracies we observe popular protests demanding that the government stand up to international pressure and defend the national interest. Many autocracies that typically suppress displays of popular opposition nonetheless sometimes allow and even encourage protests against foreign targets. For example, tens of thousands of protesters took to the “Arab street” in Egypt, Syria, and Jordan during the 2008 Israeli offensive in Gaza. In the lead up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, anti-American demonstrations were allowed in Egypt after protest organizers agreed not to criticize President

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Hosni Mubarak. That same year, demonstrators in Cambodia torched the Thai embassy, protesting purported Thai claims to Angkor Wat. In 2005, Iranian students formed human chains around Iranian nuclear reactors and demanded that the government resume uranium enrichment.

Despite the plethora of examples on the front pages of world newspapers, the phenomenon of anti-foreign protest has not been systematically studied by social scientists. Indeed, protests against foreign targets are explicitly excluded by the widely-used Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive (Banks 2010) on internal unrest across regimes. To fill this gap, I develop a theory of anti-foreign protest, drawing inspiration from the literature on two-level games and international bargaining (e.g. Schelling 1960, 1966; Putnam 1988; Martin 1993; Evans et al 1993; Smith 1998; Leeds 1999; Ramsay 2004; Leventoglu and Tarar 2005; Slantchev 2006), social movements and popular protest (e.g. Tarrow 1998; Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994), autocratic politics (e.g. Geddes 1991; Shirk 1993; Roeder 1993; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Goemans 2000; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Vreeland 2008), and nationalism (e.g. Haas 1986; Gellner 1983; Snyder 1991; van Evera 1994; Laitin 1998; Beissinger 2002). The core intuition is that anti-foreign protests may get out of hand and threaten regime stability. Protests that initially take aim at foreign targets may shift direction and criticize the regime itself. As one Egyptian official noted in 2003:

We are extremely worried about the reaction of people on the day America starts bombing the Iraqi people…Maybe people will try to express anger at American actions, but they are in such a state of disappointment and resentment that they may also express anger against rising prices and the cost of living. It might be an opportunity to mix everything together. That's what everyone is worried about.3

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Even a small demonstration may trigger a cascade of further protests as citizens realize the ubiquity of discontent with the regime. Anti-foreign protests are especially dangerous because they may unite opponents of the regime under the protective banner of patriotism, particularly if the government appears to be caving to foreign pressure.

Although autocrats typically suppress displays of anti-regime discontent, nationalist demonstrations against foreign targets are sometimes allowed or encouraged. In China, the government permitted anti-American protests in 1999 after the United States bombed the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia but repressed anti-American protests in 2001 when a US spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet collided. Anti-Japanese protests were allowed in 1985, when the Japanese prime minister visited a controversial war shrine on the anniversary of Japan’s defeat in World War II, and again in 2005, when Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council began to gain momentum. By my count, anti-Japanese protests were permitted in China on 55 days between 1978 and 2007; on 16 occasions, the Chinese government nipped similar protests in the bud, whether by arresting participants at the outset or by preemptively detaining key organizers. In 1990 and 1996, for example, the government prevented protests that sought to condemn assertions of Japanese sovereignty over disputed islands in the East China Sea. Similar patterns of repression and facilitation are apparent in Egypt, Iran, Syria, and other

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4 Using Japanese newspapers, FBIS, LexisNexis and several anti-Japanese activist websites operating out of mainland China and Hong Kong, I counted an anti-Japanese protest as having occurred if: two or more people were involved; Japan was the primary target; and the activity was held in a public location and sought to attract the attention and/or participation of bystanders. I thus excluded protests that made demands of the Chinese, British, or American governments to pressure Japan to change policy, as well as excursions by sea to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Personal interviews with anti-Japanese activists helped corroborate secondary reports. As is always the case with historical research, missing data are a problem, particularly in an authoritarian context of low transparency. These counts, both of protests that were allowed and those that were prevented, are thus likely to be underestimates.
non-democratic regimes. What explains this variation? When and why do authoritarian leaders give their citizens a green, yellow, or red light to protest foreign targets?

A good theory of anti-foreign protest will explain not only its occurrence but also its absence. Existing theories tend to over-predict anti-foreign protest in authoritarian states. The most prevalent conventional view holds that nationalist protests provide an outlet for pent-up grievances, a scapegoat for domestic problems, or a pretext for rallying the public around the flag (e.g. Coser 1956; Mueller 1973; Waldron 1999; Chang 2006; He 2007b). At the domestic level, these diversionary or “venting” theories of protest highlight only the benefits and not the risks of allowing nationalist protest. As such, they have difficulty explaining the pattern of when autocrats allow versus repress nationalist protest. Moreover, at the international level, these theories are silent on the anticipated as well as actual consequences of nationalist protest.

Linking the domestic and international levels, I argue that autocrats face a risk-return tradeoff in deciding whether to repress, tolerate, or encourage anti-foreign protest. Because anti-foreign protests may turn against the government and are increasingly costly to suppress as they gain momentum, the decision to allow such protest demonstrates toughness or “resolve” in negotiations and makes diplomatic concessions more costly for the government. By allowing nationalist demonstrations that may spin out of control and threaten the regime, autocrats make themselves visibly vulnerable to public opinion. Imagine, for example, a negotiation between an autocrat and a democrat. The democrat can point to Congress or Parliament and say, “I can’t budge—they’ve got me pinned.” With protesters in the streets, the autocrat can say, “You might lose a few points at the polls, but I could be thrown into exile or much worse. You may have Congress, but I have mobs!”

The argument rests upon two analytically distinct mechanisms by which nationalist protests translate into potential bargaining advantage. The first incorporates the risk that protests pose to regime stability, akin to the “threat that leaves something to chance” (Schelling 1960, 1966). Nationalist protests can get out of hand and undermine regime stability in a number of ways, for example, by providing a protective umbrella for anti-regime dissent, giving citizens experience and resources for future
mobilization, and generating populist fuel for intra-elite competition. Because nationalist protests can get out of hand, the decision to allow such protests signals the government’s resolve, a willingness to “go to the brink.” In cases where the regime is perceived as too weak to prevent nationalist protests, such protests reveal information about public preferences and the domestic constraints on foreign policy. On the other hand, if the regime is able to prevent protests, it can signal its willingness to cooperate with foreign governments by repressing anti-foreign protests. By paying the costs of repression, the regime credibly demonstrates its intent to pursue a conciliatory foreign policy. In either case, the decision to allow or suppress nationalist protests that pose a risk to regime stability enables foreign observers to learn about the type of regime they are dealing with.

The second mechanism captures the escalating cost of suppression, or the difficulty of putting the genie back in the bottle. As protests materialize on the street and gather steam, they become increasingly difficult and costly for the government to curtail. As protests gain momentum, the government's incentives change. Rather than repress with a costly use of force, the government has an incentive to take a tough diplomatic stance in order to appease the nationalist protesters and disperse them peacefully. In developing the dynamics of this second mechanism, I draw inspiration from the recent body of work that suggests that democratic leaders are better able to use the threat of electoral punishment for backing down—i.e. “audience costs”—to tie their hands in international negotiations (e.g. Martin 1993; Fearon 1994; Smith 1998; Schultz 2001a; Gelpi and Griesdorf 2001; Leventoglu and Tarar 2005; Tomz 2007).

As described by Fearon (1994), when a leader makes a public threat, she faces potential domestic costs for backing down from that threat. In the democratic context, these costs might translate into a dip in approval ratings. At worst, she could lose office at the next election. As a result, a leader who makes public threats will be perceived as being relatively resolved, or else she would not have taken a public stance.5 By going public and invoking these potential costs, moreover, the democratic leader becomes less likely to back down, thus “locking in” a resolute bargaining position.

5 Further research has explicitly examined the decision to go public or private, e.g. Baum 2004.
As for non-democratic regimes, the conventional wisdom in this literature suggests that the probability that authoritarian leaders will be punished for appearing incompetent or weak on foreign policy is quite small, even though the magnitude of the punishment may be quite large in the event of a coup or other irregular turnover (Fearon 1994; Schultz 2001b; Debs and Goemans 2010). Which effect dominates is a moot point if the audience costs are invisible to outsiders. Unless authoritarian leaders can convince foreign negotiators *ex ante* that the adverse consequences are real and are not part of a bluffing strategy, these audience costs will have no bite. The king’s hands may be tied, but the bonds are invisible. Weeks (2008) points to the ability of elites within autocracies to coordinate and sanction the incumbent leader as a basis for autocratic audience costs. Where internal politics are transparent enough for outsiders to believe this risk of punishment, elite audiences can serve in lieu of a voting public or a democratic opposition. The argument developed here returns our focus to the role of *mass* audiences in autocratic regimes. The logic is also quite different. Mass protests do not need to threaten the removal of the autocratic leader in order to generate audience costs; the physical and reputational costs of having to suppress protests are sufficient to give autocrats an incentive to stand firm in diplomatic negotiations.

I test the theory and illustrate the two mechanisms in the context of the People’s Republic of China. China is an appropriate setting for theoretical and substantive reasons. Among authoritarian regimes, China is at the mid-to-upper range of state strength over society. The utility of anti-foreign protest as a signaling tactic varies with state strength over society. Too little state capacity increases the noisiness of the signal sent by anti-foreign protests. In weaker regimes, the government may be unable to prevent protests from occurring. When protests occur without the government’s prior knowledge or assent, such protests send a noisier signal about the government’s resolve to foreign observers, because outsiders have a hard time discerning whether the government allowed demonstrations or was simply unable to prevent them. At the other end of the state-strength spectrum, too much state control over society decreases the credibility of the risk posed by anti-foreign protests. In totalitarian states such as North Korea, for example, anti-foreign protests are unlikely to be seen by outsiders as representing a real risk to regime stability. As in the story of Goldilocks and the three bears, the Chinese setting is “just right” for
testing the plausibility of the argument. The Chinese government has sufficient knowledge and penetration of the public sphere to anticipate most anti-foreign protests and, if necessary, step in to prevent or contain them. But the Chinese government has not been so dominant over society that anti-foreign protests do not pose a credible risk of getting out of hand. Since the death of Mao Zedong in the mid-1970s, the state has withdrawn from society sufficiently to allow for genuine grassroots mobilization, as suggested by reports of 87,000 public order disturbances in 2005. Indeed, the anti-Japanese protests of 1985 set the stage for the pro-democracy protests of 1986 and 1989, culminating in the tragic standoff on June 4, 1989. Even though the Communist Party remained in power, two General Secretaries were removed from office for their mishandling of the 1980s protest movements.

Below, I present the logic of anti-foreign protest as a bargaining tactic. After identifying key implications of the theory, I test the plausibility of the argument via a rich case study of the 2005 anti-Japanese protests in China, which coincided with Japan’s bid for permanent membership on the UN Security Council. For evaluating theories of strategic interaction, case studies are invaluable for illuminating the perceptions and motivations of key actors in the decision-making process, particularly given the absence of theoretical and empirical work to date on anti-foreign protest. Using qualitative and quantitative data gathered over fourteen months of field research in China and Japan, including more than 150 interviews with officials, activists, protesters, and experts, I demonstrate that the Chinese protests were influential in altering the bargaining positions of key actors and ultimately helped defeat Japan’s bid. Finally, I reassess the claims of conventional wisdom and conclude.

TWO-LEVEL AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS AND NATIONALIST PROTEST

In China, as in most authoritarian states, there are no formal institutional channels for popular input on foreign policy. Members of the Politburo, junta or supreme council do not answer directly to

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mass electoral constituencies; their success is judged by others within the elite. Yet the extent to which public opinion and the “street” influences foreign policy in these authoritarian regimes remains a subject of great speculation, particularly when protesters take to the streets, burn foreign flags, and attack diplomatic buildings. For many years, scholars and observers of politics viewed the relatively monolithic, opaque character of autocracies as an advantage for diplomacy. Unlike democrats, autocrats could conduct state affairs with secrecy, without fear of domestic debates being “overheard” by foreign observers. Autocracies could maintain a steady course rather than being blown about by the competing winds of particularistic interests and faddish public opinion. Recently, the very features that once seemed to put democracies at a disadvantage, particularly transparency and constraints on executive power, have been viewed as benefits to credible commitment and communication (e.g. Schultz and Weingast 2003; Stasavage 2007). Only in the last few years has the pendulum begun to swing back, such that certain types of autocracies are now seen as on par with democracies in their ability to prevail in international disputes. The arguments developed here follow in this vein, viewing domestic vulnerability and the ability to communicate that vulnerability to foreign observers as a potential advantage in international bargaining.

The theory developed here makes two basic assumptions. The first is that international outcomes affect the domestic standing of leaders and vice versa. Authoritarian leaders are no exception to the “two-level game” of strategic interaction between international and domestic politics (Putnam 1988). Although autocrats are not held accountable to the citizenry via open and competitive elections, they are nevertheless accountable to a certain “selectorate” or “winning coalition” (Shirk 1993; Roeder 1993; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999). In ordinary times, authoritarian leaders may be accountable to the military, the bureaucracy, or some other constellation of powerful actors. Below, I argue that anti-foreign protests give potential force to the evaluations of protestors and ordinary citizens outside the selectorate or winning coalition.

The second simplifying assumption is that authoritarian leaders seek above all else to maximize their probability of survival in office. Authoritarian leaders strive to retain power as a first-order preference, just as US politicians seek re-election (Mayhew 1974). Politicians may have other goals,
including ideological or policy objectives, but holding office generally makes it easier to achieve those goals. The process of rising to power also tends to favor those who have an appetite for it, weeding out those who do not (see Geddes 1991:374). Once in power, autocrats may have even stronger incentives than democrats to stay in office, given the irregular and violent manner in which autocrats are often removed (Goemans 2000).

Building upon these assumptions, I develop a theory of government response to anti-foreign mobilization. At the domestic level, the government weighs the risk to domestic stability against the cost of repressing protests before they can materialize or gather steam. Any given instance of nationalist protest varies along these two dimensions, which are analytically distinct if often associated empirically.

The Risk to Regime Stability

In the authoritarian context, nationalist protests contain an intrinsic risk to regime stability, which varies with the importance of the international issue as well as background domestic conditions, including the level of societal discontent, the level of resources and organization among opposition groups, and the ability of the regime to prevent elite defections. The magnitude of this increased risk, especially as perceived by outsiders, is a critical variable that affects the expected utility of anti-foreign protest as a bargaining tactic. It is not necessary that a given protest have a large likelihood of turning against the regime, only that there be a small probability—exogenous to the government’s handling of foreign policy and the outcome of the international negotiations—that protesters will change direction, for example, and picket government offices rather than foreign offices. Nationalist protests also increase the long-term hazard to the regime. Even if protests do not get out of hand today, the cumulative impact of citizen experience with political protest and collective action make future mobilization more likely.

Protests present a risk to autocratic stability for several reasons identified in the literature:

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7 An exception may be “tin-pot” or “bandit” leaders, whose strategy is to steal resources, flee the country, and enjoy their illicit gains in retirement.
• *Demonstration effects, tipping points, and information cascades*: Protests, once begun, can trigger the sudden realization that protest is acceptable, even safe, leading more and more people to join the protest. Once a critical mass has gathered in the streets and authorities have not suppressed the protest, the protest can rapidly swell to a size unimaginable the day before (Schelling 1978; Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994; Laitin 1998).

• *Resource mobilization*: Protests beget protests by lowering the costs of collective action for other groups that have fewer resources, activating new networks and facilitating the spread of protest techniques and repertoires from hard-core activists to previously passive groups and individuals (Tarrow 1998).

• *Elite splits*: Protests may expose weaknesses in the government that may not have been widely apparent, revealing sympathetic allies among the elite (Tarrow 1998:87) and potential regime-threatening fissures between hardliners and moderates (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). As Pool notes, “The kind of unity and cohesion created by [authoritarian] methods is fragile. Whenever the structure of controls breaks down, the apparent unanimity collapses quickly” (Pool 1973).

Nationalist protest is especially risky because it has the potential to shake the foundation of state legitimacy, particularly those that rely upon nationalist mythmaking to bolster their credentials with the public (Snyder 1991; van Evera 1994). Nationalist protests are particularly risky because of their broad appeal. As historian John Breuilly notes, “Even if nationalist movements do not have active popular support, they claim to speak for the whole nation” (Breuilly 1994:19). Nationalist protests advance goals that may challenge the foundation of the government’s legitimacy, goals that may be beyond the reach of the existing government, such as “the historical mission of the nation, ranging from quiet self-perfection to conquest or the restoration of some golden age,” including “how the nation ought to be governed” (Haas 1986:727-8). Nationalism promotes love of the nation, not love of the government, meaning that nationalist protest can easily escalate to demands for revolution if the public feels that the government has failed to defend the nation from foreign depredations. As Jack Snyder notes, “Often, nationalists claim
that old elites are ineffective in meeting foreign threats and that a new, popular government is needed to pursue national interests more forcefully.” (Snyder 1993:16; see also Shirk 2007:256)

Relative to protests that advance the interests of a particular group, protests that promote the interests of the nation are also more difficult for the regime to suppress. Nationalism, under the guise of patriotism, provides a layer of protection against government suppression, making it more costly for the government to use force to disperse protests. Not only are the political costs of using force against patriotic demonstrations higher than other types of demonstrations, but the very attempt to do so is more likely to backfire, because security forces are more likely to side with the protesters. In Iran, for example, the 1979 revolution succeeded in large part due to support from elements in the military, which turned their back on the pro-American Shah (e.g. Telhami 2002:73).

Historically, how often have anti-foreign protests spun out of control to the extent that autocratic incumbents lost their grip on power? Looking into the Archigos dataset (Goemans et al. 2009) on political leaders from 1875 to 2004, there are 573 instances in which leaders lost power in an irregular manner but were not deposed by a foreign state. Of these, popular protests pushed leaders out of office in 29 cases. Using Lexis-Nexis and the sources cited by Archigos, I found evidence to suggest that four of these 29 leaders were ousted by protests that were at least partly anti-foreign: the 1956 revolution in Hungary, where an anti-Soviet uprising caused the government to collapse (and also precipitated a Soviet invasion); the 1979 revolution in Iran, where anti-American protesters deposed the Shah; the 1972 riots in Madagascar against neo-colonial agreements with France, which pushed President Tsiranana out of office; and the 1992 ouster of Azerbaijani President Mutalibov, during which protesters demanded tougher action by the government against Russia and Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. This number is striking, though it may seem low, because there are selection effects working against these outcomes. Governments tend not to allow high-risk protests, and when they do, the government is likely to take actions—such as adopting a more hawkish foreign policy stance—that will mollify protesters and prevent a popular backlash. Moreover, these four instances represent only those cases where protests were the proximate cause of
irregular leadership turnover; there are likely many more cases where protests of an anti-foreign nature led to instability, which then provoked a military coup or foreign takeover.

**The Cost of Repression**

Repression is costly. Protests are easier to nip in the bud than to suppress after they have begun. The more people that have to be detained, dispersed, or prevented from gathering in the street, the greater the cost to the regime. The government must expend greater effort and absorb higher costs when curtailing a protest that has become large or widespread. Repression is always costly, but dispersing an amassed crowd is more costly than hauling away a few “early risers” at the scene (Tarrow 1998) or warning off activists on the eve of protest. Physically, more manpower is required to deal with a large crowd, whether by force or persuasion. More government resources must be mobilized to corral protesters and clear the scene without bloodshed. The government also faces higher reputation costs of suppression once protests have attracted domestic and international scrutiny. The larger and more prominent the protest, the more likely international and domestic observers are to condemn the government for violating human rights. Once a large crowd has assembled, the government’s handling of the protests becomes more visible. The government is thus more likely to face censure for suppressing protest once it has grown in size and scale. Domestically, even members of the public who disagree with the protesters’ demands may be spurred to defend the right to protest, e.g. liberals who favor political reform and openness to popular participation. As suggested above, nationalist protests are especially costly to suppress because suppression often appears unpatriotic—a betrayal of the national myth. Clever protesters seeking to gain sympathy and avoid suppression have often used this to their advantage. In China, for example, nationalist protesters often chant the slogan, “Patriotism is innocent!” The reputation costs of suppression thus increase once protest has begun, varying with the extent to which observers view the protests as legitimate.

It is important to note that the assumption of escalating costs of repression implies that anti-foreign protests are unlikely to “fizzle out” in the absence of satisfaction—in the form of foreign concessions or a positive change in the status quo—or suppression. That is, the government cannot wait
out the protests and assume that people will go home once they are tired, regardless of the outcome. This assumption is reasonable in the short term, particularly during the initial “rapid diffusion” phase of the protest cycle (Tarrow 1998:141). Over the long term, protests may subside as exhaustion sets in. I thus adopt a relatively instrumental view of protest. Protestors may participate for many different reasons, including thrill-seeking and blowing off steam, but many are also purposive, seeking to effect policy change. Although some participants will satisfy their appetite for protest after a short period of participation, others in the crowd will find that the experience has whetted their appetite for protest, stirring them and others to continue pressing their demands. That protestors act instrumentally holds even if nationalist protest is insincere, a mask or outlet for anti-government grievances. In an insincere protest, protesters are still unlikely to disperse without achieving their objectives, in this case domestic concessions rather than foreign policy demands.

In deciding whether to allow or repress attempts by citizens to mobilize nationalist protests, the autocrat must weigh the danger to regime stability against the cost of using force or coercion to prevent citizens from gathering in the street. Figure 1 illustrates a stylized universe of possible protests defined by these two dimensions, with the dashed line representing the cutoff between protests that are allowed and protests that are repressed. Below the dashed line, the government allows protests because repression is more costly than the expected damage to regime stability. Above the dashed line, the government squelches attempts to mobilize protests that are relatively easy to repress but carry a high expected risk to regime stability. The dashed line represents the set of protests for which the government is indifferent between tolerance and repression. As the government incorporates the potential diplomatic benefits of nationalist protest in its calculus, the set of protests that the government is willing to allow expands, which I turn to next. [FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

NATIONALIST PROTESTS: SIGNALING RESOLVE AND TYING HANDS

Nationalist protests can create bargaining leverage for authoritarian leaders in two ways: first, by demonstrating resolve in diplomatic negotiations, and second, by making it costly to pursue a soft or conciliatory foreign policy. The argument developed here follows from a two-level game in which the
international and domestic levels are interdependent (Putnam 1988). As in a standard models of crisis bargaining (e.g. Morrow 1989; Powell 1990; Fearon 1994; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1997), two states are negotiating over the division of some good, which may represent anything from natural resources to territory to a particular policy. The source of conflict is distributional: which state will get the better end of the bargain if a deal is reached. Each state is uncertain about the other state’s willingness to hold out for a better deal and risk the collapse of negotiations. Because the escalation of conflict is costly, both states prefer to reach an agreement, but each want to ensure the best possible terms. Given incomplete information, both states have strategic incentives to misrepresent their willingness to stand firm, making credible communication difficult (Fearon 1995). To signal resolve, however, “cheap talk” will not suffice; states must take costly actions that distinguish their statements from mere bluff.

Signaling Resolve: Nationalist Protest as the Threat that Leaves Something to Chance

The decision to allow anti-foreign protests demonstrates a willingness to bear risk, namely, that protests may endanger regime stability. Although the government can take security measures to mitigate this risk—e.g. sending police to accompany the protest march or prohibiting protest on sensitive domestic anniversaries or in focal locations—there remains some probability that the protests will spiral beyond their intended scope and target the government. One can imagine a number of scenarios: anti-foreign protests could turn against the government, grow too large for the state security apparatus to disperse, or generate such popular support that state insiders—even police or military units—may disobey orders to suppress the protests and side with the demonstrators (Lee 2009; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). The government’s willingness to run this risk sets it apart from others that would not run this risk, signaling a relatively high value for the dispute relative to concession.

Some portion of this risk is independent of the government’s actions on foreign policy, that is, it is exogenous to the international negotiations. This element of risk is determined by the fragility of the authoritarian system or the latent instability of the regime, rendering anti-foreign protests analogous to the “threat that leaves something to chance” (Schelling 1960, 1966). The innovation here is that the risk of disaster is not mutually assured destruction, but domestically assured destruction. The act of allowing
protests thus shows that the government is willing to approach the “brink.” Whereas traditional models require actions that increase the risk of war to signal resolve (Schelling 1960; Powell 1990; Fearon 1992, 1994), I suggest that actions that increase the risk of regime instability can also serve this purpose.

To illustrate, consider again the nature of diplomatic negotiations with and without protests. Without protests, the government’s resolve over the issue is mainly conveyed via public rhetoric and private comments. While official spokesmen may calibrate their rhetoric to convey a consistent hierarchy of national priorities, outside observers have little hard evidence to evaluate the weight of official remarks. Given that government officials have incentives to bluff, their statements lack a certain degree of credibility and may therefore be discounted. By consenting to anti-foreign protests, however, the government demonstrates that it is willing to run a risk of domestic instability for the sake of the dispute, thereby sending a costly signal. As the cliché goes, actions speak louder than words. By allowing protests that appear potentially destabilizing in the eyes of foreign observers, authoritarian leaders communicate the gravity of their concern.

Although it may appear “crazy” to engage in this sort of brinkmanship, since the potential hazard is disproportionately borne by the government making the threat, it is not as irrational as it may sound. When confronted with nationalist mobilization, the government faces a choice: allow protests and accept the risk that they will get out of hand, or repress the protests and accept the expense to regime legitimacy. Of the two, allowing protests is the only potentially cost-free option. The downside is potentially larger, but it is not certain. Played right, the domestic risk generated by protests can even translate into international benefits.

Convincing foreign observers of the risk to stability and the cost of repression is a critical task for an authoritarian government seeking to use nationalist protest for bargaining leverage. In particular, the

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8 On the efficiency of private and public rhetoric as credible signals, see Sartori 2002, Leventoglu and Tarar 2005, and Kurizaki 2007. At a higher level of escalation, economic sanctions and military mobilization are alternative methods of signaling resolve, e.g. Slantchev 2005.
success of this tactic depends upon foreigners being able and willing to distinguish between “sincere” and “manufactured” protests, illustrated in Figure 2. In sincere demonstrations, participants are self-motivated, self-chosen, and largely self-organized, even if their plans have been scanned and approved by government authorities. They continue to mobilize and demonstrate until the government responds to their demands or forcibly curtails their activities. In manufactured protests, participants are selected by the government, organized by the government (with buses often provided), and motivated by the government (whether by monetary reward or compulsory mandate). Sincere protests are often described as “spontaneous” protests by government spokesmen and protest organizers, both of whom wish to differentiate their protests from “rent-a-crowd” mobs, whose participants are not genuinely interested in the issue. Sincere protests, unlike manufactured protests, carry a risk to stability and a cost of repression that is not present in manufactured protests, which are likely to be dismissed as “cheap talk.” By this logic, state-organized rallies, marches and demonstrations are not expected to generate bargaining leverage, as such activities are neither risky to the regime nor costly for the government to curtail. [FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Under what conditions will this tactic be successful in compelling foreign governments to make concessions, and under what conditions will it backfire? The threat of domestic instability gives foreign governments an incentive to show leniency at the bargaining table under certain conditions. To be effective, the threat that leaves something to chance requires that the threatened outcome—regime instability and possible regime turnover—be worse than the status quo. This holds when one or both of two scope conditions are met:

1) The cost to the foreign government of chaos, instability, and even state failure is prohibitively high. Even if the foreign government desires regime change, believing that a new government would be more moderate or democratic than the incumbent regime, the transition costs may be too high. Instability may result in lost trade and investment, or nontraditional threats to security, such as large-scale refugee flows or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to nonstate actors.
2) The incumbent regime is or appears to be more moderate than the average citizen, i.e. the foreign government prefers the incumbent regime to its probable successor. Regime instability need not equal revolution or even a titular change of leadership. Large-scale protests can alter the balance of power between hardliners and doves within the reigning elite, pushing the regime toward a more hawkish stance. If nationalist protests are perceived to be more hawkish than the government’s position, then foreign governments may conclude that short-term concessions are a relatively low price to pay for strengthening a friendly autocrat in the long run. In many autocracies, this condition appears to hold. In the Middle East, for example, Telhami 1993: 438) writes: “On Arab views about the Palestinian question, it is generally accepted that mass public opinion is more radical on those issues than elite and official positions.” Similarly, in China, according to a senior expert on Sino-Japanese relations, “The gap between the people and the government is really large on Japan. For example, the Chinese government definitely doesn’t support the boycott of Japanese goods. Japan is very important to China’s economic development. But the public feels more strongly than the government about Japan” (Interview 34, July 2006). In fact, if China were to become more democratic, said a prominent nationalist author, “It would obviously be more hard-line. Right now, foreigners have special privileges that would not be allowed in a democracy” (Interview 42, July 2006).

**Tying Hands: Nationalist Protests as Audience Costs**

Another method of signaling resolve is to take actions that increase the risk of bargaining failure (Powell 1990; Schelling 1960; Fearon 1997). A recent body of literature has suggested that public posturing is one way for state leaders to send a costly signal of resolve during diplomatic negotiations (e.g. Martin 1993; Fearon 1994; Smith 1998; Schultz 2001a; Leventoglu and Tarar 2005). By “going public” before domestic audiences, the government increases the potential costs of subsequently backing down. These “audience costs” make it harder for the government to offer concessions, increasing the risk that the government will be locked into a position it cannot yield. The decision to go public signals resolve; the ensuing threat of incurring audience costs ties the government’s hands.
The microfoundations of audience costs have recently been the subject of some controversy (e.g. Schultz 2001b; Smith 1998; Slantchev 2006). In a seminal article, Fearon (1994) suggests that domestic audiences punish leaders who back down for betraying the “national honor.” Audience costs are assumed as an exogenous parameter; the public does not actually have the opportunity to act. This raises two questions about the credibility of audience costs. First, is it rational for citizens to punish their leaders for backing down? Second, under what conditions are citizens able to impose punishment?

Most work on the microfoundations of audience costs has focused on why citizens would punish their leaders. Smith (1998) argues that backing down during a crisis reveals a lack of leadership competence. If failure to follow through with past commitments reflects poorly upon a leader’s competence, then voters may rationally punish leaders for backing down in a crisis despite being content with the outcome, i.e. having avoided war or some other form of “foreign entanglement” (Smith 1998: 623). Nevertheless, as Schultz points out, it is unclear why citizens would punish their leaders for getting caught bluffing, since bluffing can be an optimal strategy (Schultz 1999:237). An alternative line of argument suggests that being caught bluffing destroys a country’s reputation for honesty (e.g. Guisinger and Smith 2002; Sartori 2002). In this view, voters have incentives to remove leaders who back down in order to restore the nation’s credibility. Survey experiments by Tomz (2007) indicate that US respondents indeed disapproved more strongly when the President failed to follow through with a threat than when the President stayed out of the crisis altogether.

A smaller subset of literature on audience costs has addressed how institutional conditions affect the ability of citizens to punish their leaders. In order to threaten punishment credibly, citizens must be able to obtain reliable information about the foreign policy performance of their leaders. In Schultz’s (1998) depiction of democracy, competition between the leadership and opposition is public, unrestricted, and informative. However, Ramsay (2004) and Slantchev (2006) point out that the information-revealing properties of democratic competition rest upon a critical assumption, namely, that the opposition speaks credibly. This point remains controversial. On the one hand, Ramsay argues that opposition babbling is reduced by assuming two-dimensional preferences, incorporating policy goals as well as office-seeking
goals to discipline the opposition. On the other hand, Slantchev contends that office-seeking incentives bias the signal that the opposition sends to citizens, preventing them from learning anything about the competence of the incumbent leadership.

Despite this unresolved debate, audience costs have been marshaled to explain international cooperation (Leeds 1999), crisis behavior and outcomes (Partell and Palmer 1999; Eyerman and Hart 1996), compliance with trade agreements (Mansfield et al. 2002), monetary policy credibility (Lohmann 2003), and even democratic consolidation (Pevehouse 2002). The use of audience costs to address such a range of issues underscores the need to substantiate their theoretical underpinnings. In doing so, I depart from the traditional focus on electoral institutions and turn instead to the strategic interaction of citizens and leaders in authoritarian states.

Although autocratic leaders are not constrained by the same electoral institutions as democratic leaders, anti-foreign protests represent an alternative mechanism by which domestic politics can be leveraged in international negotiations. By raising the cost of diplomatic concession, anti-foreign protests serve as a commitment tactic in international negotiations, enabling authoritarian leaders to claim credibly that they cannot maintain the status quo or meet foreign demands. Analogous to audience costs, anti-foreign protests represent one method by which leaders can “tie” their hands, generating expectations of retrospective sanctions if they fail to follow through with their commitments or threats.

Under what circumstances will demonstrators be willing to disperse peacefully, and under what conditions will they continue to protest, requiring the government to use coercive measures to restore order? Protesters may be placated by diplomatic concessions the government is able to wrangle from the foreign party, making it relatively costless for the government to disperse the satisfied protesters. On the other hand, protesters may become further inflamed by the government’s failure to prevail in the international dispute, increasing the cost of dispersing the dissatisfied crowds. For long-running disputes with no definitive outcome in sight, the government’s diplomatic conduct may determine whether protesters go home, satisfied that the Foreign Ministry is standing up for their interests, or whether protesters continue to protest, condemning the Foreign Ministry for taking a weak-kneed stance. The
government’s rhetoric is also likely to affect the speed with which nationalist protests gain new participants, sympathy and momentum. Vague statements are likely to fan the flames of popular ire, but a tough stance on foreign policy may satisfy protesters and dissuade others from taking up the nationalist cause.

Anti-foreign protests thus raise the cost of diplomatic concession by generating visible domestic costs of backing down. As protests gain momentum and the costs of suppression escalate, the government becomes less and less likely to make diplomatic concessions. By raising the salience of the international dispute among the public, protests also increase the size of the audience costs incurred if the government backs down (see Baum 2004; Miller and Krosnick 2000). With mobs in the streets, autocrats face incentives to placate protesters with hawkish foreign policies and diplomatic success. If the costs of concession and suppression grow large enough, the government will stand firm with certainty. Rather than concede and face the wrath of protesters, the government can minimize the costs of dispersing protest by taking a firm foreign policy stance. If nationalist protesters see progress toward their objectives, they will be more easily persuaded to disperse without blaming the government.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Three primary hypotheses follow from the argument.

1. **Leverage Hypothesis:** Given the occurrence of anti-foreign protests, the outcome of international negotiations should be more favorable to the government than would otherwise have been the case. Once the government has tied its hands and demonstrated resolve by allowing anti-foreign protests, the burden of conciliation falls to the foreign government. On average, therefore, anti-foreign protests should lead to a more advantageous bargain for the authoritarian government. However, the nature of strategic interaction means that although anti-foreign protests give authoritarian leaders bargaining leverage, the ultimate outcome depends on the resolve and actions of the other parties. Nationalist protests, like other escalatory tactics, do not guarantee success in international bargaining. Anti-foreign protests reduce the government’s flexibility to make concessions, shifting the burden of cooperation to the other negotiating party. If the two countries are to reach a deal, the foreign
government will have to make greater concessions. But like other “lock-in” tactics, anti-foreign protests increase the likelihood that relations will become strained and negotiations will collapse. As in the classic game of chicken, throwing away one’s steering wheel makes it more likely--but not certain--that the other driver will swerve. Likewise, anti-foreign protests do not guarantee that the foreign government will yield. Indeed, if the foreign government believes that the regime can repress anti-foreign protests at little cost to its coffers and legitimacy, particularly if the protests are small in scale and have little domestic sympathy, the foreign government is unlikely to make significant concessions.

2. **Placation hypothesis:** Given the occurrence of anti-foreign protests, the government should adopt a more hawkish foreign policy stance than it otherwise would have. Unless foreign negotiators back down or threaten to impose sanctions that will be more costly to the government than suppressing protests, the government should take a tougher foreign policy stance in order to placate and disperse protesters.

3. **Timing hypothesis:** Anti-foreign protests are more likely to be allowed by authoritarian governments before or during negotiations, not after a settlement has been reached. The timing of anti-foreign protests should thus coincide with a perceived window of opportunity in international negotiations. As signals of resolve, nationalist protests are useful during the stage of negotiations when parties are trying to reveal preferences and locate a bargain. Once a deal has been struck and the negotiations have moved into the implementation phase, anti-foreign protests no longer increase bargaining leverage. When reassurance and compliance are the objective, anti-foreign protests cease to be useful tactics. Thus, we should not observe anti-foreign protests allowed after a settlement has been reached.

**CASE STUDY: UN SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM AND CHINESE PROTESTS**

*To speak plainly, the government uses us when it suits their purpose. When it doesn’t suit them, it suppresses us. This way the government can play the public opinion card. After all, Japan is a democracy*
and respects public opinion. Even in a non-democratic country like China, the government can still point to the public’s feelings. — Anti-Japanese activist, Shanghai (Interview 81, April 2007)

To test the plausibility of the theory and illustrate the strategic mechanisms, I present a case study of the anti-Japanese protests that swept China in the spring of 2005 and the concurrent negotiations over the expansion of the United Nations Security Council, drawing upon more than 150 personal interviews in China, Japan and the United States with officials, nationalist activists, protesters, students, journalists, and intellectuals. In the spring of 2005, at least 38 cities held anti-Japanese demonstrations, including protest marches and street signature campaigns against Japan’s bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.9 The anti-Japanese protests and petitions were timed to coincide with a critical period of negotiations over the expansion of the UN Security Council (UNSC). Although discussion of UNSC reform had resumed in September 2004, with Japan, India, Germany, and Brazil campaigning for permanent seats as the “Group of Four” (G4), it was not until March and April of 2005 that the negotiations intensified. At the end of March, over 130 nations attended a G4 meeting, more than the 128 votes need to pass in a General Assembly vote. As Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi stated at the time, “The momentum for reforming the United Nations has never risen this high.”10 As a senior Japanese foreign ministry official recounted, “For a long time, the possibility of permanent membership was like a dream. But at that moment, it was a reality” (Interview 128, January 2009).

For China, this period represented a window of opportunity to kill the G4 proposal in the framework stage, while proposals were still under discussion in the General Assembly. When UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan endorsed Japan’s candidacy and announced in March 2005 that he would like a decision by September, three issues were uncertain: 1) whether the G4 could win a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly to pass a framework resolution expanding the permanent membership of the Security Council; 2) whether each of the G4 nations could win a two-thirds majority within their

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9 For other discussions of these protests, see Gries 2005; Zhao 2005; He 2007a; and Shirk 2007.

10 Kyodo News Agency, April 12, 2005.
respective regions in the selection of new permanent members; and 3) what positions the permanent
UNSC members would take in the final ratification stage, particularly China and the United States, as
both governments sought to avoid the reputational costs of opposing reform. If the G4 proposal had been
put to a vote and received two-thirds support in the General Assembly, an amendment to the UN Charter
would have been raised for ratification. Under such circumstances, China would have been faced with a
painful decision: to veto an amendment passed by two-thirds of the General Assembly or see Japan
become a permanent member of the Security Council. Historically, China has scrupulously avoided using
its veto, usually preferring to abstain. As Samuel Kim notes, “Given its long-standing assault on the veto
as an expression of hegemonic behavior, China [has] tried hard—and successfully—not to allow itself to
be cornered into having no choice but to cast its solo veto” (Kim 1999). Moreover, to veto a charter
amendment would be to oppose a reform package approved by a supermajority of the General
Assembly—making China look hypocritical for claiming to represent the developing world. From
Beijing’s perspective, using the solo veto represented a costly option of last resort. A better outcome
would have another permanent UNSC member opposing the G4 proposal alongside China; the best
solution would be to mobilize enough opposition to the G4 proposal to prevent a UN General Assembly
vote in the first place.

The rising tide of support for Japan’s candidacy and the G4 proposal galvanized China to allow
grassroots anti-Japanese activities in dozens of Chinese cities. Although initially authorized by the
government, the anti-Japanese protests nonetheless contained an element of risk and demonstrated the
domestic costs of appearing weak on the issue of Japan’s candidacy. The nationalist activities began with
an online signature campaign but quickly escalated into peaceful street petitions, followed by raucous and
sometimes violent protest marches. Permission to host the internet campaign had been informally
requested from and granted by the State Council Information Office, the government agency in charge of
monitoring the content of all internet news sites. “The government wanted this petition to happen among
the public,” said an editor at one of the sponsoring websites. On the ground, anti-Japan street petitions occurred with government consent, if not active support. In interviews, nationalist activists described to me their negotiations with local public security officials over the timing, content, and location of their activities. According to one activist, the police wanted their street signature campaign to be held in a park because the space was large and generally empty: “We could have held it in front of the Japanese embassy, but it would have had to be shorter, with fewer participants” (Interview 43, July 2006). As peaceful street petitions sprang up around the country, large protest marches followed, leading to vandalism against Japanese businesses and property in several cities. Riot police prevented demonstrators from entering Japanese diplomatic buildings and department stores but otherwise did not interfere with the protests. There is little doubt that the Chinese government knew about the planned protests well in advance. In Shanghai, for example, the Public Security Bureau BBS received 30 posts in the three days prior to the April 16 protest, asking if permission to protest had been granted and mentioning the time, location, and route of the march. One demonstrator had telephoned the police directly, only to be told that there was insufficient time to process her application for a protest permit (Interview 74, April 2007). In Shenzhen, a junior officer with the People’s Armed Police told me that the protests had been authorized in advance. “The protest routes had all been examined and approved beforehand,” he said, showing me the video footage he had taken during the protest—with a Sony camcorder, no less (Interview 92, May 2007).

The anti-Japanese protests were influential in altering the course of the negotiations, helping China justify its public stance against Japan’s bid, eliciting symbolic concessions from Japan, and inducing other key nations to move closer to the Chinese position on the G4 proposal. As demonstrations gained steam and began to show signs of getting out of hand, the Chinese government found it easier to take a tough foreign policy stance and press other governments for concessions than to curtail the protests by force and risk a popular backlash. At the international level, the Chinese government utilized the risk of instability and the costs of going against domestic opinion to take a principled stance against Japan’s

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The author would like to thank a source who wishes to remain anonymous for this information.
bid. Asked about the protests, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang blamed “Japan’s erroneous attitude and actions on issues such as its history of aggression” for causing the protests. Asked if the non-governmental activities (minjian huodong) in China and Japan had gotten out of control (shikong), Qin replied: “As to how to prevent the situation from getting out of control (fangzhi shitai shikong), this too is something upon which the Japanese side must seriously reflect.”12

China’s strategy succeeded, eliciting concessions from Japan, the United States, and key supporters of Japan’s candidacy in the Asian region. These concessions enabled Chinese leaders to claim diplomatic victory and calm the Chinese public without paying large suppression costs or looking weak on foreign policy. Although Japan and the G4 continued to seek the 128 votes needed to pass their framework resolution, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi made a historic apology for Japanese wartime atrocities and dropped demands that Chinese leaders apologize for the anti-Japanese protests. China’s efforts reduced regional support for Japan and the G4, particularly in Southeast Asia. The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) endorsed Japan’s candidacy but split over the G4 proposal. Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—all recipients of Japanese aid and investment since World War II—surprised Japanese diplomats by refusing to cosponsor the G4 proposal. The United States joined China in speaking publicly against the G4 proposal, although it continued to support Japan alone. Like Beijing, Washington had hoped the G4 proposal would fail without having to bear the costs of openly opposing it. Despite US support for Japan’s candidacy, the United States was uninterested in granting permanent membership to Germany, Brazil and India. Following the eruption of anti-Japanese protests in China, senior US officials publicly voiced their doubts about the G4 proposal, siding with China and other countries seeking “consensus” before moving forward with UN reform. Referring to the anti-Japanese protests in China, incoming US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton stated at his

confirmation hearing that it would be “politically very difficult to make any change in the composition of the permanent membership,” in light of the “things that were going on in China over the weekend, combined with public statements made by senior Chinese officials.” In July, US Ambassador Tahir-Kheli stated, “Let me be as clear as possible: the US does not think any proposal to expand the Security Council—including one based on our own ideas—should be voted upon at this stage.” On the eve of a potential vote in the General Assembly, the United States joined China in blocking a vote on the G4 proposal.

ANALYSIS: ANTI-JAPANESE PROTESTS AS A BARGAINING TACTIC

The case study offers strong support for the mechanisms and hypotheses identified above. Below, I provide evidence that foreign and domestic observers perceived a real risk in the anti-Japanese protests and recognized the domestic political cost to the Chinese government of suppressing protests unless it took a more hawkish stance against Japan’s bid. I then show that the anti-Japanese protests contributed to a more favorable outcome in the U.N. negotiations, pushed the Chinese government to satisfy its domestic audience by opposing the G4 proposal publicly, and were curtailed once the Chinese government could claim diplomatic victory.

First, the anti-Japanese protests posed a risk of getting out of hand, a risk that was evident to foreign observers. “At the very beginning, the government wanted to use public opinion as a bargaining tool in their diplomacy with Japanese and to win sympathy from the international community,” said a Sino-Japanese expert at Beijing University. “But now some unintended consequences are showing up and this has begun to worry them. The protests turned out much bigger than they expected, and also much more complicated. Not everyone took to the street to voice their resentment of the Japanese.”

15 Josephine Ma and Shi Ting, *South China Morning Post*, April 22, 2005.
largest daily, the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, reached a similar conclusion: “What the Chinese government fears most now is that anti-Japanese protests could turn to criticism that its diplomacy is weak-kneed and develop into antigovernment demonstrations. Add into the mix pent-up frustration among labor groups and farmers, and the Chinese government could be facing a shakeup.”\(^{16}\) As one former Japanese ambassador recounted, “When protests occurred, the [Chinese] leadership was surprised—though some may have wanted them—by the magnitude and momentum of the protests” (Interview 20, April 2006). According to a Japanese official who was trapped inside the Embassy until the morning after the April 9 protest, “It was definitely tacitly approved, but many more showed up than expected. The organizers didn’t know how large it would be. Neither did the police. It was organized over the internet, after all” (Interview 22, April 2006).

US officials also acknowledged that the anti-Japanese protests showed signs of getting out of control. Commenting on the protests in Beijing, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said that that it was “very regrettable that this one did turn violent and was not under control.”\(^{17}\) One senior Bush administration official recalled, “We believed at the time that the Chinese government was piggybacking on something that was indigenous and spontaneous concerning Japanese textbooks and the like. What we were worried about with this protest was that things started to get out of control” (Interview 137, April 2009).

In China, the police officer who was on duty during all three protests in Shenzhen described to me the difficulty of maintaining order during the protests: “The troublemakers also carry “Boycott Japan” banners. In such a large protest march, there will inevitably be a small minority of people with different objectives, even some who are intent on destruction and inciting the masses to make trouble – and not against Japan” (Interview 92, May 2007). Historically, nationalist protests in China have tended to turn against the government, as evidenced by the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China. In the

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\(^{16}\) Satoshi Saeki and Masahiko Takekoshi, April 12, 2005.

\(^{17}\) *Associated Press*, April 12, 2005.
post-Mao era, the anti-Japanese protests of 1985 set the stage for the pro-democracy protests of 1986, which in turn laid the foundation for the 1989 movement (Whiting 1989; Wasserstrom 1991). Even though the Communist Party remained in power, two General Secretaries were removed from office for their mishandling of the 1980s protest movements. Today, this risk is still pertinent. During interviews, both officials and activists in China stated that anti-Japanese events, even small gatherings of fewer than 100 participants, pose a risk to social stability. As one Bao Diao activist in Shanghai put it, “There’s no 100% guarantee that something will happen that the authorities can’t control. If they say yes [and allow an event], they have to be on guard in case something arises. But if they say no, they can rest easy” (Interview 81, April 2007). The government has reason to fear that anti-foreign protests could snowball into anti-government, pro-democracy protests. “Nationalism and democracy are inseparable in my mind,” said a prominent nationalist author (Interview 42, July 2006). In 1998, a petition called on the National People’s Congress to elect as president the anti-Japanese activist Tong Zeng. In 2005, Tong Zeng and other leading Bao Diao activists were instructed not to participate in the anti-Japanese protests: “We were told this was an entirely spontaneous event, so the people leading the movement must have no role.”

Second, the case study shows that protest activities have a tendency to escalate and gain momentum, making it increasingly costly for the government to suppress protests once they have begun. In 2005, by claiming diplomatic victory, the Chinese government was able to curtail protests without having to pay these costs, but the sequence of events nonetheless illustrates the dynamic of escalation and the difficulty of ordering police to use force against patriotic demonstrators. According to a Japanese official who snuck outside the Embassy to observe the protest, the demonstrators cajoled the police: "You are our friends. We are demonstrating against Japan, so if you stop us that means you are supporting Japan" (Interview 22, April 2006). A common observation among interviewees in Shanghai and Beijing was that the protests were much larger than expected. Many participants joined the protest march along

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the way, often because a friend in the march had called and said, “It’s not just a rumor—it’s actually happening.” Another participant said that he had heard the march moving past his apartment, so he went downstairs to join the protest (Interview 70, April 2007). At the macro level, the extent and intensity of anti-Japanese activity also increased over the course of the month. “Without the online petition, there wouldn’t have been street petitions, and without the street petitions there wouldn’t have been protest marches and vandalism. This is the natural course of things,” said one Bao Diao activist (Interview 81, April 2007).

Figure 3 illustrates the pattern of escalation from online petitions to offline protest, beginning with street petitions and growing to protest marches. As measured by coverage on Sina.com, one of the three most popular internet portals in China, the online signature campaign against Japan’s bid grew exponentially after the statements by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on March 19 and 21 generated momentum for Japan’s candidacy and the G4 proposal. Following the semi-official launch of the internet campaign on March 23, street petitions were the first offline activities to take place, peaking on the weekend of April 2-3. The street petitions were largely stationary events, held at a city square or park, with a core group of five to fifty activists collecting signatures and distributing leaflets. Over the following two weeks, petitions were increasingly replaced by protest marches as the modal form of anti-Japanese activity. Protest marches were much larger in size and typically processed through the city center, calling upon bystanders to join in, and often ended in a confrontation with the police outside Japanese businesses or diplomatic buildings. [FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

As the number of protests increased, so too did the public’s determination to hold additional protests. By the third weekend, netizens in Shanghai said that Shanghai must hold a protest in order to be like Beijing and Guangzhou. Moreover, for some participants the experience of protest lent force to the belief that protest was a right. One Bao Diao activist was moved to anger when his application to hold a protest on May 4th was rejected. He said: “The people are exercising their legal rights to assemble and protest and this should not be suppressed because they serve to uphold the country’s sovereign rights
externally and Chinese people's human rights internally.” Had events not enabled the Chinese government to declare on April 19 that the UN negotiations were well in hand and that further protests were unnecessary, it is likely that another wave of protests would have taken place on May 1 and May 4, based on messages circulating on internet forums at the time.

**Leverage Hypothesis:** Anti-foreign protests should lead to a more favorable outcome for the government than it otherwise would have achieved.

The anti-Japanese protests undermined global support for Japan’s candidacy and the G4 proposal, evidenced by the shift in the public positions taken by the United States and several ASEAN nations. Before the anti-Japanese protests, senior US officials publicly supported Japan’s candidacy but remained silent on the G4 proposal. As one of Machimura’s advisors recalled, “Our policy toward the US was just to ask the US to keep silent, not be negative toward our initiative, just stay neutral—so that if we could get two-thirds support, we would then ask the US to recognize reality” (Interview 128, January 2009).

After the protests began, the United States rejected Annan’s calls for a swift decision on reform, stressing the need for “consensus,” the catchphrase used by opponents of the G4 proposal. Following the second week of protests, John Bolton, the newly appointed US Ambassador to the United Nations, explicitly referred to the protests in stating his doubts about Japan’s chances for success in the negotiations.

“China’s negative campaign has struck an immeasurable blow to Japan,” wrote the *Asahi Shukan*. “Japan knew that, deep down inside, the United States was against the G-4’s plan. But it was unexpected that the United States would announce its opposition stance so openly.” Ultimately, the Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations announced that the United States and China had reached an agreement to oppose the G4 proposal. As John Bolton wrote in his memoir, Chinese UN Ambassador “Wang and I readily agreed that we had no use for the G-4 proposal” (Bolton 2007: 252). By standing with China in blocking the G4, the United States spared China from shouldering the blame for blocking UNSC reform alone.

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21 FBIS, JPP20050728000098, August 5, 2005.
Similarly, the evidence suggests that the anti-Japanese protests were part of a Chinese campaign to undermine regional support for Japan and the G4. “I think the student protests and the rest of it was really designed to remind Southeast Asians and others that would be part of the voting at the United Nations of the danger involved—that these were serious issues to the Chinese people and that it certainly wasn’t time for Japan to get on the Security Council,” recounted a senior White House official (Interview 134, March 2009). Although ASEAN supported Japan’s candidacy as early as November 2004, the organization was ultimately unwilling to endorse the G4, and its most supportive members, e.g. Singapore and Vietnam, decided not to co-sponsor the proposal. According to Machimura’s advisor on UNSC reform, “Because of China’s opposition, we got very little support from Asian nations. Many told us that because of China’s opposition, they would not co-sponsor the resolution.” (Interview 128, January 2009)

By allowing anti-Japanese protests and bringing up Japan’s misdeeds during World War II, China gave ASEAN nations—which in November 2004 had signed a trade accord with China—ample grounds for resisting Japan’s entreaties for support at the UN deliberations. Malloch Brown, chief of staff to Kofi Annan, stated in Germany at the time: “Demonstrations against the Japanese embassy and consulates reminds one [that] there is a China-Japan dimension to which Germany’s membership is hostage….Germany and Japan and India really need to listen to their regions and give their regions assurance that they are not going to use their membership to settle scores within the region.”22 Indeed, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on multiple occasions bracketed his support for Japan’s candidacy with criticisms of Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine and Japanese history textbooks.

**Placation Hypothesis:** Nationalist protests make it more likely that the government will take a more hawkish stance in international negotiations than it otherwise would have.

The narrative demonstrates that the escalating costs of suppression were instrumental in leading the government to choose a tougher foreign policy position. Three days after protest marches took place in Beijing and other cities, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao publicly voiced his opposition to Japan’s

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candidacy. A Foreign Ministry official described the change in China’s stance on the UNSC issue in this way:

China had to make its stance clear because other countries were no longer being so active. The uncertainty over the outcome of the G4 proposal was too great. Domestically, the atmosphere was intense….If the government didn’t take a stand on the UNSC issue, it would lose public confidence. (Interview 100, June 2007)

By taking a tougher stance against Japan’s UNSC bid, the government appeased the public’s demands, thus minimizing the costs of bringing the protests to an end. According to a senior analyst on Sino-Japanese relations at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, “Taking a stance greatly heartened the public,” he said, adding that “if the government ignores the people, the people will rise up against the government.” (Interview 32, July 2006)

The Chinese government was aware of the international costs of threatening to veto the G4 proposal, but not vetoing the bid would have been domestically more costly. As Shi Yinhong, a prominent international relations expert at Renmin University, commented:

As for the masses, the resolute opposition to Japan's bid for a UNSC permanent seat has already become a form of fixed mentality. In fact, China's attitude toward Japan's bid for a UNSC permanent seat already has not much leeway for concession….China has no alternative but to cast a veto under the grim situation….This may have a negative impact on the prospect of Sino-Japanese ties and the security and stability of the Asia Pacific region. At the same time, China will also offend Germany, India, Brazil, and other countries bidding for a UNSC permanent seat. However, under the present circumstances and after weighing the pros and cons, China must use this way to block Japan.23

Indeed, the protests allowed the Chinese government to reduce the international costs of threatening to veto the G4 proposal. By pointing to anti-Japanese street protests, the Chinese government could justify

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23 Ta Kung Pao, FBIS, CPP20050603000054, June 3, 2005.
its opposition to Japan’s bid as an attempt to placate domestic opinion rather than a naked power struggle with Japan for regional hegemony. As even the conservative Sankei Shimbun noted, “Hu’s call for Japan's reflection on history does not run counter to his eagerness to rectify the aggravated relations because Hu’s call was probably intended to calm down anti-Japanese feelings.”

Interviews with protesters and Bao Diao activists also suggest that the government’s stance on the UNSC issue was effective at easing pressure for further protest. One nationalist intellectual commented: “The protests certainly brought pressure to bear on the government…On the issue of Japan’s entry into the UNSC, the government’s position changed dramatically. Before the protests, the government was very vague. Afterward, they clearly opposed Japan’s entry.” (Interview 42, July 2006) Bao Diao activists, perhaps as part of their tacit understanding with the government, know that once the government has taken a clear stance, it is time for the activists to back off and allow the government to take the upper hand. Remarked one Bao Diao activist in Shanghai: “We can only push the government to take action in areas where the government has not taken a clear position. Afterwards, we must withdraw (tuibu).” (Interview 81, April 2007)

**Timing Hypothesis:** Anti-foreign protests are more likely to be allowed before or during negotiations.

The timing of the protests coincided with a key window of negotiations over UNSC expansion, as illustrated in Figure 3. Statements by US Secretary of State Rice and UN Secretary-General Annan, along with the support of three permanent UNSC members and between 120 and 134 members in the General Assembly, created the perception in China that Japan might succeed in gaining a permanent seat. When the internet petition began to take off on activist websites, the government gave permission to commercial net portals to host the petition. By contrast, when the same websites hosted an internet petition in August 2004 against the use of Japanese bullet train technology, the government shut down the petition after 22

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24 FBIS, JPP20050424000002, April 24, 2005.
hours. “It’s the social instability factor,” said an activist with the Patriots Alliance Network at the time. “So they closed the website.”

In the spring of 2005, the Chinese government made no effort to shut down the internet petition even after protests erupted. In fact, the Chinese government did not make a concerted nationwide effort to prevent further protests until Koizumi requested a meeting with Hu at the Asia-Africa Summit and indicated that he would not reiterate demands for an apology. The government may have tried to mitigate the risk that the situation would spiral out of control by preventing protests in Beijing and Guangzhou on April 16, but large protests occurred in Shanghai and other cities that same weekend, even though the police knew about the protest plans well in advance. Moreover, those in charge of maintaining order at the scene of the protests seemed to be under the impression that protest had been given the official stamp of approval. A junior officer with the People’s Armed Police in Shenzhen claimed that the protests were approved in advance by the government. This suggests that if no formal protest permit was issued, perhaps the government’s rationale was to leave room for plausible deniability when confronted with international accusations.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The 2005 anti-Japanese protests are also useful for evaluating the merits of alternative explanations. Here, I argue that the most common conjecture—that autocrats allow nationalist protest to distract citizens from domestic problems—does not adequately account for the 2005 anti-Japanese protests. This view suggests that anti-foreign protests are mobilized by the government as a diversionary tactic, as “pressure valves” for citizens to vent their frustrations and release pent-up anger that might otherwise turn against the government. However, the diversionary view of nationalist protests overlooks their tendency to turn against the government. For example, Yukio Okamoto, advisor to Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi on foreign affairs, made the following observation about the 2005 anti-Japanese protests: “The government is losing its ability to control events. Taking the lid off to release pent-up

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pressure is one thing, but the authorities are finding that they can’t get the lid back on” (Okamoto and Tanaka 2005). As Okamoto’s comment illustrates, the risk of instability posed by anti-Japanese protests was readily apparent to foreign observers. Moreover, my interviews revealed a general concern among both government officials and nationalist activists that anti-government elements might utilize anti-Japanese protests as an opportunity to “instigate trouble.” Rather than decreasing social unrest by providing an outlet for frustration, anti-foreign protests create new opportunities for discontented citizens to mobilize and network. As another Japanese diplomat noted, “The government may let the public vent, and Japan, the United States, and France make good targets. But it is dangerous for the government, because the Chinese public is increasingly aware of human rights and democratic ideas, [and] with the development of the internet, it is harder and harder to control the information that the public gets.” (Interview 128, January 2009)

It is often argued, both in scholarly and popular accounts, that the Chinese Communist Party has sought to use nationalism as a replacement for ideology as the basis for its legitimacy after the tragedy of June 4, 1989. For more than a decade, mainland Chinese citizens have been inundated with propaganda celebrating the role of the Chinese Communist Party in World War II, known in China as the War of Resistance against Japan. But textbooks, films, and school field trips to museums glorifying the Communist Party’s defense of China are a much less dangerous means of encouraging nationalism and rallying the public around the flag than street protests. Inculcating nationalism may be a strategy for redirecting domestic grievances, but nationalist protests per se are not a particularly effective diversionary tactic, given the risk that nationalist protests could get out of hand.

In addition, the diversionary perspective pays little attention to the costs of suppressing demonstrations after they have begun and gained momentum. Unless the government can claim to have prevailed in the diplomatic negotiations, the government will have to disperse an angry mob, one which is outraged not only at the foreign government but also the inability of the regime itself to defend the

26Zhao 1998; Shirk 2007.
nation’s interest. In 2005, the costs of curtailing the protests were not very large, because the government took a tougher stance against Japan and was able to claim victory in the UNSC negotiations. But the evidence suggests that without a diplomatic victory and a tougher foreign policy stance, suppression would have been very costly, as momentum built for a fourth round of protests.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the outlines of an answer to a puzzling phenomenon in the study of authoritarian regimes and international conflict: why do authoritarian leaders sometimes allow and sometimes repress destabilizing nationalist protests? If anti-foreign protests are costly signals of resolve in international bargaining, then it is not necessarily the case that democracies have the advantage in creating credible commitments vis-à-vis audience costs. In the literature that links democratic politics and international relations, conventional wisdom holds that democracies have the advantage over autocracies in crisis bargaining. For democracies, the need to retain electoral support makes it difficult for democratic leaders to back down from positions taken publicly. The logic of audience costs holds that it is precisely this domestic vulnerability that enables democratic leaders to send credible signals about their intentions and resolve to foreign decision makers.

It is generally assumed that democratic leaders are more easily held accountable than autocratic leaders. Whereas regular elections enable democratic publics to remove leaders at relatively little cost, in autocracies, citizens are assumed to be nearly powerless to punish leaders that act against the national interest. Although many scholars have noted that autocratic leaders may face harsher punishments in the event of a coup or other irregular change of leadership, this probability is assumed to be either very small or not visible ex ante to foreign decision makers. This, then, is the signature role of anti-foreign protests: enabling authoritarian leaders to send a visible and costly signal of their domestic vulnerability, and generating incentives to stand firm in international negotiations.

For an illustration of this phenomenon during the 1999 anti-US protests, see Zhao 2003.
The evidence presented here strongly supports the argument that authoritarian leaders face strategic incentives to allow anti-foreign protests in order to gain international bargaining leverage. In the spring of 2005, anti-Japanese protests in China were instrumental in changing the course of the diplomatic negotiations over UN Security Council reform. In addition to eliciting an apology from Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the protests prompted the United States and nations in Southeast Asia to align their positions more closely with China. It was this international benefit that led China to allow the anti-Japanese petitions and protests, despite the potential domestic cost and risk to the regime. Indeed, the possibility of a regime backlash is precisely why the anti-Japanese protests provided the government with international leverage on the UNSC issue.

Given the “success” of the 2005 anti-Japanese protests as a bargaining tactic in the UNSC negotiations, it is likely that the Chinese government will at some point in the future resort to “playing the public opinion card” by allowing anti-foreign protests. Nevertheless, the delicate balance between protests that are risky enough to send a signal of resolve and yet not too risky to outweigh the international benefits suggests that nationalist protests will not soon become a substitute for “normal” diplomacy.

REFERENCES


Figure 1: The Autocrat’s Domestic Calculus

Prevented protests: High risk relative to cost of repression

Allowed protests: low risk relative to cost of repression
Figure 2: Sincere vs. Manufactured Protests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizens</th>
<th>Interested</th>
<th>Not interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1. Sincere protests</td>
<td>2. Manufactured protests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>3. Stifled protests</td>
<td>4. No protests</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Figure 3: From Petitions to Marches: Escalation of the 2005 Anti-Japanese Protests