



Wuhan University China Institute of  
Boundary and Ocean Studies

# China's Foreign Policy towards its Unsettled Territorial and Boundary Disputes

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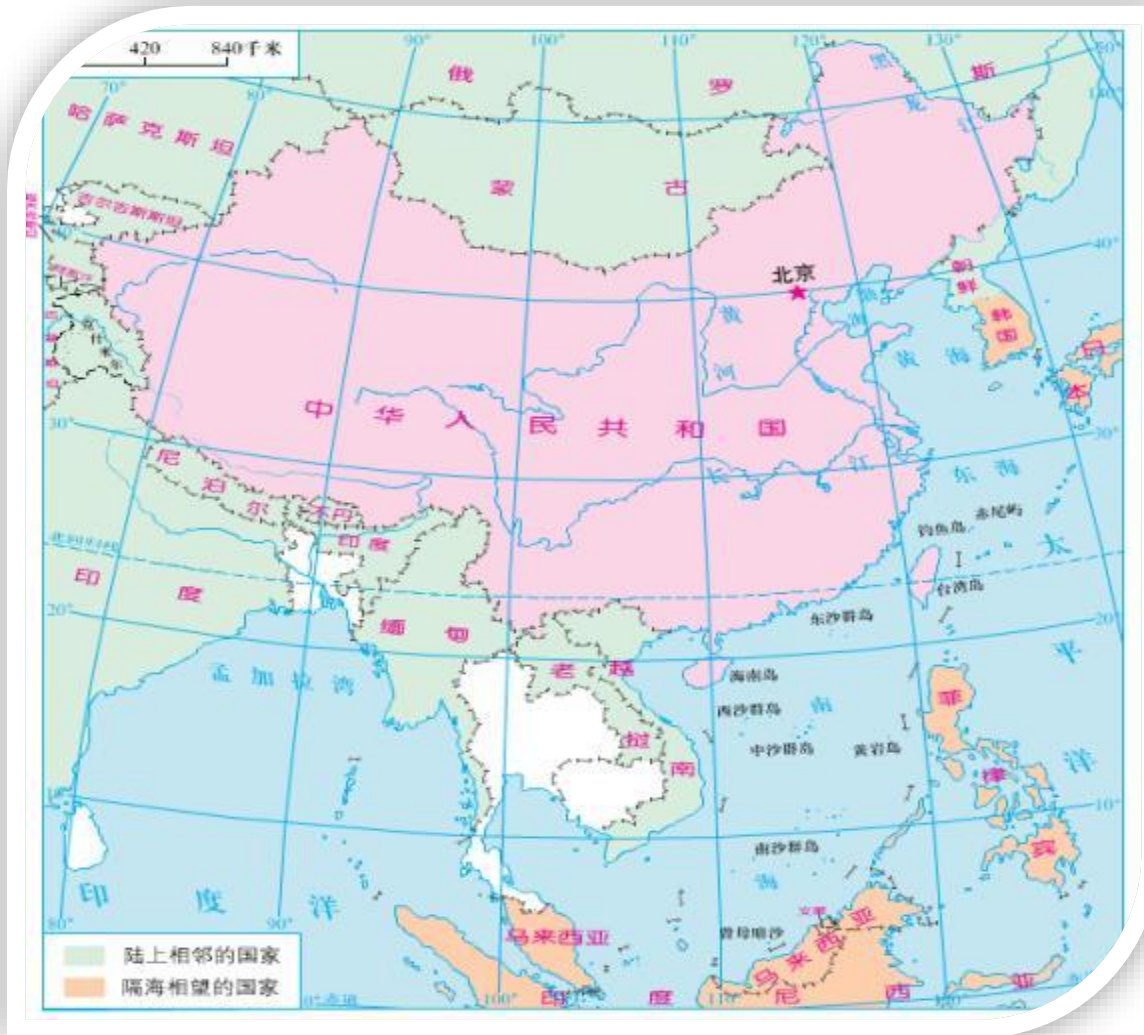
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# GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION OF CHINA



- *Asian continent*
- *Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea*
- *14 neighbours on land*
- *8 neighbours at sea*

# QUESTIONS

- *Why has China resolved territorial and boundary disputes with some of her neighbours, but not with all of them?*
- *Why China resolved those disputes with her neighbours mainly in the 1960s and 1990s, but not during other periods of time?*
- *Why China has resolved a majority of the land boundary disputes, but nearly none of those disputes at sea?*
- *What are the factors that stimulate China to choose the delay, escalation or cooperation strategy for the outstanding disputes?*

# OUTLINE

## □ Setting the scene

- *Territory & boundary in law and politics*
- *Factors influencing national strategies towards territorial & boundary disputes*

## □ Retrospect

- *Disputes on land*
- *Disputes at sea*

## □ Prospect

- *Grand strategy-Overall foreign policy-Neighbourhood policy-  
Policy towards unsettled disputes*

## □ Conclusion

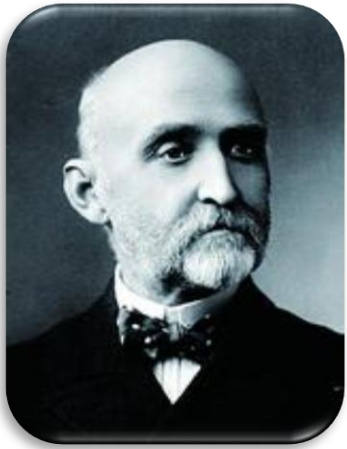
- *Policy-Approach-Strategy-Manner*

# Territory & boundary in law & politics



Frontiers are indeed the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death to nations.

Lord Curzon of Kedleston



Whoever rules the waves rules the world.

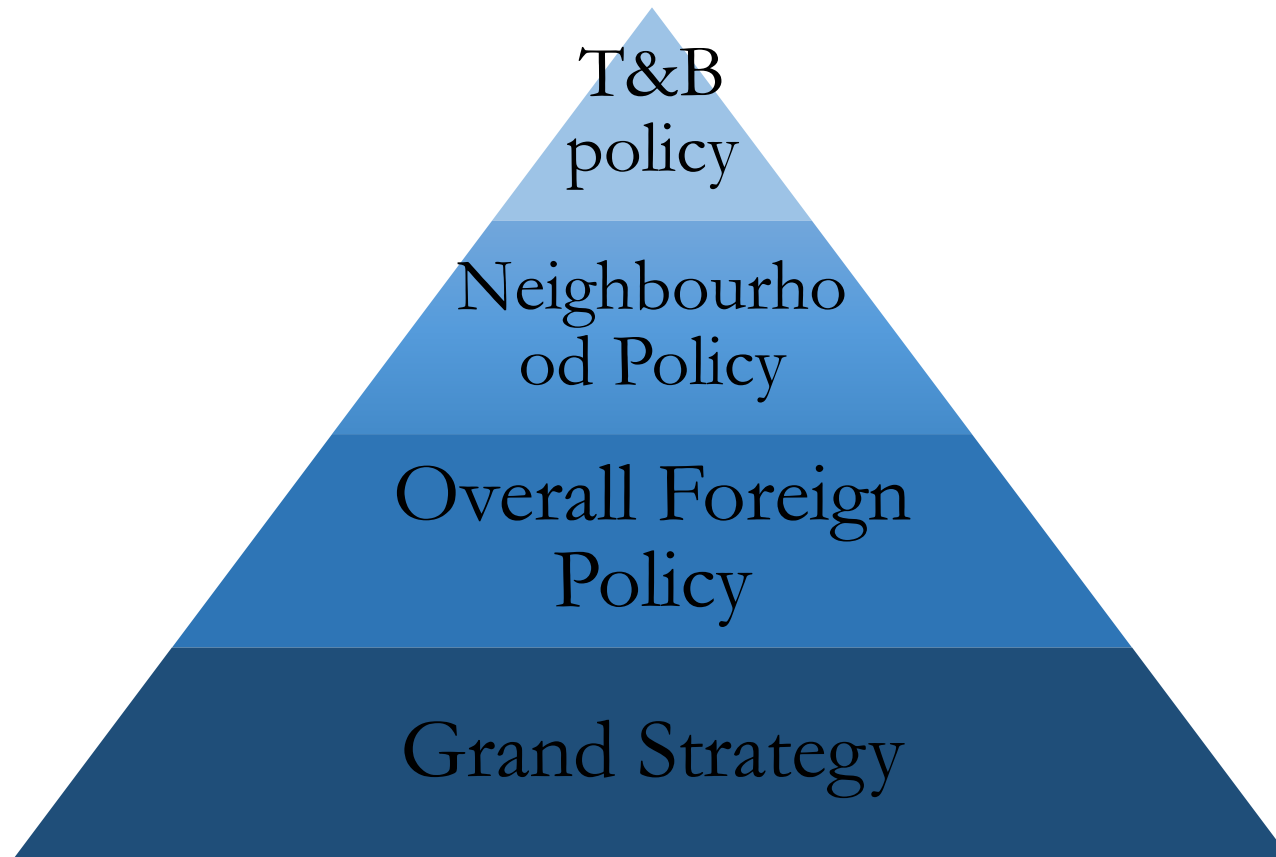
Alfred T. Mahan

# Territory & boundary in law & politics: starting points

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- ✧ Territory is a key element of sovereign States.
- ✧ National boundaries defines limits of a State's sovereignty, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and separate those from other States or the international community.
- ✧ Territorial & boundary issues touches upon national sovereignty, security and development.
- ✧ Territorial & boundary issues have been frequent causes of war/military conflicts.
- ✧ National boundaries can also be bridges and channels for cross-border exchanges and cooperation.

# Factors influencing national policies



*Strategy towards territorial & boundary  
disputes: delay / escalation / cooperation*



# TERRITORIAL & BOUNDARY DISPUTES ON LAND

- *12 of the 14 land boundary disputes have been resolved*
- *Two outstanding disputes: China-India; China-Bhutan*
- *Two peak periods: 1950s-1960s; 1990s-2010*

## 1950s-1960s

- *Grand Strategy: new government*
- *Overall Foreign Policy: establishing relations*
- *Neighbourhood Policy: peace, stability*
- *Policy on boundary disputes: cooperation & compromise*

## 1990s-2010

- *Grand Strategy: Reform and opening up*
- *Overall Foreign Policy: Peaceful development*
- *Neighbourhood Policy: harmony, stability*
- *Policy on boundary disputes: cooperation & compromise*





# TERRITORIAL & BOUNDARY DISPUTES ON LAND

## □ Features

- *Never used force/ threatened to use force, took advantage of the neighbours*

## □ Principles

- *Five Principles of Peaceful-Coexistence*

## □ Bases

- *Historic facts, international law, actual control, mutual understanding, compromise*

## □ Objective

- *Certainty, stability, finality of national land boundaries*

## □ Results

- *Policies matches, disputes resolved*
- *Policies do not match, unresolved*

- <sup>9</sup> – *Unilateral change of status quo, escalation, confrontation*



# TERRITORIAL & BOUNDARY DISPUTES AT SEA

## □ Resolved

- *Delimitation of Beibu Wan (Tonkin Gulf) with Vietnam*

## □ Outstanding

- *Territorial sovereignty disputes: Diaoyu Dao (Senkaku Islands); Nansha Qundao (Spratly Islands)*
- *Maritime delimitation disputes: ....*

## □ Why

- *Strategic importance of the sea & maritime features*
- *Smaller room for compromise, especially for islands disputes*
- *Competition/confrontation between China and other claimants*
- *Involvement of non-parties to the disputes*

# PROSPECT OF CHINA'S POLICY

## □ Grand Strategy

- *Peaceful development, the Chinese Dream*
- *the Belt & Road Initiative (land-based, oceangoing)*
- *National Strategy for development of the sea: economy, environment, technology, navy*

## □ Overall Foreign Policy

- *peaceful development, win-win cooperation*

## □ Neighbourhood Policy

- *amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness*

## □ Policy towards territorial & boundary disputes

*Maintain peace/stability vs. Safeguard national sovereignty/rights/interests*

## □ Concluding remarks

- **Policy:** *adhere to the path of peaceful development, follow its new vision for neighborhood diplomacy featuring amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness, and formulate an overall boundary and maritime policy that coordinates China's core interests in safeguarding a secure neighborhood and protecting its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights, through a more balanced approach.*
- **Approach:** *hold on to its previous approaches of resolving disputes through bilateral talks, manage conflicts through rules and mechanisms, and ease tensions through win-win cooperation.*



# PROSPECT OF CHINA'S POLICY

- **Strategy:** *continue to uphold its claims to territorial sovereignty and maritime rights; draw bottom lines for itself, and draw red lines for other disputant states and the third parties; try to avoid escalation of disputes, especially military confrontations.*
- **Manner:** *resolve the outstanding disputes on a case-by-case basis and in a step-by-step manner.*





Thank you

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