Making It Personal?

A Comparative Study of Institutional Constraints on Foreign Policy in Russia and China

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By treating militarism and personalism as institutional constraints on foreign policy, this article examines the role and influence of these constraints on the foreign policies of Russia and China. By looking at empirical evidence the authors argue that domestic institutional constraints in each country have exhibited distinctly different patterns throughout the last twenty years, and this can to some extent explain the difference in their respective foreign policies. However, institutional personalism in China has recently become more similar to that of Russia. The authors argue that current Russian foreign policy bears some elements of similarity suggesting future developments in Chinese foreign policy.

Keywords: foreign policy, Russia, China

Whether the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), founded by Russia, China and a number of Central Asian states in 2001, as an organization has achieved much can be debated, but the symbolism for the two largest members putting their troubled history behind and making common cause is certainly significant. Arguably, Russia and China both share many similarities as great powers[1] : both are nuclear-armed states with aircraft carriers and hold seats on the UN Security Council;

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both share imperial and communist history; and both have strained relations with the West.

Democratic peace theory has long suggested, and provided ample evidence for, the thesis that democratic states are more peaceful than authoritarian states, but the theory is far from uncontroversial. The discussion about democratic peace has gone through many stages of refinement, one of which was Elman's, who argued that "greater institutional constraint on the [democratic] executive makes war less likely in cases where the executive is more hawkish…, but fewer institutional constraints makes war less likely where the [democratic] executive is on the dovish side…"[2] Academics studying authoritarian states have made a similar case for authoritarian states. They reject the idea that the "authoritarian state" is a monolithic concept, and argue that there is variation between the foreign policies of authoritarian states which can be similarly explained by examining institutional constraints on the leader or leadership[3,4,5,6,7].

We find in this article a reasonable theoretical approach that can explain why the foreign policies of Russia and China – particularly their respective conflict behaviour – differ to the extent they do, despite the many similarities between the countries themselves. The aim of this article is therefore not to explain Chinese and Russian foreign policy in terms of systemic or external factors, but instead to explain the difference in foreign policy outcomes from a theoretical point of view that is specifically suited to compare domestic institutional constraints on foreign policy in China and Russia.

Theoretical framework

Our choice of theoretical framework — which is based on "authoritarian domestic constraint theory"[8]— argues that there is considerable variation between the foreign policies of authoritarian states. The framework is based on the theoretical work of several scholars[9]. Instead of democracy, it takes its starting point in authoritarianism. We consider this an appropriate choice of framework, since China definitely is an authoritarian state, and there is a growing consensus that Russia should also be classified as such, despite its ostensibly democratic institutions[10].

These studies tend to adopt the typology of Geddes,[11] who distinguishes between "non-personalist" and "personalist" authoritarian regimes, referring to authoritarian states where the leader is either

constrained or unconstrained by ruling elites. Slater[12]goes even further, suggesting an additional distinction between military and civilian regimes. The combination of these characteristics yields a two-dimensional typology of authoritarian states which contains four authoritarian categories. In Slater's terminology, these are: **machine**, **junta**, **boss**, and **strongman** (Figure 1).

Through this typology, Weeks[13] shows how machines are no more likely (and sometimes even less likely) than democracies to initiate military conflicts, juntas are more likely than machines or democracies, bosses and strongmen are more likely than juntas to initiate military conflicts, and strongmen are slightly more likely than bosses to initiate conflict. In short, the probability that a country initiates military conflict increases as one moves in a down-right direction throughout Figure 1. Based on the premise of the paper, which is that Russian foreign policy has been more aggressive than that of China, we can therefore make two tentative hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Russia has been more personalistic than China

Hypothesis 2: Russia has been more militaristic than China

Method

This paper is set to put the framework of Weeks[14] to the test. As our interest is in the most recent developments in both countries, and given the limited scope of this paper, we have decided to focus on the period after the year 2000. We use country-years as the unit of analysis, which is a choice that Weeks rejects in favour of dyadic data from the CWP data set[15]. In our judgment, Weeks' choice is appropriate for the regression analysis and quantitative approach that she employs, as it allows to control for variables related to both the initiator of a dispute, as well as the target country. However, we motivate our choice for the use of country-years because our analysis is primarily qualitative and the focus is in investigating the character of Russian and Chinese domestic institutions and how those institutions are likely to increase their general probability of engaging in conflict, without particular regards to whom the counterpart of the conflict might be. Our qualitative approach also limits the sample size and therefore usefulness of a fully quantitative approach. We do however use the dyadic data from the CWP dataset to compute the number of disputes and incidents that have taken place for a given country-year (years 2000 to 2010 only) in order to get some measure of the dependent variable.

Each country-year will be coded according to a modified version of Weeks' methodology, which is based on two sets of yes or no questions[16]. With reference to Figure 1, one set of eight questions measures the personalist dimension, and one set of five questions measures the military dimension. Weeks does not provide the exact phrasing of the questions in her article, and instead refers to an online appendix[17] which is no longer accessible, so the questions have been reproduced here as faithfully as possible based on their description in the main text. The questions as this paper uses them are provided in Figure 2. For ease of reference, we refer to the questions using a letter and a number (e.g. "P1" for the first question of the personalist dimension). Another modification is changing the dataset used for question M5, since the original dataset[18] is inaccessible to us. Instead, we use the Wahman *regimeny* variable[19] as a way of cross-validating our own empirical findings. This variable code four different types of military regimes: Military, Military No-Party, Military Multiparty, and Military One-party. Neither Russia nor China meet this dataset's criteria for being a military regime, and the variable is negative for all country-years. As we will see in the discussion section, this is indicative of the findings of this paper that their respective levels of militarization have both been low and roughly equal.

A positive answer will be coded as "1", a negative answer as "0". The exception is question M4 where the portion of the members that belong to the military will be provided as a ratio. This is done in order to approximate the influence of military individuals more directly.

Scores in each dimension will be averaged to produce a number between 0 and 1. A score greater than 0.5 on the personalist dimension (P) will categorize the country-year as "personalist"; a score lower than 0.5 will categorize the country-year as "non-personalist". A score greater than 0.5 on the militarist dimension (M) will categorize the country-year as "militarist"; a score lower than 0.5 will categorize the country-year as "non-militarist" (i.e. civilian). The combined scores will place the country year in one of Slater's four categories (machine, boss, junta, strongman). For example, a country-year where P=0.6 and M=0.6 would be classified as personalist military (i.e. "strongman"). The answer to each question will be empirically established to the extent possible. In theory, the sample should contain 38 country-years (19 per country), with 12 questions for each country-year, but in cases where the answer is unclear or cannot be reasonably estimated, questions will be coded as missing.

Data on Russian and Chinese conflict behaviour

Given the geopolitical similarities between China and Russia, the difference between their respective foreign policy behaviour in the last 20 years is striking. Chinese foreign policy has — until very recently — been remarkably passive, as often illustrated by the phrase "bide our time and hide our capabilities" (*taoguang yanghui*). While Chinese military certainly has been involved in some skirmishes with its neighbours, and recently engaged in major land reclamation efforts in the South China Sea, it has been careful to not engage in protracted military engagements. Only once has China engaged in armed conflict in the post-Mao-era — the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. By contrast, Russia's foreign policy in the last 20 years has been much more aggressive. In fact, as the country grew disillusioned with the promises of wholesale Westernization, Foreign Minister Primakov even literally called for an "active foreign policy" (*aktivnaya vneshnaya politika*)[20]. Russia then went on to perform a Eurasian pivot, and eventually "crossed the Rubicon" by intervening in Georgia[21], Ukraine[22], and Syria.[23]

The difference between the two countries can also be shown through The Correlates of War Project's (CWP) dataset of Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs).[24] A recent report[25] uses this data to identify China as "dispute prone", having initiated 33 MIDs between 1990 and 2010. However, it is clear from the report that China is less "dispute prone" than Russia, which has initiated 48 MIDs.[26]

Our analysis (Figure 3) of the CWP dataset for the recent period 2000-2010 shows that Russia participated in 24 MIDs and China participated in 28. This seems to imply that China is the more aggressive state, but since CWP codes MIDs on both the dispute and incident level, we can see that a comparison of incidents per conflict proves that Russian disputes contained far more incidents on average (5.5) than Chinese disputes (2). While this does not directly show that Russia is more aggressive the difference suggests that disputes which Russia initiates tend to be more protracted, suggesting less willingness or ability to disengage due to higher strategic commitment to the dispute[27]. Russian disputes have also been characterized by a higher degree of hostility (display use of force), and one dispute (the Georgian War of 2008) did result in significant casualties. This dataset does not include the ongoing Ukrainian or Syrian conflicts where the casualty numbers are significantly higher. In contrast, Chinese disputes tend to be isolated

incidents relating to its competing territorial claims, and in every case China "has stopped short of the outright use of force"[28].

While there is plenty of literature on domestic constraints on the foreign policy of either country[29], there is little research that compares the foreign policies of the two countries, one exception being Wilson's comparison[30] of their respective soft power strategies. The framework employed in this paper is based on the assumption that China and Russia, to some degree, are authoritarian states, and that their different authoritarian characteristics are the explanatory variables behind their foreign policy behaviour. Given the widespread perception that "authoritarianism is becoming more formidable"[31], this article aims to contribute to our understanding of authoritarian states and their foreign policy behaviour. Such an approach could also shed light on recent events and the future trajectory of Chinese foreign policy which has entered a state of change since the second Hu administration[32], and especially as *taoguang yanhui* has been increasingly replaced by *fenfa youwei* ("striving for achievement") after Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in late 2012.

Having examined the different conflict behaviours of Russia and China we now move on to analysing the militarist and personalist institutions of the two countries by answering the analytical questions that were introduced in the Method section.

Cases: Militarism and personalism in Russia and China

Militarism in Russia

The question of militarism of today's Russia tends to revolve around the *siloviki*, Russian political elite with military or security background. Different estimates have been produced for the overall presence of *siloviki* in Russian elite circles and top leadership. The lowest estimate is that their presence increased from around 12 percent of the entire elite in 2002[33] to 19.4 percent in 2009[34]. The higher estimation suggests a low of 25.1 percent in 2002[35] and high of 42 percent[36]. The different estimates are largely due to different conceptualizations and definitions of the term *siloviki*, which led some[37] to conclude that "perhaps Russia's top political leadership came to be dominated by *siloviki* during the Putin presidency but its elite as a whole definitely did not", at least until the interim period of Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012) as the President of Russian Federation. However, this debate about *siloviki* influ-

ence on Russian militarization is not sufficiently nuanced for the purposes of this article. Whether by broad or narrow definition, the use of the term *silioviki* conflates individuals with background in military and background in security. The theoretical assumption is that *military* background is the important variable, and therefore it would be instructive to look at a particularly influential subsection of the Russian elite in order to understand its influence of military on Russian foreign policy. The Security Council of the Russian Federation, termed "Putin's Politburo"[38] will be the example we use here.

In the Security Council, only permanent members have voting power on decisions. In 2001, four out of six permanent members were *siloviki*[39]. In 2018, the ratio was eight out of thirteen[40]. Three individuals have been truly permanent: Vladimir Putin, Sergey Ivanov, and Nikolay Patrushev, three *siloviki* who have been on the Security Council since its inception (albeit in differing roles).

A major share of an institution designed to deal with security issues has a security background, however there were no *siloviki* with military background on the Security Council in neither 2001 when Putin just had assumed power, nor 2018. We can identify this trend with even more clarity by looking further at the composition of the entire Security Council (including non-permanent members) for all years of the Russian Federation. When dividing *siloviki* into individuals with military background and individuals with security background it is clear that the influence of security-*siloviki* is increasing, whereas the influence of military-*siloviki* is decreasing (Figure 4).

In light of this evidence, it is clear that Putin has attempted to marginalize military from foreign policy decision-making, rather relying on those with the same security background as himself. This is especially clear when considering the sharp increase in security-*siloviki* between 1999 and 2000, just as Putin came into power. It is through this influence that Putin has been able to exert influence over the armed forces. In 2004, Putin's close associate, Defence Minister Ivanov led a reform of the Russian army's command structure which put the army under the command of the Defence Ministry and took significant operational responsibilities away from the General Staff[41]. In effect, this gave Putin more direct control of the army, at the expense of military leadership, although Ivanov's reforms did not sufficiently deal with the bloated army bureaucracy and its endemic corruption. That task passed to Anatoly Serduykov, a civilian who Putin appointed as De-

fence Minister in 2007. Serduykov served throughout the Medvedev period until Putin replaced him with a *siloviki,* Sergei Shoigu in late 2012. This is indicative of an identified trend[42] where the presence of *siloviki* in the Russian elite decreased somewhat during the Medvedev interim period. Figure 4 also shows that the share of civilians reached a peak at the end of the Medvedev presidency in 2012. This is not to suggest that there is necessarily some inherent tension between civilians and *siloviki*. For example, the appointment of Serduykov shows that Putin was not reluctant to put civilians in charge of military matters. The most obvious example of this is Medvedev himself, who, unlike Putin, had a purely civilian background and was his hand-picked replacement. The crucial relationship with Medvedev was not through a shared security background, but from having known each other from Putin's early political career in St. Petersburg.

Personalism in Russia

The chances of obtaining high office in Russia are greatly increased if one has personal connection to Putin[43]. Immediately when Putin came to power in 1999 he began to recruit individuals from his own circles to man critical posts in his government. For example, he diminished the powers of federal governments by grouping them into seven "superfederal regions" and appointing his own loyalists as leading plenipotentiaries over these regions. Of these seven people, five were *siloviki* and two had the additional benefit of being *petertsy*, close associates of Putin who worked with him in St. Petersburg where he began his political career[44]. Dmitry Medvedev is one such *petertsy* whose four-year appointment as president shows that Putin kept relying on this crucial circle of cronies to maintain power throughout his stint as Prime Minster. According to Moshes, Putin kept calling the shots from this position,[45] but Olga Kryshtanovskaya, expert on Russian political elites disagrees to some extent. She claims in an interview that Medvedev was not completely subsidiary to his patron, and was in fact given substantial authority, with the critical exception of appointments to high office. In Kryshtanovskaya's words: "There are about 75 officials who hold key positions at the top of the Russian power hierarchy. None of these 75 key men was dismissed or replaced by Medvedev — none"[46]. For this reason, personalism can be said to have decreased in Russia during the Medvedev presidency, as personal connection to the leader (Medvedev) did not have a direct impact on access to high office (P1 in

Figure 3), the politburo equivalent was not a mere rubber stamp for the leader's decisions (P2) but rather for Putin's, and the leader did not choose the members of the politburo equivalent (P4).

When Putin reclaimed the presidency in 2012 he showed that whatever power he did lose during Medvedev's presidency, he was never so disadvantaged to the point where he was unable to reclaim his previous position. So far into his second spell as president, Putin has not declared any clear successor (heir-apparent) the way that he weighed between Sergey Ivanov and Medvedev between 2004 and 2008, where he finally endorsed Medvedev[47].

The dynamics of decision-making in Putin's small group of people has been described by Hill and Gaddy:

> [a] small number of trusted figures around Mr. Putin, perhaps twenty to thirty people, make the key decisions. At the very top is an even tighter inner circle of about half a dozen individuals, all with close ties to Putin… Real decision-making power resides inside the inner circle.[48]

We can infer this dynamic at work by examining official readouts of Security Council meetings. The permanent members meet on a weekly basis and discuss ongoing issues, while the whole council meets on a much more infrequent basis. During the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, the permanent members met three times in February and four times in March, but the full Security Council did not convene until April, and then only to discuss an unrelated policy issue. Only in July did Ukraine appear on the agenda of the full council. Clearly, it is the smaller group of permanent members that take the crucial decisions on crucial security matters. How the dynamics work within this group is not entirely known, but Dawisha suggests that during Putin's ascendance there were many circles of different powerful people, and although Putin was not initially the leader of every group, he was the only one that "stood astride them all,"[49] meaning that he was the only one who could leverage personal connections in one circle to gain advantage in another. In effect, Putin made his closest dependent on his own success, and this has created a tight-knit group of people that will let him take the lead. However, the disadvantage of this over-reliance on personal and security networks is that it has "hampered [Putin's] ability to form political alliances with [other] economically vibrant constituencies".[50] In other words, Putin is not only unwilling to rely on people outside his personal network, but also unable. In the analysis

of Galeotti, Putin's leadership style is slowly "hollowing out his inner elite"[51], for example by reassigning the Head of the Presidential Administration, his long-term ally Sergey Ivanov to a less prestigious post and replacing him with the younger Anton Vaino.

Putin has taken similar steps in his handling of the armed forces. In 2016, he carried through the largest purge of military officials since Stalin's purges in the 1930's by dismissing most of the Baltic Sea Fleet command[52]. Putin's grappling with military command structures and the endemic corruption of Russian armed forces has been a theme throughout both his presidencies. Through the military reforms mentioned in the previous section he changed the top-level command structure of the armed forces to bring them more under his own control, and by forming a new Presidential Guard in 2016, he further cemented his position as the wielder of Russian military power. As described by Savage, the Presidential Guard is "a new paramilitary force combining several previous internal security forces under a unified structure answering directly to [Putin]."[53] The Presidential Guard is placed under the command of Putin's former bodyguard and judo sparring partner General Victor Zolotov, who joined the Security Council the same year (though not as a permanent member). A presidential decree issued in 2017 authorized the Presidential Guard to take part in missions even beyond Russian borders, effectively supplanting the role of the regular Armed Forces[54]. Savage notes the geopolitical implications of this:

> ...the National Guard may offer Putin wiggle room semantics he can use to manipulate perception of Russia's role in a conflict. This essentially grants him the ability to say that technically, the Russian "Armed Forces" are not operating in a given country or region when they are accused of interfering.[55]

While the geopolitical implications seem clear, this twin-structure — a direct result of Putin's personalist politics — presents an analytical problem by highlighting the intersection of personalism and militarism, as well as the blurry distinction between military and security in Russia. If the security forces are now actual military forces, should Russian security individuals (including Putin himself) be analysed as military? This question will be dealt with further in the discussion section.

Militarism in China

The CCP views the separation of party and military in the Soviet Union as one of the main reasons for its collapse[56]; broaching the subject is

tantamount to "heresy".[57] Ever since, the CCP has made concentrated efforts to maintain the People's Liberation Army (PLA) firmly under party control. The submission of the military to the party in China is reflected by the fact that the three CCP general secretaries since Deng Xiaoping's death have very limited military background: Jiang Zemin had no military experience, Hu Jintao had a brief stint as political commissar in local PLA units in Tibet early in his career, and Xi Jinping served in a non-combat role as *mishu* (secretary) to the Defence Minister of the General Office of the Central Military Commission between 1979-1982, which later "served as an important credential when he became the party boss more than 30 years later".[58] Hu Jintao's experience, on the other hand, does not seem to have translated into any real influence over the party's armed branch however, considering that Jiang Zemin clung on to the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission for another two years after he stepped down as president and general secretary.

While the military has been the stage for such political battles, the actual presence of military in the Politburo has been minimal. In the six Politburos since 1992, there has been a maximum of two military representatives (Figure 5). None has sat on the PSC since Liu Huaqing did, between 1992-1997[59].

Overall, military leaders in China have exercised minimal influence on formulation of Chinese policy at the top level, a state of affairs that CCP leaders have been very content with. This is not to say that the loyalty of the PLA is taken for granted. The institutional memory of PLA mutiny during the 1989 Tiananmen-massacre is still fresh in the minds of CCP leadership.[60] Both Jiang and Hu era propaganda emphasized the importance of "upholding the absolute CCP leadership over the armed forces" (*jianchi dang dui jun juedui lingdao*).[61] In the words of Richard McGregor:

> The leadership's assiduous cultivation of the PLA has run parallel with ceaseless, almost hysterical campaigns in the official media that, year after year, hammer home the principle of "absolute loyalty" of the military to the Party. On the surface, the rationale for these campaigns is a mystery. There has been no revolt in the barracks or any public battles setting the Party against the PLA for over a decade.[62]

This fervent emphasis on PLA obedience is even more explicit in Xi-era propaganda. Since coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping has re-

peatedly stressed the importance of "upholding the absolute CCP leadership over the armed forces".[63] According to a database maintained by the People's Daily, he has used the phrase on 49 separate occasions.[64] In maintaining the absolute leadership over the military, high-ranking PLA officers have been major targets of his anti-corruption campaign. Comparing Xi's use of the phrase "upholding the absolute CCP leadership over the armed forces" with investigations of high-ranking officials (so-called "tigers")[65] (Figure 6), it can be seen that use of the phrase corresponds with an increase in arrests of military officials in 2014. However, since Xi announced sweeping military reforms in the beginning of 2016, very few investigations of military officials have been publicly announced, but Xi's use of the phrase remains constant or even at a higher level than before the anti-corruption campaign began. The continued usage of the phrase shows that just like his successors, even with the military "pacified", Xi Jinping does not take their obedience for granted. Implications of Xi's anti-corruption campaign for the changing dynamics of personalism in China will be discussed in the next section.

Personalism in China

Personalism in contemporary Chinese politics can largely be divided into two periods. The first is the non-personalistic era of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao (1992-2012), the second is the increasingly personalistic regime of Xi Jinping (2012-). This section will consider each period in turn.

Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao

Although Jiang Zemin was by all accounts a charismatic leader[66], both he and Hu Jintao are widely regarded as technocrats, and never more than "first among equals".[67] Throughout the Jiang and Hu terms, the Politburo is considered to have operated on consensus decision-making, commonly known as "collective leadership".[68] Through collective leadership, the CCP intended to avoid the concentration of power within one single individual, as had been the case under Mao and also under much of Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Members of the Politburo are elected by the Central Committee whose members may only vote for nominees based on a preliminary list which is decided in advance through a secretive conference of top leadership at the Beidaihe resort outside of Beijing.[69] Therefore, the election process during Jiang and

Hu was hardly democratic, but neither was the outcome contingent on the will of one strong leader. Instead, it was the result of much negotiation and horse-trading within the top leadership itself. That process was completely opaque to outsiders, but the very fact that it existed proves that the influence of the supreme leader was not unchecked. Furthermore, it has been well-established that there were at least two factions competing for power in the top leadership: the princeling faction, made up of the children of revolutionary personalities, such as Jiang Zemin and Xi Jinping, and the Youth League faction, made up of individuals who came to power by rising through the ranks of the CCP Youth League, such as Hu Jintao and Li Keqiang.[70]

The underlying feature of collective leadership was the institutionalization of leadership transition, intended to steer the party clear of the debilitating power struggles that had crippled it on numerous occasions in the past. The crucial mechanism for power-transition was the principle of "separated designation" (*gedai zhiding*), an unofficial term for an unofficial process which held that each leader choose their successor's successor, thereby making sure that no competing faction could gain a consistent grip on power.[71] That is not to say that leadership transitions were completely free of friction. As mentioned above, when Hu became the paramount leader in 2002, Jiang Zemin held on to the position of Chairman of the Central Military Commission for another two years.

Xi Jinping

Xi Jinping's leadership can be regarded as a watershed moment in CCP leadership history. The transition between Hu and Xi went smoothly, and adhered to the general norms of collective leadership,[72] but throughout his first term, and with repeated emphasis from his second, Xi has forcefully moved to undermine the political institutions that the CCP built up under Jiang and Hu. In a series of moves that are widely characterized as a deinstitutionalization of Chinese politics Xi has moved to consolidate his power.[73] One such move — or rather the absence of a move — was Xi's apparent refusal to appoint a successor at the beginning of his second term, the way that he himself was appointed as heir-apparent at the beginning of Hu Jintao's second term. With Xi's abolishment of presidential term limits at the 19th Party Congress, it seems likely that he will stay in power for at least one additional term.

Another example of Xi's deinstitutionalization is how he has made himself "Chairman of everything" by assuming chairmanship over eight "small leading groups", influential groups that existed largely outside (and above) the official party hierarchy, including the National Security Commission, which puts him in charge of domestic security.[74] At the 19th Party Congress in 2017 several of these groups were granted official status.[75] Additionally, Xi has acquired two titles that clearly distinguish him from his predecessors, as well as his supposed peers on the PSC. Xi was explicitly appointed "Commander-in-Chief" in April 2016[76] and a few months later party media began to refer to him as "the core of the Politburo Standing Committee".[77]

Due to the increased prominence of Xi's persona, there is some debate about the implications of the current balance of factions within the PSC. Excluding Xi, four members belong to Xi's faction or have close ties to him. Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Wang Yang belong to Xi's rival faction.[78] However, as Heath has noted, it seems that factional affiliation is becoming a less powerful explanatory variable in the world of Chinese politics.[79] Xi has purged Bo Xilai and Sun Zhengcai — two powerful princelings — and Lorentzen and Lu show that Xi's favour does not seem to extend to those with personal ties to the other members of the PSC.[80] Individuals with close connection to the other six PSC members have not been more insulated from Xi's anti-corruption campaign than anyone else, but *direct* personal connection to Xi seems to provide protection from being targeted. Indeed, several of his protégés (some princelings, some not) have risen unusually fast through party or PLA ranks, often helped by their predecessors' falling afoul of Xi's anti-corruption campaign.[81]

As a part of his anti-corruption campaign, Xi Jinping has steadily gone after individuals within the PLA, beginning with then-Politburo member Xu Caihou in 2012. Data on military officials caught up in the campaign is less publicly available than civilian officials, which indicates the sensitivity of the matter[82]. However, as discussed in the previous section, high-ranking military officials were arrested from 2012 through the end of 2015, at which point Xi Jinping initiated a sweeping reorganization of the PLA command structure which on its face created a leaner, more modern command structure, but in effect meant that the PLA was put under more direct command of Xi himself.[83] This suggests that Xi moved to consolidate his power over the army first after

he had eliminated resistance within PLA ranks, and further suggests that while the PLA may not have much direct influence over foreign policy-making, it remained a force to be reckoned with in the domestic arena.

Discussion

The preceding sections have described the degree to which domestic institutions in Russia and China have been militarized or personalized in the last two decades. Figures 7 and 8 show the change in each dimension of each country year since 2000, compared with MIDs (disputes and incidents) for 2000-2010.

These results suggest that Russia has been highly personalized throughout Vladimir Putin's first and second terms as president, but briefly depersonalized during Medvedev's term. China has moved from a configuration of low personalization and low militarism ("machine"), to one with high personalization and low militarism ("boss"). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is mostly confirmed, because Russia has been more personalistic than China throughout the period, except for the years 2008-2012 (if we count Medvedev as the de facto leader and not a figurehead). On the other hand, Hypothesis 2 cannot be confirmed, because their respective levels of militarization have both been low and roughly equal. Because we have reliable data on the dependent variable (initiation of MIDs) for the first half of the period (2000-2010) but not for the second, we divide the discussion accordingly. We then turn to discuss a few conceptual issues related to the independent variable.

2000-2010

The sample size is too small to obtain any reliable estimate of a statistical relationship between change in either dimension or change in the initiation of MIDs. The point made in Figure 2 is clearly displayed in Figure 7 and 8: Russia has engaged in more incidents per dispute in the ten-year period. The general patterns seem to bear out the theoretical prediction that machines (like China 2000-2010) are less dispute prone than bosses (Russia 2000-2008).

The low degree of militarism in both cases confirms the theoretical proposition by Weeks that even in low-militarized contexts, disputes may break out.[84]

A statistical analysis is obviously unnecessary in the Chinese case, as neither dimension changes, even as MIDs occur with varying intensity

for most years of the sample. Most of the Chinese MIDs are related to competing maritime territorial claims with neighbouring states. A better explanation for variation in these cases could be offered by surges of nationalism in China[85] and China's attempts at balancing against United States' influence in the region.[86] As for Russia, there is some variation, mainly in the personalist dimension, but there does not seem to be any particularly strong relationship between change in personalism and initiation of MIDs.

To bring up a specific case: Russian intervention in Georgia happened in August, three months after Medvedev became president. Therefore, the outbreak of the conflict corresponds to a decline in personalism, when Russia could be classified as a "machine". This is exactly opposite to what theory would predict — incidents actually *increased* in the first two years of Medvedev's rule. Russia had disputes with Georgia in every year from 2000 to 2010, so there was in a sense a gradual build-up of tensions between the two countries that could possibly be explained by Putin's increasing personalism. This is an explanation that is not modelled by the theory, and the sample does not provide enough years with low personalism for a reliable comparison.

2011-2018

The Russian invasion of Ukraine (2014) and its intervention in Syria (2015) both correspond with high levels of personalism in Russian institutions. For China, no conflict has broken out, and datasets on recent events in the East and South China Sea or along the disputed border with India suffer from all forms of bias, which makes even a general measurement of Chinese "aggressiveness" or "assertiveness" difficult. However, what is indisputable is that extensive land reclamation efforts have been ongoing in the South China Sea since at least 2013[87] and that there has been a renewed emphasis on the South China Sea as a "core interest" (*hexin liyi*) both by party-media and by Xi Jinping himself, who frequently brings up the subject in his meetings with foreign leaders and media.[88]

Although the results differ, the degree of militarism is low in both cases. Both Russian and Chinese leadership have purposefully structured its bureaucracy to check the influence of military on politics, for reasons that correspond to their respective foreign policy styles. Putin's creation of the Presidential Guard and the way in which he has turned it into an expeditionary force under his personal command

shows how his undermining of military hierarchy was carried through with the goal of foreign power consolidation. Xi Jinping's military reform, on the other hand, seems to be primarily an act of domestic power consolidation. The lack of militarization in Russia does not seem to have impacted its probability to engage in these larger scale conflicts at all, and therefore we might expect that the lack of PLA-influence in the CCP Politburo does not necessarily mean that China will not engage in conflict at some point in the future.

For the last 18 years, Russia has been a high-personalism/low-militarism (or "boss"-authoritarian) state for a longer period of time than China. Weeks' theory predicts that the probability of Russia going to war is higher for Russia than for China and given that during this time Russia has engaged in three military conflicts while China has engaged in none, the theoretical prediction turns out as expected. Moreover, China's current level of personalism, which is higher than that of Russia when it initiated the conflict in Ukraine and intervened in Syria, would imply that the theoretical probability of China being involved in conflict is increasing.

Being a general theory, it proves accurate in the case of Russia, but not very precise. However, between some limitations we find that, the theory does not sufficiently explain variation in outcome despite similarity of initial conditions and it deserves attention for further research. For example, why did no conflict break out in the Chinese case in 2017 even though theoretical conditions in 2017 were similar to the Russian case in 2014 (Ukraine) and 2015 (Syria)? The particular cases of Ukraine and Syria would have to be analysed and compared in detail in order to establish the particular causal mechanisms at work, and how they relate to the particular political institutions. Indeed, the causal mechanisms at work between institutions and foreign policy outcomes would need to be clarified by further research.

Pepinsky suggests that "the institutional turn in comparative authoritarianism" does not sufficiently distinguish between "institutions as causes … and institutions as epiphenomena".[89] This article is open to such criticism, and has only briefly touched upon the underlying factors that have shaped the domestic political institutions of Russia and China (e.g. how the CCP's view that the separation of military and civilian leadership was the undoing of the Soviet Union has shaped the way it treats party-military relations), but it is outside the scope of the paper to provide a full explanation of these factors or how those fac-

tors may have acted upon its foreign policy outcomes. There are some additional issues with the theoretical approach attempted here which should be discussed before drawing a conclusion.

Conclusion

Many authors — who may be referred to as "Russia experts" — have written about the "militarization" of Russia's leadership.[90] However, the common usage of the term "militarism" among Russia experts does not correspond with the theoretical use by Weeks, who clearly separates "military" from "security".[91] The main difference is that the authoritarianism experts make a clear distinction between military and security, but the Russia experts do not and instead consider all *siloviki* "military". Because this paper is based on the theory of Weeks, this paper uses her narrow definition of military as clearly distinguished from security. However, it seems that in so doing the theory classifies Putin as "non-military", a designation which changes the answers to most of the analytical questions from "yes" to "no" and seemingly fails to capture an important dimension of Russian politics. While civilian presence has been largely constant in the Security Council, military influence in the top Russian leadership has been decreasing at the expense of security influence. Clearly this trend says something meaningful about the dynamics of Russian politics, but if one then makes the logical distinction between security background and military background of *siloviki*, the analytical questions used to explore the militarist dimension of Russian political institutions fail to find any evidence of such a dimension. This becomes especially problematic from the year 2017 when the Presidential Guard became authorized to act in foreign regions. Through this act, Putin has to some degree conflated security with military. The Russia experts certainly take this as evidence of *increasing* militarization of Russian politics, but the analytical questions employed in this paper fail to capture this change, and the Russian militarization index remains unchanged.

Another issue is that of the Medvedev interregnum between 2008 and 2012. During this period, access to high government office was not dependent on Medvedev, and he did not personally control the security forces. Therefore, his presidency can be considered much less personalistic than Putin's. Again, this analysis seems to miss out on an important aspect of the dynamics of Russian political institutions. If one were to revise the method for the purpose of a future study, it

is our opinion that analytical questions should be designed with the possibility of a figurehead-leader in mind.

In the case of China, we do not face these issues because the fundamental role of the Chinese military has not changed significantly, and Xi's role as a leader after 2012 is unambiguous. China's score on both militarism and personalism under Jiang and Hu, as well as during the first part of Xi's first term is so low that one could be led to believe that the country was not authoritarian at all. For anybody with even a cursory knowledge of Chinese politics, this is of course a preposterous suggestion. This result is due to the fact that the theoretical definition of authoritarianism which is focused on two particular characteristics of the system (degree of militarization, degree of personalization) that are theorized to be meaningful for foreign policy outcomes, but not focused on other characteristics that can be used to define authoritarianism (e.g. degree of civil liberties, freedom of speech, freedom of association, degree of accountability).

This article has sought to apply a general theory to two specific cases. It has attempted to explain the difference between Russian and Chinese foreign policy as a result of their different domestic political institutions. The result turned out as expected, but only to some degree: *in general* Russia has been more aggressive than China, and *in general* Russia has also been more personalistic (but not more militaristic, conceptual issues notwithstanding) than China. Thus, these observations suggest that China will be more likely to engage in conflict at some point in the future, because, due to its increasing personalism, China has now become a "boss"-state like Russia. However, closer empirical study of the relationship between Xi Jinping's personalism and China's military ambitions is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

This article has also tried to provide a quantifiable measure of increasing personalism in two powerful authoritarian nations. The foreign policy implications of such increasing personalism extend beyond the realm of conflict. For example, Xi Jinping's decision to enshrine his personal development pet-project — the Belt and Road Initiative — next to his own name in the CCP constitution indicates that the relationship between personalism and economic statecraft would make a fruitful topic for future research.

Figure 1. Typology of Authoritarian Regimes and examples (1946-99)

	Civilian Audience or Leader	Military Audience or Leader
Non-personalist (Elite-constrained) Leader	MACHINE *USSR (after Stalin)* *China (after Mao)*	JUNTA *Brazil, South Korea, Argentina*
Personalist (Unconstrained) Leader	BOSS *USSR (Stalin)* *China (Mao)*	STRONGMAN *Egypt (Nasser)* *Chile (Pinochet)*

Reproduced from Slater (2003, p. 86), with regime examples by Weeks (2012a; p. 330, 337).

Figure 2. Analytical questions based on Weeks (2012, p. 336)

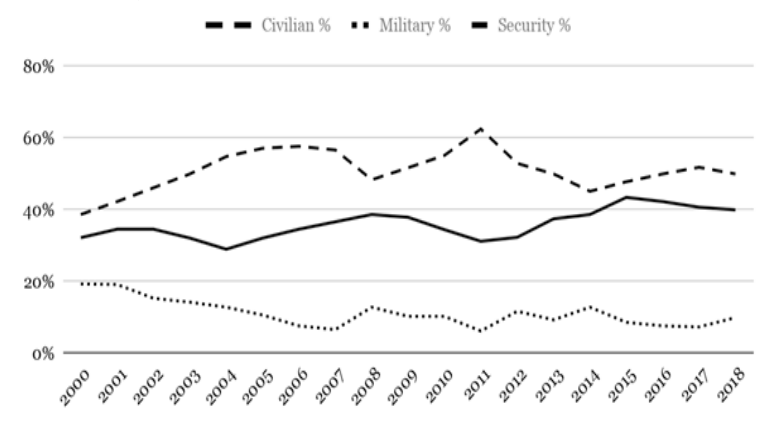
Personalist Dimension	Militarist Dimension
P1. Is access to high government office dependent on the personal favor of the leader?	**M1.** Is the leader a current or former high-ranking military officer?
P2. Do country specialists view the politburo (or equivalent) as a rubber stamp for the leader's decisions?	**M2.** Do officers hold cabinet or politburo positions not related to the armed forces?
P3. Does the leader personally control the security forces?	**M3.** Is military high command consulted about non-military matters?
P4. If there is a supporting party, does the leader choose most of the members of the politburo equivalent?	**M4.** What share of members of the cabinet or politburo-equivalent are military?
P5. Is the heir apparent, a member of the same family, clan, tribe, or minority ethnic group as the leader? [Not coded if there is no clear heir apparent]	**M5.** Does the variable *regimeny*[92] code the regime as military?
P6. Has normal military hierarchy been seriously disorganized or overturned, or has the leader created new military forces loyal to him personally?	
P7. Have dissenting officers or officers from different regions, tribes, religions, or ethnic groups been murdered, imprisoned, or forced into exile?	
P8. If the leader is from the military, has the officer corps been marginalized from most decision making?	

Figure 3. MIDs initiated by Russia or China 2000-2010

	China	Russia
Total Disputes	28	24
Total Incidents	57	131
Incidents/Dispute	2.04	5.46
Average Duration (days)	55	152
Median Duration	4.5	1
Max Duration	280	1491
Incidents with casualties	1	4
Casualties	1	100-300
Threat to use force	84.21%	73.28%
Display use of force	15.79%	26.72%
Use of force	-	0.76%

Note: Each *dispute* is coded as initiated by State A (Russia or China), but an individual *incident* may not have been. The same is true for most aggressive action taken. For example, in two incidents coded as "Display use of force" for China, Chinese fishing vessels initiated the dispute by entering the territorial waters of another country (Vietnam and North Korea respectively), but in each case the target state responded by opening fire on the Chinese vessels, thereby being the one displaying use of force. Therefore, the table should be read as describing the general characteristics of conflicts that Russia or China get involved in, not as a general pattern of either state's conflict behaviour. Source: Correlates of War Project (2013)[93]

Figure 4. Share of individuals with civilian, military, or security background in the Russian Security Council 2000-2018[94]



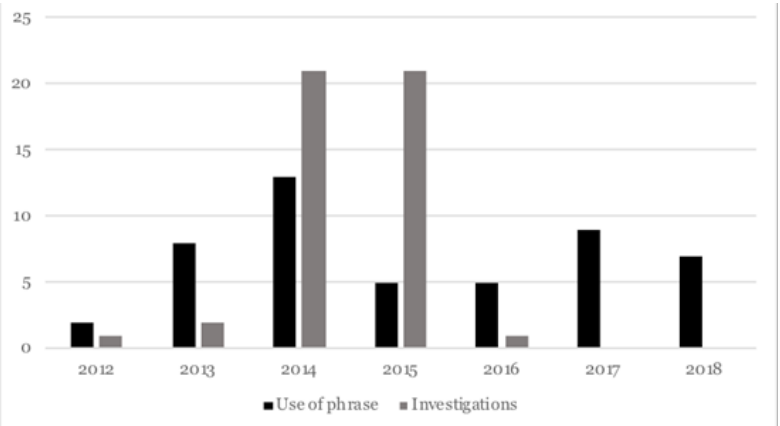
Source: Whoiswho.dp.ru. (2018)[95]

Figure 5. Share of military in the CCP Politburo

Leader	Politburo	Civilians	Military	Total	Share of military
Jiang Zemin	14th	21	2	23	9%
(1992-2002)	15th	23	2	25	8%
Hu Jintao	16th	22	2	24	8%
(2003-2012)	17th	24	2	26	8%
Xi Jinping	18th	23	2	25	8%
(2012-)	19th	23	2	25	8%

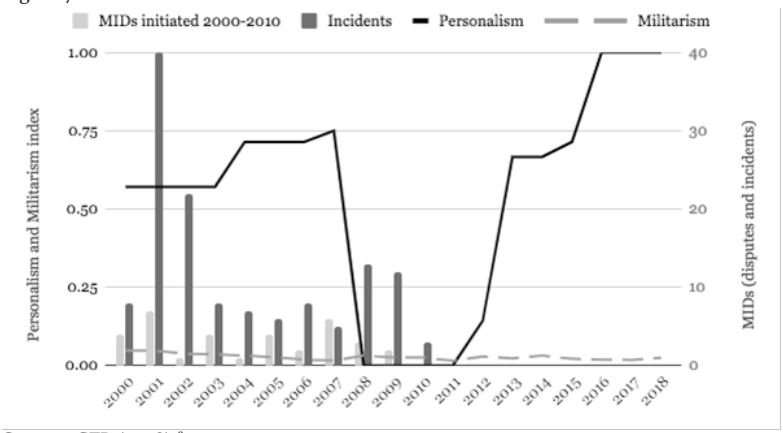
Source: Adapted from Li (2016a) and cpc.people.com.cn (2007)[96]

Figure 6. Xi Jinping's use of "jianchi dang dui jun juedui lingdao" and anti-corruption investigations against high-ranking military



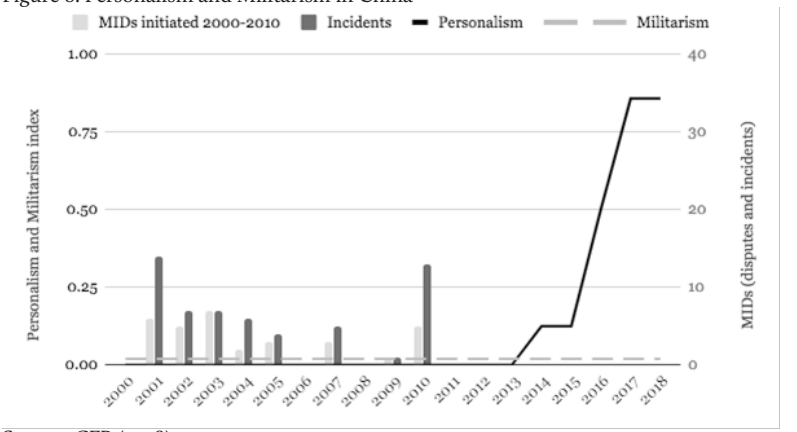
Source: Investigations from Chinafile (2016); Use of phrase from People's Daily (2018)[97]

Figure 7. Personalism and Militarism in Russia



Source: CFR (2018)[98]

Figure 8. Personalism and Militarism in China



Source: CFR (2018)[99]

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