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The Qods Force in Iran

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The Role of the Qods Force in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Ardavan Khoshnood

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in 1979 had a great impact on the question of security in both the region and outside of the Middle East. The foreign policy of the new republic would show hostility and aggression as terrorism became its modus operandi. In order to safeguard the newly established regime and the revolution, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Pasdaran)* was established, of which its external branch was named the *Qods Force* (QF). By reviewing scholarly works and regime publications, the current article aims to study and analyze the foreign policy of the IRI and the role of the QF in it. As the IRI is today deemed to be a sponsor of terrorism, and as the tensions between the IRI and the United States have increased since the *Pasdaran* and its QF was designated a terrorist organization, the role of the QF in the foreign policy of the IRI is even more important. This article shows that even though terrorism through the QF is still the modus operandi of the IRI, the QF has through the years evolved and uses other methods in order to influence and cement the power of the IRI in the international arena. The article also concludes that it is highly unlikely for the IRI to be reformed as long as the current leadership and establishment continue to rule, and if the regime feels threatened, it will almost certainly use terrorism and violence in order to guarantee its survival.

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Ardavan Khoshnood

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in 1979, Islam became the de facto source of legitimacy for the newly born republic, affecting all parts of society.[1] The new regime's interpretation of Islam was allowed to guide their foreign policy, permitting measures such as threat and use of violence to bring forth their objectives.[2] Today, at the heart of Iran's foreign policy, lies the military organization *Pasdaran*[3] and its *Qods*[4] *Force* (QF) which is responsible for foreign operations.

In recent years, the *Pasdaran* and the QF have gained more influence and power in Iran and its foreign policy. The QF is therefore not unsurprisingly deemed to be a national security threat for many countries in the region[5], Western Europe[6] as well as the American continent[7]. Because of this, the Trump administration in April 2019 designated the *Pasdaran* and thus the QF as a terrorist organization[8], and on 3 January 2020, assassinated the commander of the QF, Qasem Soleimani.

As Iran continues to be an important player in the Middle East, at the same time aspiring for more influence in Western Europe (WE) and the American continent, in line with the foreign policy of the IRI, it is important to study and analyze the foreign policy of Iran and the role of the QF in it.

Pasdaran

Pasdaran was *de facto* established in late April 1979[9], and *de jure* recognized on 5 May 1979, after a decree issued by Ruhollah Khomeini[10]. The founding members of the *Pasdaran* already knew each other from secret Islamic military camps in Lebanon and Syria, which were set up in order to train opponents of the Shah.[11]

After the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran, loyalists to Khomeini organized themselves in revolutionary committees to manage security in different cities of the country. It was a need of organizing these committees in which the idea of the *Pasdaran* was born. Khomeini, fearful of the military still being loyal to the Shah, saw also an opportunity in the *Pasdaran* to create a parallel military organization loyal to him which also could defend the revolution from domestic and foreign threats. His distrust of the regular army grew even stronger when members of the army and a great number of civilians still loyal

to the Shah tried to kill Khomeini and overthrow[12] the Islamic republic in July 1980.[13]

Initially responsible for protecting the newly established IRI and the borders of the country, *Pasdaran* now became a counterbalance to the regular military. The *Pasdaran* has since then been held higher than the regular military. In a speech, the current supreme leader of the IRI, Ali Khamenei, stated that although other organs of the IRI eventually became revolutionary, the *Pasdaran* was created, established and built by the revolution itself.[14]

The aim of the Pasdaran

The role of the *Pasdaran* is stated in the constitution of the IRI, article 150: 'The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [...] shall continue to exist in order to carry out its role as the protector of the revolution and its achievements'.[15] The *Pasdaran* also has its own statute which confirms the above statements.[16] The constitution of the IRI, article 110, point 6e, states that the supreme leader is the commander in chief of the *Pasdaran*.[17]

Pasdaran is today one of the most powerful institutions of the IRI with its tentacles reaching all organs of the country, not least its economy.[18] Besides owning several large banks[19], the *Pasdaran* also owns and controls a large engineering industry called the *Khatam Al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters*[20] with more than 25 000 staff, working with issues such as water, oil, gas and telecommunications. The *Pasdaran* likewise owns several media sources thus controlling a widespread propaganda machine.[21]

The construction and structure of the Pasdaran

Although some of the members of the *Pasdaran*, including its leadership, knew each other from Islamist camps before the fall of the Shah, some of them connected and gained strong bonds during the Iran-Iraq war, which also gave them vital military experience. After its establishment, the *Pasdaran* was initially run by Ayatollah Hassan Lahouti Eshkevari[22], with the help of Behzad Nabavi[23], Ali Shamkhani[24] and Mohsen Rezaei.

The *Pasdaran* command since its creation can be divided into two parts: the early temporary command, which was established in direct connection to the creation of *Pasdaran*, and the permanent command, which was established after that the *Pasdaran* had fully struc-

tured and organized themselves. Starting with the first part, the first commander of the *Pasdaran* was Javad Mansouri 1979-80. After him, there was a short lap before the permanent command of the *Pasdaran* was implemented. Since then, the *Pasdaran* have had five commanders; Abbas Agha Zamani (1980), Morteza Rezaei (1980-81), Mohsen Rezaei (1981-97), Yahya Rahim Safavi (1997-07), Mohammad Ali Jafari (2007-19) and Hossein Salami who is the incumbent commander.

The emblem of the *Pasdaran* consists of a fist holding a rifle in front of a globe. Above the rifle is a verse of the Qur'an, *Al-Anfal 8:60*, which translated to English states: 'Prepare Against them What Force You Can'.

The structure and force of the *Pasdaran* remains unknown, but it is believed that the organization has more than 120 000 members with sections in at least all large cities of Iran.[25] *Pasdaran* consists of several branches; *Pasdaran* Army forces, *Pasdaran* Navy forces, *Pasdaran* Aerospace forces, the QF, the *Basij*, the organization for intelligence, the counterintelligence organization as well as the security organization. The organizational chart of the *Pasdaran* and its leadership is presented in figure 1.

The navy of the regular military is responsible for the Gulf of Oman and beyond, while the *Pasdaran* navy forces has control over operations in the Persian Gulf. Both navies have, however, overlapping responsibilities in the vital *Strait of Hormuz*. As the air forces of the regular military controls the combat aircrafts of the IRI, the *Pasdaran* aerospace forces mostly focuses on the IRI's missile program. While the regular army secures and guards the borders of Iran, the *Pasdaran* ground forces mainly focus on questions of internal security and to organize paramilitary organizations and the *Basij* to combat unrest in the country.[26]

The *Basij*, officially in Farsi named *Sazeman-e Basij-e Mostazafin* (the Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed) is a Khomeini-loyalist militia founded after the victory of the Islamic Revolution with voluntary members as young as 15 years old, who launched massive human-wave assaults against the Iraqis in the Iran-Iraq war.[27]

The organization for intelligence gathers both domestic and foreign intelligence. The counterintelligence organization is responsible for counterespionage and safeguarding the *Pasdaran* from infiltration. The security organization has no intelligence gathering responsibilities and works with security issues like close protection.

The Qods Force of the Pasdaran

The QF was established in 1990 as a development of the Office of Islamic Liberation Movements in the *Pasdaran*. The Office was established shortly after the Islamic revolution and was headed by the prominent cleric Hossein Ali Montazeri[28]. One of the main objectives of the Office was to coordinate Iran´s support for different Islamic organizations like the *Hezbollah*.

The first commander of the QF was Ahmad Vahidi[29]. However, the longest serving commander of the QF was Qasem Soleimani, who ascended as the head of the QF in 1998. On 3 January 2020, Soleimani was assassinated by US forces in Iraq and replaced by Esmail Gha´ani. The importance of the QF can be understood by the fact that the commander of the QF reports directly to the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, bypassing the regular chain of command which other branches of the *Pasdaran* must follow, i.e. report to the commander of the *Pasdaran* who in turn report to the supreme leader.[30]

Since its establishment, the QF has been conducting covert operations outside of Iran like terrorism, espionage, sabotage and destabilization of countries deemed to be enemies of the IRI.[31] The estimated strength of the QF is unknown and is by Iran experts and analysts put at between 5 000 and 15 000 operatives.[32]

Foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Although Iran has been wrapped in a domestic struggle for power between the moderates and the conservatives for many years, the use of terrorism in its foreign policy has been nurtured under presidents of both camps.[33] While the IRI denies any role in terror attacks it is blamed for and especially the many assassinations it is accused of against Iranian opponents in exile, Wege argues that 'Tehran does little to conceal its role in these assassinations'.[34] The reason for this may be that Iran does not see its actions as terrorism but rather as resistance.

Article 152 of the constitution states that 'the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran shall be based on the [...] defence of the rights of all Muslims [...]'.[35] Although this statement is not further discussed in the different articles of the constitution, the preamble argues that the '[...] Constitution paves the way for the perpetuation of this Revolution in and outside the country [...] it tries to prepare the ground for the creation of a single world Ommat[36] [...]'.

It is the above declarations in conjunction with Khomeini's statements on the question of the revolution, which supports the IRI mission of exporting the Islamic revolution.[37] The current foreign minister of the IRI, Mohammad Javad Zarif, endorses the constitution arguing that 'Iran seeks to enhance its regional and global stature; to promote its ideals'.[38] How much this is an expression for exporting the revolution is thus unclear.

Regional foreign policy of the Islamic Republic

Although not Iran's creation, Iran had a decisive role in the emergence of the Lebanese *Hezbollah* which since the victory of the Islamic revolution has received significant financial and logistical resources as well as weapons from the *Pasdaran*. The *Hezbollah* is without doubt one of IRI`s most important achievements in its foreign policy. *Hezbollah* was not only a tool for the IRI to spread the Islamic revolution, but also a tool to use terrorism against enemy-states.[39] The former commander of the QF, Qasem Soleimani, has stated that Iran has been present in Lebanon in supporting the *Hezbollah*, and that he himself was in Lebanon during the 2006 war between Israel and *Hezbollah*.[40]

One antagonist to Iran is Saudi Arabia which the IRI has tried to influence. Probably, at least to some degree, as a reaction to this, the Shia cleric Nimr Al-Nimr was executed by Saudi Arabia in January 2016, further infecting the tensions between the two states. It should, however, be noted that Al-Nimr did not have much sympathy for the IRI and vice versa as he was from the *Shirazi school* of the Shia faith descending from Ayatollah Mohammad Mahdi Shirazi[41]. As the political thought of the *Shirazi school* did not align well with the political system of the IRI, clerics of the Shirazi school did not fall out well with the leadership of the regime.[42] However, Al-Nimr could be used by the IRI as propaganda against the Saudis. Another way the IRI tries to encounter Saudi Arabia, is through supporting the *Houthis* in Yemen in combating the Yemeni government which is highly supported by Saudi Arabia.[43]

A second country which the IRI has strained relations with is Bahrain. As the majority of the population in Bahrain are Shia Muslims, and Iran house Bahraini activists fighting the Al-Khalifa family ruling the country, Iran has often been accused of agitating the Shias against the Bahraini government. Although Iran denies any activities in supporting the Shias in Bahrain, Bahrain claims otherwise and has in reaction toward the actions of Iran, cracked down on the Shia community and revoked the citizenship of the Bahraini Shia cleric Isa Qassim.[44]

The conflicts between IRI and Bahrain, however, date back to the victory of the Islamic revolution and the unsuccessful 1981 coup by the now defunct Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB). The IFLB was founded in the 1970s and had the overthrow of the Al-Khalifa regime as its main objective. In 1980 the IFLB declared loyalty to Ruhollah Khomeini, and in 1981 they tried to topple the Al-Khalifa regime. The IFBL was connected to the IRI and its members also received training by the *Pasdaran*.[45]

Iran is furthermore highly active in Syria with the QF to fight the opposition to Assad. Also, the Lebanese *Hezbollah*, on orders from Iran, is active in Syria fighting for Assad.[46] Interestingly, Iranian officials and members of the QF, initially, repeatedly denied any involvement in Syria.[47] Today, however, the IRI admits that they have a military presence in Syria via the QF[48], as hundreds of Iranian members of the QF have been confirmed killed, among them the high profiled *Pasdaran* commander General Hossein Hamadani[49].

Iran and the QF are also active in Afghanistan. After the invasion of Afghanistan, the IRI have gained more influence in the country – notably among its Shia population, which is highly supported by the QF in discussing influence and propaganda.[50] It is thus not only through supporting subversions which the IRI tries to export its revolution and ideology. Diplomacy and negotiations are increasingly becoming part of the modus operandi of the *Pasdaran* and the QF.

As long as Saddam Hussein was in power in Iraq, Iran tried to destabilize the government of Saddam through its support to the Shia population of Iraq which makes the majority of the population of the country. After the fall of Saddam at the hands of the Americans, Iran gained more strength and is probably the most influential country in Iraq today. The Shia community in Iraq is also more supported by Iran than ever before.[51] The QF continue to be active in Iraq in both supporting the Shia community as well as, according to the US, undermining Iraqi governments not acting on the wishes of Tehran.[52] Iran does not deny the fact that it has a military presence in Iraq via the QF, but claims they are only there to fight terrorism.[53]

Islamic Republic's foreign policy in relation to Western Europe and America

Even though the relation between the IRI and the US have been strained since the attack on the American embassy in Tehran by Khomeini loy-

alists in 1979, the IRI has had widespread diplomatic and commercial relations with the European Union (EU) and especially Western Europe (WE).[54] The good relations with WE has, however, not stopped the IRI from conducting or attempting to conduct terrorist operations in those countries, including Canada, either against the interest of the host country or against Iranian dissidents living in those countries.[55]

Qods Force in Iranian Foreign Policy

Most WE countries have witnessed the killing of Iranian dissidents. More than 200 Iranian dissidents across the world, deemed by the IRI as threats to its existence, have over the years been killed or seriously injured in assassinations by operatives of the IRI employed either by the QF or the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence.[56]

In the post-Khomeini era, the foreign policy of the IRI has evolved as Iran now tries to gain more power and influence in different countries through its supporters, different organizations affiliated with the IRI, cultural organizations as well as mosques.[57] The National Iranian-American Council in the US is a good example of an organization functioning as a base of interest for the IRI.[58] The creation of the British based Iranian owned *Press TV*[59] is another sign of the policy change seen in the foreign policy of the IRI with emphasis on influence.

In discussing the US, the IRI through the QF is highly active in the country. Also, the *Hezbollah* is active in the US as well as Canada, as was seen in 2002 when American and Canadian law enforcements in different operations exposed criminality directly linked to *Hezbollah* operatives.[60] Likewise, in Latin America the QF and Iran are highly active. Over the years, Iran has highly increased its presence in Latin America and doubled its embassies, with the one in Nicaragua being the largest with more than 150 employees.[61]

The Qods Force and the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic

The *Pasdaran* and its QF is deemed to have a vital and central role in the foreign policy of the IRI.[62] On one hand, the *Pasdaran* is in control of the IRI's unconventional warfare, thus having an important role in the open and subtle threats made by the IRI towards other countries[63]; on the other hand, operatives and proxies of the *Pasdaran* throughout the world, via the QF, engage in covert operations and acts of terrorism. In using proxies in its operations, Ward states: 'Carrying on the tradition of the "hidden hand" attacks in the Gulf and the use of sympathetic militant groups to export the revolution during the 1980s, the Guard and its QF have kept Iran actively involved in terrorism'.[64] The

use of proxies in different covert operations is admitted by the *Pasdaran*, which in a book published by the *Pasdaran* themselves states that the use of pro-revolutionary proxies outside of Iran is part of the doctrine of the *Pasdaran*.[65]

The Qods Force in the region

Since the 1980s Iran has initially through the Office of Islamic Liberation Movements and later via the QF controlled *Hezbollah* in Lebanon as well as different Shia militias in Iraq and other countries in the region to implement its foreign policy which is also admitted by the former commander of the QF.[66]

As the IRI opposes the existence of Israel, it has always combatted and been an opponent of peace between Palestine and Israel, thus the foreign policy of the country has been focused in undermining any efforts to achieve peace, as seen in the support of the *Pasdaran* and its QF to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.[67] The *Pasdaran* has also used its control over the IRI's missile program to threaten Israel. The commander of the *Pasdaran* Aerospace Forces, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, has in an interview stated that 'The reason we [The *Pasdaran*] designed our missiles with a range of 2000 km is to be able to hit our enemy the Zionist regime from a safe distance'.[68]

Both in Afghanistan and Iraq, after the fall of the Taliban and Saddam respectively, Iran's foreign policy has been focused on gaining influence in the two countries. While in Afghanistan the IRI acts through diplomacy and propaganda, the QF is highly active in Iraq to gain more power and influence by supporting Shia militias. Iraq is of such importance for Iran that the former commander of the QF, Soleimani, himself, has been in Iraq directing diverse military operations.[69] Most of these operations have been conducted against ISIS, but the Americans have also been targeted. In the beginning of 2007, QF operatives dressed as American troops attacked the *Provisional Joint Coordination Center* in Karbala, killing five American soldiers and kidnapping four who later were found murdered.[70]

Today, the QF is most active in implementing the foreign policy of the IRI in Syria, in defending Bashar Al-Assad.[71] The survival of Assad is of great importance for the IRI, which cannot afford to lose an ally in the region. Syria is also of strategic importance for the IRI. The former deputy commander of the *Pasdaran* and now the current commander of the *Pasdaran*, Hossein Salami, said in an interview that Syria is im-

portant in order to have a continuous interconnection between Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Salami stated that losing Syria would mean that Iran's connection to Lebanon and Palestine would be lost, and Iran would not be able to fight the enemies of Islam, being the Israelis.[72]

Another way the QF tries to influence the region and at the same time strengthen its own position, is by persuading the diplomatic core of the IRI to appoint QF officials as diplomats and not least ambassadors. Since Iraq is of significant importance for the IRI and in particular the QF which is highly active in the country, the current Iranian ambassador to Iraq is a former senior QF official – Brigadier General Iraj Mesdaghi. The first commander of the *Pasdaran*, Javad Mansouri, stated in an interview that many Iranian diplomats in the region are members of the QF. In a controversial statement, Mansouri also exposed Abbas Araghchi to be a member of the QF.[73] Araghchi is a career diplomat and Iran´s chief nuclear negotiator. This clearly illuminates that the *Pasdaran* and its QF do not only use irregular warfare in order to influence and strength its power, but diplomatic channels as well.

Another example is the former commander of the QF, Soleimani, and how he has been part of extra-territorial negotiations and thus been acting as a *pseudo minister of foreign affairs*. Soleimani had a prominent role in negotiating between different fractions in both Iraq and Syria, and he advised the Shiite establishment in Iraq on how to negotiate with the US and the UK.[74] Soleimani had also a significant role in convincing the Russians to engage in Syria and deploy their militaries in the country in support of Assad.[75] The role of Soleimani as Iran´s pseudo minister of foreign affairs is much more different than the role of Mohammad Javad Zarif as the *de jure* Iranian minister of foreign affairs. The *Pasdaran* and the commander of the QF answer directly to the supreme leader, which is why he is not required to have any presidential nor parliamentary endorsement. Soleimani has thus had free hands in acting on direct orders and on behalf of the supreme leader without being exposed for internal political conflicts and disputes.

The Qods Force in the Western Europe and the American continent

In the 1980s and the 1990s, the world witnessed hundreds of assassinations and assassination attempts against Iranian dissidents, particularly in Western Europe. Even though most of these assassinations

remain unsolved, they have by different governments, intelligence services and organizations been attributed to the IRI.[76] There are, however, few known assassinations of Iranian dissidents since May 1996. It is unclear why these assassinations have decreased, but the reason is probably twofold; on one hand it is difficult to conduct a covert operation in another country, and on the other hand, instead of conducting assassinations, which in turn would heavily affect the relationship of the IRI with the countries the assassinations are taking place in, the IRI both through its Ministry of Intelligence as well as the QF have instead been engaging in widespread espionage against Iranian dissidents and other targets of interest as have been reported by several countries.[77]

The QF has also, fully in accordance with the foreign policy of the IRI, gained large influences in Latin America and is highly active in the area. The fact that *Hezbollah* has also been increasing their presence in these countries has concerned both the Americans and the Israelis, which believe that their interests in these countries may be threatened.[78]

Islamic Republic's use of terrorism

As the French in the 1980s sold fighter jets to Iraq and gave a safe haven to opponents of the IRI, Iran engaged in several acts of terrorism against France. French government personnel were attacked, French citizens were kidnapped and held hostages in Lebanon and several bomb attacks at the hands of the *Hezbollah* shook Paris.[79] Even though Iran denies any role in these terrorist attacks, a court in France in the 1990s convicted Fouad Ali Saleh to life in prison because of his role in the bombings in Paris. Saleh, a Tunisian born in France, had studied in Iran and been recruited by the Lebanese *Hezbollah* to conduct the attacks in Paris.[80] Some bomb attacks in France remain unsolved, but both the police and the French intelligence point out *Hezbollah* and Iran as responsible for these attacks.[81] Although Iran´s footprints are seen in these attacks carried out by the *Hezbollah*, there is no clear evidence of which role, if any, the QF has had. However, since *Hezbollah* is the 'primary terrorist proxy' of the QF, it is highly likely that the QF was very much involved in these attacks.[82]

In 1994, operatives of the QF and members of the Lebanese *Hezbollah* bombed a Jewish community center in Argentina, the *Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association*, AMIA. Two years earlier the Israeli embassy

in Argentina was bombed, allegedly by the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and QF operatives.[83] Even though Iran denies any role in the AMIA bombing, not only has the Argentine prosecutor Alberto Nisman[84] connected Iran and the QF to the bombing[85], but the Argentinians have also provided sufficient evidence to issue a warrant through Interpol for the arrest of five Iranians and one Lebanese national. Among the five Iranian nationals are the former commander of the *Pasdaran*, Mohsen Rezaei[86], former commander of the QF Ahmad Vahidi[87], and former minister of intelligence, Ali Fallahian[88].

Another act of terrorism in which Iran has been convicted for in a court is the Khobar tower bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996, where more than 500 individuals were killed and injured. In 2006, a court in the US found Iran responsible for the attacks, despite Iran's claim to the contrary.[89] According to the US Department of State it was the *Pasdaran* – and thus the QF – that was responsible for placing the bomb.[90]

Ever since the establishment of the IRI, more than 160 Iranian opponents of the IRI have been killed by the regime.[91] In discussing these assassinations, it is often difficult to know which organization that has planned and executed the assassination: The Ministry of Intelligence, the QF or both. There is, however, no doubt that at least one of these two organizations carry out orders of assassinations against Iranian dissidents.[92]

The most high-profile assassination of Iranians in exile which the QF conducted was in Berlin in 1992, when four Iranians opposed to the IRI were killed in what came to be known as the Mykonos assassination. Mykonos was the restaurant the opponents had gathered in for a meeting when they were fired upon. The operation had been planned by a veteran member of the *Pasdaran* living in Germany and then conducted by both Lebanese and Iranian operatives of the QF.[93] The German Supreme Court in Berlin, on 10 April 1997, stated that the highest officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran had ordered the terrorist attacks. The verdict not only sentenced two terrorists to life in prison, but also stated that 'the political leaders of Iran gave the order, for the sole purpose of staying in power' and that 'the order givers and string pullers were Iranian state functionaries'.[94]

Acts of terrorism where the IRI is suspected, but no verdicts have been passed, are the many bombings of US embassies in the ME[95] and hundreds of assassinations and assassination attempts against Iranian dissidents all around the world.[96]

In 2011 the US accused the IRI and the QF for planning to assassinate the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia in the US.[97] According to US officials, it was after that a QF operative living in the US contacted whom he believed was a member of a Latin American drug cartel (but in fact was an undercover informant for the Drug Enforcement Agency) to negotiate payment for killing the Saudi Arabian Ambassador in the US when the plot was revealed.[98] The IRI denied any involvement in plans to assassinate the Saudi ambassador.[99]

Terrorist operations on foreign soil in discussing Europe and the American continent, sponsored by the IRI, have been diminishing. Iran, however, still supports acts of terrorism in at least Europe. An example is seen in Germany, where a Pakistani national was convicted for espionage for the QF with the aim of killing prominent German nationals linked to Israel.[100]

Discussion

The IRI today mainly focuses on propaganda, lobby organizations and espionage to control and influence Iranian dissidents as well as other countries.[101] Recently, Mahmoud Alavi, the IRI's minister of intelligence, stated in an aired interview that the IRI has followers all over the world and that these individuals are loyal to the Islamic revolution and work without pay as a lobby for the IRI.[102]

It is important to point out that even though there is no proof of the IRI for the last decades to be involved in any assassinations or assassination attempts in the US and the WE, it is not because of the lack of will. In late March 2017, 31-year old Mustufa Haidar Syed-Naqfi from Pakistan was convicted by a court in Berlin for spying for Iran and the QF. The court stated that Syed-Naqfi had gathered information on prominent individuals with connection to Israel, which would be targeted by the QF.[103] That the IRI has turned to propaganda and espionage therefore does not mean that the notion of terrorism has been abandoned.

In discussing the US, the IRI through QF has mainly been active against American interests in the ME and in Latin America. Since 2003 when US forces invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam, Iran has grown stronger. Saddam was an archenemy of the IRI after the eight-year long war between the two countries. In overthrowing Saddam, the Bush administration did the IRI a favor and contributed to the growing strength of the IRI, which today has an active foreign policy in the re-

gion. The supreme leader of Iran has stated that the QF has an important part in creating *Hezbollah* cells all around the world[104], and with Saddam gone, the IRI can now much more easily and more effectively act upon this wish. The IRI does not hide the fact that the QF is highly active in the region.[105]

Although more than 30 years have passed since the above statement of the supreme leader of Iran, Iran's foreign policy in supporting *Hezbollah* and different Islamic militias in the world intensely shows that this statement is valid even today.

The IRI considers Israel and Saudi Arabia its foremost enemies in the region[106], which is reflected in the foreign policy of the IRI that supports different organizations, among them terrorist organizations, with the goal of destabilizing these countries and other countries deemed to be an antagonist to the Islamic regime in Iran.[107] In doing so, the foreign policy of the IRI is highly nonsectarian and in full accordance with the article 152 of the IRI's constitution and its preamble. This is, for example, seen in the IRI's support to the Sunni *Islamic Jihad Movement of Palestine* and *Hamas*. The IRI's affiliations with *Al Qaeda*, not least after the invasion of Afghanistan in which high-ranking members of *Al Qaeda* fled to Iran, is another example of Iran's nonsectarian support for terrorism.[108]

It can be summarized that Iran's actions in the region are to gain influence and export its revolution and ideology abroad. In this quest, the IRI uses terrorism or propaganda. The former is not done directly by Iranian operatives, but rather by local militias trained or supported by the QF. In discussing the use of propaganda, the IRI are only able to do that in countries in which its operatives can move somewhat freely (Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria). In these countries, the use of violence and force are only used when encountered with antagonism.

The main aim of the IRI is to guarantee regime survival. Islam and the constitution of the IRI are what legitimize the regime -- any harm to these, the idea of the state, would mean a direct threat to regime survival. The IRI can therefore not step back from its Islamic character and identity. In discussing the idea of the state, the notion of export of the Islamic revolution becomes more clear and vivid.[109] Recently, the representative of Khamenei in the *Pasdaran*, Ali Saeidi Shahroudi, stated that the Islamic revolution must be used in order to spread Islam to the world.[110] Also, Khamenei's representative in the QF, Ali Shirazi, has recently stated that the export of the revolution to other countries is

the beginning of a new era in international affairs.[111] In February 2017, a senior advisor to the supreme leader, Ali Akbar Velayati[112], stated in a speech that the Palestinian intifada is one of the clearest measures with respect to Iran's export of the revolution.[113]

The *Pasdaran* and its QF have been an essential part of the IRI's tool to not only export the revolution, but also engage in covert operations and acts of terrorism in order to fight the enemies of the IRI. However, the IRI has to some degree changed its foreign policy from only focusing on terrorism, to now trying to influence different countries in other ways, which is also clearly stated by the IRI's current minister of foreign affairs that discusses economy, culture and technology as tools of influence.[114] This, to some parts, explains why the IRI has changed its modus operandi to espionage, propaganda and lobbying in order to gain influence. The unique role of Qasem Soleimani acting as a pseudo minister of foreign affairs and engaging in diplomatic talks, is yet a sign of the above.

In discussing the support for the IRI, the physical base of the regime, it is important to divide the supporters into two parts; the people residing in Iran, and the Muslim people of the world, foremost the Shias. For the IRI, the trust and faith of both groups are vital. The Iranian people is of importance in order to safeguard the regime. Not being able to control the people either by using violence or force, as seen after the presidential election of 2009, or by keeping its legitimacy, may contribute to the fall of the IRI. Regarding Muslims from other countries, their support is vital for the IRI since they are used by the regime in different covert operations through organizations like the Lebanese *Hezbollah*, the Saudi *Hezbollah*, the *Kataib Hezbollah* in Iraq etc.[115] To trust these groups, the IRI must ensure that they are supported financially, logistically and militarily. Without their support and loyalty, the IRI will not be able to influence other countries.

Implications for the future

When Khomeini after 14 years in exile returned to Iran, the Canadian-American journalist Peter Jennings, who sat with Khomeini in the Air France plane flying to Iran, asked Khomeini how he felt now that he was to see Iran again. Khomeini answered 'nothing'. Khomeini's translator and close aid, Ghotbzadeh, himself being highly surprised by Khomeini's answer, asked Khomeini, 'nothing?', to which Khomeini again answered, 'I don´t feel a thing'.[116] This filmed interview was, of

course, never aired in Iran, but is today widely spread in the country and notably in social media.[117] Although this statement of Khomeini is today mocked and discussed by Iranians to be a clear sign that Khomeini never cared about Iran, the reality is more complex. Khomeini's answer was fully in conjunction with his Islamic ideology and I would argue that it also laid the ground for the concept of a borderless Islamic world. For Khomeini, Islam and Islamism, an internationalist ideology, was the important issue. This is significant to understand in order to grasp Khomeini's ideology, the ideology of the IRI today and its future actions.

In the region, the IRI considers itself a great and large power. Iran's ambitions of controlling the ME are highly alive, not least since the fall of Saddam. The fact that the Saudis tried to cooperate with the Israelis to harm the IRI is a clear sign of the concern which these countries have over Iran´s ambitions in the region.[118] The foreign policy of the IRI will continue to be aggressive and hostile in the region. The role of the *Pasdaran* and especially its QF will, in all likelihood, also continue to grow, as Iran continues to aspire for more influence in the region. In this matter, the role of terrorism and the use of violence will be highly vivid. As the *Pasdaran* is one the most important institutional expressions of the state, and as the ME, at least now, continues to be unstable, the physical base of the state demands actions from the *Pasdaran*, as is seen in the case of Syria.

Looking at the WE and the American continent, the IRI will probably mostly focus its acts of terrorism in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Only to a minor degree will the IRI focus on terrorism in WE, and then possibly target Israelis and Israeli interests[119], as well as important Iranian dissidents. American interests will most likely be targeted by the IRI in the ME and Latin America.

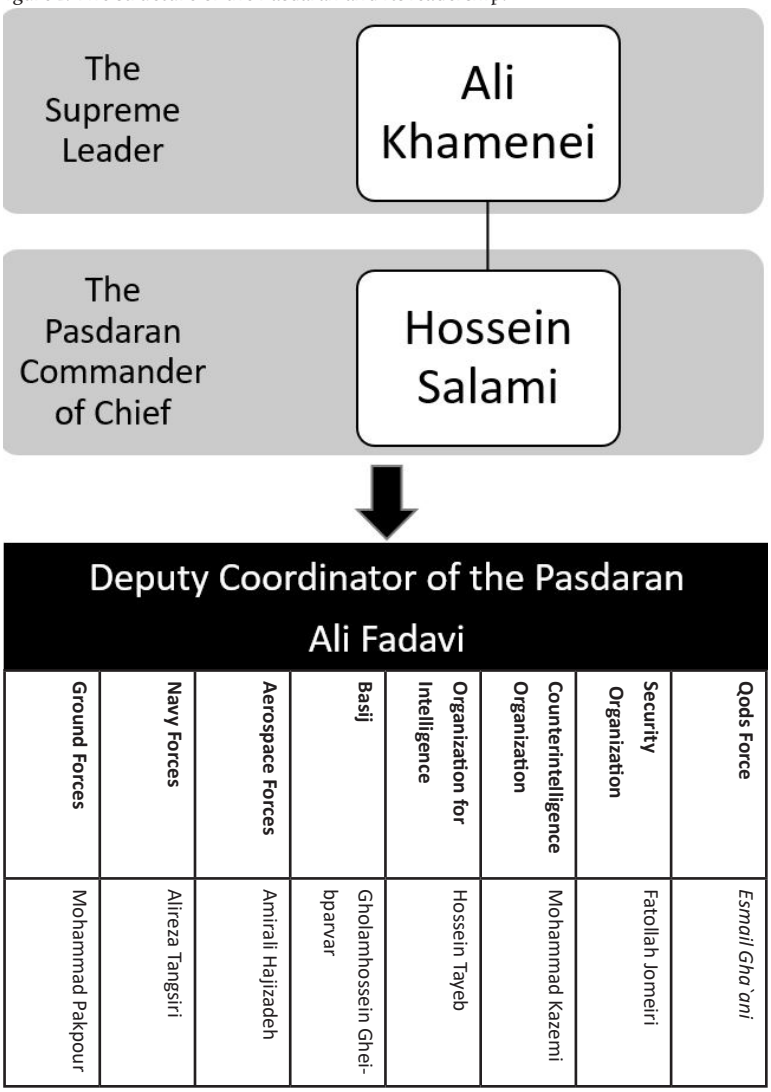
One factor, however, should be remembered, and that is if the IRI feels threatened, it will not take any considerations of diplomatic relations nor cost of life, and will use terrorism to save itself. The blockage or disruption of the *Strait of Hormuz*, which is a matter of national security for the US[120], is without doubt a strategy the IRI will use if threatened. Hostage taking of ships in the Persian Gulf as well as foreigners in Iran will be other strategies that have been and will be used.

For Khomeini, as for the current supreme leader, Khamenei, violence and threats were and are the way to counter antagonism to the IRI.[121] As long as Khamenei is the supreme leader of the country, the foreign

policy of the IRI will probably not change for the better. Khamenei has led Iran for more than two decades and is the symbol of resistance for many in the Islamic world. Khamenei has developed the foreign policy of the country in accordance with the constitution of the IRI, thus it cannot easily be abandoned, not least because of the obligations the IRI has to its physical base and the importance of remaining loyal to its idea of the state. To discuss changes in the foreign policy of the IRI from a perspective of a conservative president or moderate president in Iran is therefore wrong, since the president on one hand acts on orders from the supreme leader, and on the other hand is himself fully loyal to the principles of the Islamic revolution and the ideology of the IRI. Over the years, Iran has had both conservative and moderate presidents without any significant differences in their respective foreign policies and their use of the QF in order to implement the foreign policy of the country. There is no doubt that the foreign policy of the IRI to some degree has softened in the post-Khomeini era, however, the IRI continues to dominate the international arena with its support to terrorism, espionage and other ways to destabilize countries deemed to be enemies of the revolution.

As long as Khamenei continues to rule Iran, and as long as the establishment of the country consists of individuals themselves being part of the revolution and loyal to the IRI, no vital changes in the foreign policy of the IRI will be seen, and Iran will continue its hostile foreign policy. Professor Misagh Parsa in his recent book on Democracy in Iran, states 'Taken together, these variables help determine whether the likely route to democratization will proceed through reform or revolution. The variables suggest that it is highly unlikely for Iran to democratize through reform […]'.[122] If this statement by professor Parsa is valid, and the people of Iran would come to the same conclusion, the use of terrorism both inside Iran and outside by operatives of the Ministry of Intelligence, the *Pasdaran* and the QF respectively, will be a great threat in both discussing human rights and questions concerning national and international security.

Figure 1. The structure of the Pasdaran and its leadership.



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Making It Personal?

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

Joel Petersson Ivre, Eugene Lee

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)

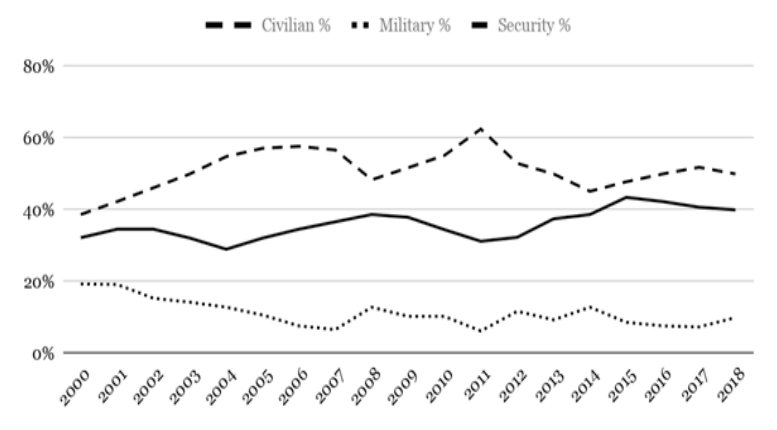
Personalist Dimension	Militarist Dimension
P1. Is access to high government office dependent on the personal favor of the leader?	**M1.** Is the leader a current or former high-ranking military officer?
P2. Do country specialists view the politburo (or equivalent) as a rubber stamp for the leader's decisions?	**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]



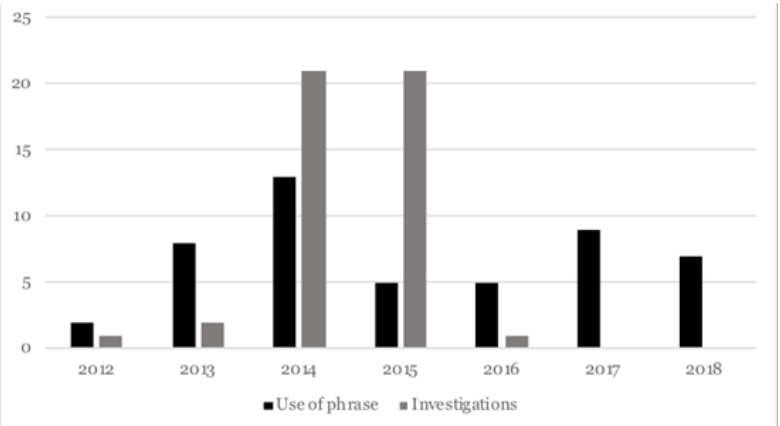
Source: Whoiswho.dp.ru. (2018)[95]

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%

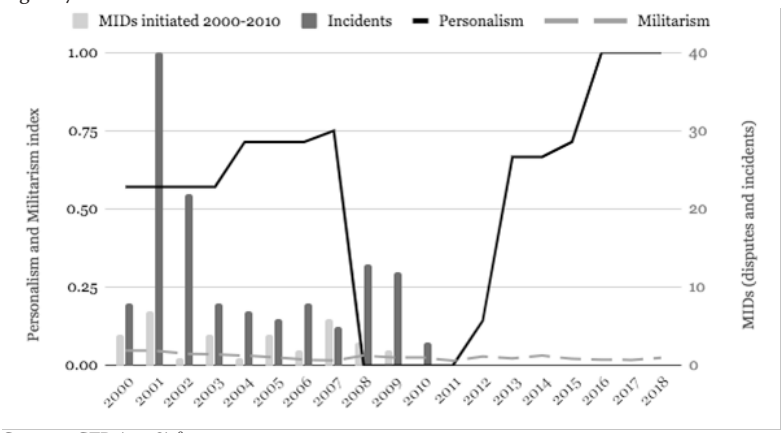
Source: Adapted from Li (2016a) and cpc.people.com.cn (2007)[96]

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



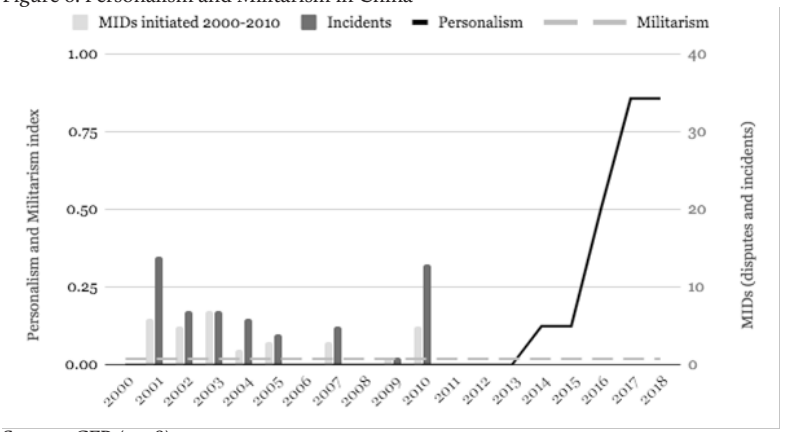
Source: Investigations from Chinafile (2016); Use of phrase from People's Daily (2018)[97]

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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Conceptualizing Soft Balancing Beyond Cold War

What's Changed, What Remains the Same?

Mila Larionova

This article is a systematic inquiry into the nature and role of soft balancing in the contemporary theory and practice of international relations. By wading into the contentious debate concerning the place and legitimacy of soft balancing, the article explores the theoretical prominence of the concept and adds methodological content to the study. Thus, the research produces a quantitative corpus-based and thematic analysis of the existing soft balancing literature to demarcate the boundary of the concept. This approach enables the author to enhance conventional theorization and not only identify the main gaps within the existing studies but go beyond the popular post-Cold War era discussion. Additionally, this article addresses the question of how soft balancing is distinguished from other concepts in the balance of power theory. Ultimately, the study reveals that despite its theoretical and empirical potential, the soft balancing research agenda remains underdeveloped, largely due to the limitation in the empirical content. Precisely, the empirical studies are limited to balance of power rhetoric akin to hard vs. soft and its implications for the United States' hegemonic power.

Keywords: IR theory, soft balancing, hard balancing, hedging, balance of power

Mila Larionova. Conceptualizing Soft Balancing Beyond Cold War. What's Changed, What Remains the Same?. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 14, no. 3: 65–91.

1. The concept of soft balancing

This theoretical article seeks to initiate conceptual sophistication of soft balancing to contribute to the existing and yet underdeveloped understanding of the phenomenon. Despite the solid soft balancing study generated during the last decades, it however remains fraught with conceptual ambiguities, competing theoretical and empirical claims and vocabulary. Thus, the research produces a quantitative corpus-based and thematic analysis of the existing soft balancing studies to demarcate the boundary of soft balancing. This approach enables the author to enhance conventional theorization and not only identify the main gaps within the academic literature but go beyond the popular post-Cold War era discussion. Regarding the initiated research agenda, the following questions can be posed:

1. Where are the boundaries of the soft balancing concept? What is the nature of the conceptual boundary?
2. What have been the conceptual alternatives to soft balancing?

The balance of power is one of the most influential theories in international relations, which has been further clarified and advanced by soft balancing. While soft balancing is not a new phenomenon in international relations, it has become popular, and hotly debated, under the unipolar distribution of power. The soft-balancing concept was primarily designed by Walt[1] and Joffe[2] to differentiate between traditional hard and soft forms of balancing. Revised in 2000s with the works of Pape and Paul, it soon, however faced widespread criticism. In recent years, the research community has engaged in a lively debate concerning the place and the actual legitimacy of soft balancing in International Relations (IR) scholarship. [3]

Currently, there are two foundational quotations that underpin the rest of the soft balancing argument. The first is from T. V. Paul:

> [Soft balancing] occurs when states generally develop ententes or limited security understandings with one another to balance a potentially threatening state or a rising power. Soft balancing is often based on a limited arms build-up, ad hoc cooperative exercises, or collaboration in regional or international institutions; these policies may be converted to open, hard-balancing strategies if and when security competition becomes intense and the powerful state becomes threatening.[4]

The second is by Robert Pape, who describes four main nonmilitary mechanisms that enable the strategy of soft balancing: refusal to use territory that is vital to the operations of the superior state's ground, air, or naval forces; entangling diplomacy, by which states undermine the plans and policies of the superior state, especially using international institutions; economic statecraft by strengthening the regional economic blocs and diverting trade from non-members; and finally, coordination of mutual commitment to resist the policies of the superior or threatening state. [5]

As was stated above, both foundational quotations raise a lot of questions and criticism. Precisely, critics suggest that broad definition leads to conceptual widening and lack of consensus on the actual term.

The recent contribution to the understanding of soft balancing in its empirical discussion has been made by T. V. Paul in his book *Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era*. Historical retrospect from the post-Napoleonic era to today's situation enabled the author to explain the conditions under which soft balancing has occurred and when it works. Despite his notable contribution, further research is required to identify a mechanism that will allow scholars to spot potential cases of soft balancing and demarcate its boundaries. To achieve this, corpus analysis is employed in the research.

2. The algorithm of data analysis

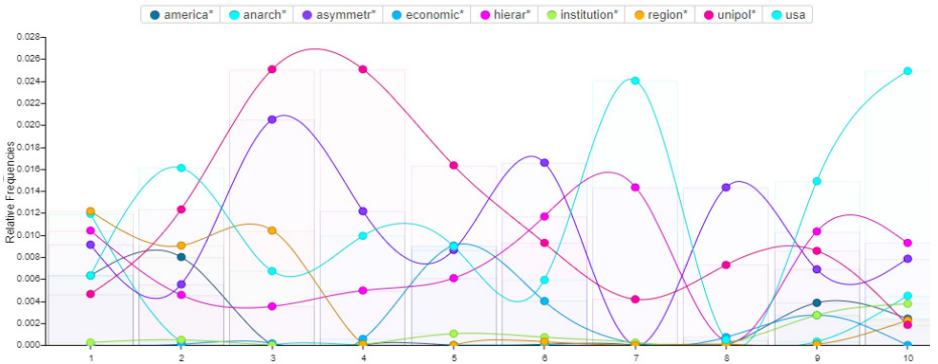
The author sees a compatibility between quantitative and qualitative methods; however, the dominant research paradigm adopted in the article is the former.[6] Thus, computer-based text analysis is used to provide quantitative confirmation of patterns noticed in the literature review and illustrate the data in great detail. The quantitative corpus-based method[7] is applied to recognize the more commonly occurring words and phrases in corpora. A corpus was created by downloading the full texts of 107 academic articles on soft balancing published from 2001 to 2018. Following the standard procedure implemented by many researchers, notices, personal profiles, titles, legends, references, acknowledgements, and tables and figures were removed from the corpus. Hence, the remaining textual data represents full sentences only. The corpus was analyzed using several software programs, including WordSmith Tools and Voyant. These tools were used to calculate the number of occurrences of each unique word. The so-called function words that are used for sentence construction were not considered. The most prev-

alent content ('meaningful' words or the root words) for the research in the corpus were the following: Hard (hard balancing, hard power); Hierar* (hierarchy, hierarchical), Asymmetr* (asymmetry, asymmetrical, weaker, weak, dominant, great (powers)), Anarc* (anarchy, anarchical), Region* (region, regional), Economic* (economical, economically), Institu* (institution, institutional, organization(s), NGO, SCO, ASEAN, EU, European Union, multilateral), USA, America* (American, Bush, US), Unipol* (unipolarity, unipole, unipolar), Hedg*(hedging, hedge).

All these meaningful words are keywords as their percentage prevalence is significantly high in the corpus. It is important to note that the main prevalent meaningful word of the corpus is 'hard' because soft balancing is contrasted with hard balancing in the majority of the articles. In the current research, the process of corpus analysis is divided into two agendas: first, to explain the conceptual definition and demarcate the boundary of soft balancing, and second, to elaborate a distinction among three related and alternative concepts, hard balancing, hedging, and bandwagoning.

Consequently, the dominant content of the corpus excluding the above-mentioned related concepts can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Document segments of soft balancing literature review



Source: Created by the author through the computer-based text analysis.

In order to spot the main themes of the concept, the frequently occurred words were divided to clusters (Table 1). Further, based on the clusters and content analysis, thematic literature review is grouped according to terms, arguments and parameters. Thereby, thematic grouping demonstrates the types of topics important for the research and organized in inclusive order. Based on frequencies of themes (topics) the author generalizes the conceptual contours of soft balancing (Table 2).

Table 1

Operationalization Themes	Meta Theme
Hierarchy and Power Asymmetry	Soft Balancing Theorization
Anarchy and Power Asymmetry	
Regional Security	
Economic Competition	
Limited Institutional Cooperation	
International Trade	
Economic competition (diplomacy and security) / Economic coordination	
Soft Power	

Table 2. Concept Map for Soft Balancing

Theme	Source citation
Hierarchy, Anarchy, Unipolarity	80%
Power Asymmetry, Unipolarity	75%
Regional Security, Institutions	60%
International Trade, Limited Institutional Cooperation, Economic competition, Institutions	68%
Soft Power[8]	30%

The concept map created by the author depicts relationships between the operationalization themes. Thus, 80% articles in the corpora refer to Hierarchy, Anarchy and Unipolarity as central themes, while for 75% of the existing studies Power Asymmetry and Unipolarity remain dominant in soft balancing discussion. In the same manner, International trade/Institutional and Economic cooperation/completion represent 68% of the reference. Regional security and institutions share 60% of the academic discussion and the smallest portion as of 30% is dedicated to the soft power.

3. Soft Balancing Conceptualization

In the context of the thematic analysis of contemporary literature, five topics are relevant to the soft balancing concept, viz., (1) hierarchy, (2) power asymmetry, (3) regional security, (4) international trade/economic interdependence/interconnectedness of politics and economics, and (5) soft power.

3.1 Hierarchy

The most popular theme in soft balancing literature is the US hegemonic power and American dominance, unipolarity and hierarchy. During the last decades, the global dominance of the United States has forced academics to analyze how other states respond to US hegemonic power.[9] Thus, in the age of US unipolarity, Pape's definition gives a name to the strategies implemented by states to restrain the hegemonic power.[10] Precisely, he argues that in order to constrain the hegemon, weaker states utilize 'nonmilitary tools, such as international institutions, economic statecraft, and strict interpretations of neutrality'.[11]

Numerous academics have used soft balancing to describe the policies of second-ranked powers trying to delay and thwart US war efforts. For example, Paul has claimed that 'in the post–Cold War era, soft balancing has become an attractive strategy through which second-tier major powers are able to challenge the legitimacy of the interventionist policies of the United States and its allies'.[13] Thereby, traditional hard balancing is replaced by soft balancing and the latter becomes 'the primary reaction of major powers to the United States' hegemonic power'.[14] The strongest case highlighted by academics to validate the importance of soft balancing is the reaction of major powers to the Bush administration during the preventive war in Iraq. Specifically, as Josef Joffe rightly points out regarding the policies of France, Germany, and Russia on Iraq: 'What was their purpose? To save Saddam Hussein? No, of course not. It was to contain and constrain American power, now liberated from the ropes of bipolarity'.[15]

Thus, providing valuable insight into the understanding of the post–Cold War era and the prominence of soft balancing, academics have stretched the balance of power theory, with soft balancing proponents giving it a sophisticated theoretical treatment. However, post–Cold War era findings fed into widely published commentaries and critiques, as they were limited to a system displaying unipolarity and the United States' hegemonic power.[16] Indeed, the corpus-based research shows that empirical ground of soft balancing studies is mostly second-tier states and major, emerging powers versus unipolarity and the US hegemonic power. Although this trend is natural as the US - with its hegemonic sphere of influence - has the ability to project its power anywhere in the globe, one of the remaining problems of such tendency is the relevance and scope of the concept. This should not be read, however, as a critique of soft balancing empirical findings per se,

Hierarchy

First Order Theme Cluster	Operationalization Theme[12]
dominance of the United States	
to curtail US power	
weaker states confronting a unipolar power	
weaker actors may seek to constrain the unipole	
second-tier major powers challenge the legitimacy of the interventionist policies of the United States	
principal reaction of major powers to the Bush administration's preventive war doctrine	
security threats from the hegemon	
post–Cold War era is the only modern unipolar system	
Unipole	Hierarchy
soft balancing behavior vis-a`-vis the United States.	
threat posed by the superpower.	
global unipolarity	
systematic attempts to constrain and balance the United States	
a coalition of secondary powers	
secondary states begin to see the unipole as a direct or indirect threat to their national interests	
delegitimize unipolar unilateralism	
excluding the unipole from multilateral political and economic organizations	
the current era of US dominance	

but rather as a valid point to define the contemporary significance of the phenomena and an opportunity to go beyond this 'tradition' and develop the concept further.

3.2 Power Asymmetry

By the mid-2000s, a new strand of soft balancing theorization came to disciplinary prominence. Reflecting the criticism, the general theoretical contour of soft balancing was changed to remedy the abovementioned shortcomings and demonstrate that the concept is relevant to systems displaying unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity. As Paul puts it, 'soft balancing has been employed irrespective of the

distribution of power in the international system—whether multipolar, bipolar, or unipolar'.[17] Similarly, Pape argues that soft balancing is 'mostly brought about within the unipolar system yet there are numerous examples of soft balancing which predate the post-Cold War era'. [18] As an example, he discusses the retrospective period after the Franco- Prussian war in 1870, in which the unified Germany soft balanced against France by forming 'soft alliances' with Austria, Britain and Russia.[19]

While many proponents of the soft balancing argument restrict the notion to joint efforts among emerging and great powers and to actions responding to security threats from the hegemon, others offer a wide range of actions taken by a weaker state to gain influence with a stronger state.[20]

Thus, the second major thematic grouping generated during the research is Power Asymmetry.

The analysis of this thematic group suggests that the possibility of applying a soft balancing strategy 'has more to do with the potential

Power Asymmetry

First Order Theme Cluster	Operationalization Theme
various international systems	
overcoming coordination problems under anarchy	
degree of power asymmetry 60%	
To pursue alliances to obtain outcomes against the will of a dominating power	
undermine the relative power	
the behavior of weaker states toward more powerful states	Power Asymmetry
to constrain an emerging power's freedom of action	
mutual binding an emerging power	
to constrain an emerging power's freedom of action	
overcome power asymmetries	
toward the predominant power	
non offensive coalition building to neutralize a potentially threatening power	
compensating for power asymmetries	
the relative power of the threatening state	
changes and asymmetries in the distribution of capabilities	
political integration practice	

leverage and vulnerabilities of the involved actors rather than with the system's polarity per se'.[21] In this respect, power asymmetry cluster provides an extensive justification to add empirical depth to the concept of soft balancing. Thus, based on the theme of power asymmetry, advocates of the concept offer a wide range of definitions. Some have described soft balancing as a policy that pursues alliances to obtain outcomes against the will of a dominating power.[22] Kai He and Huiyun Feng, for example, claim that 'soft balancing refers to the efforts to undermine the relative power of the threatening state through diplomatic coordination and institutional constraints'.[23]

Thus, by providing a detailed, systematic account of power asymmetry, analysis of soft balancing has played a critical role in understanding the behavior of weaker states toward more powerful states. Additionally, soft balancing is considered as a strategy essentially designed to limit the actions of emerging powers while avoiding hard balancing or bandwagoning.[24] For example, Saltzman states that 'soft balancing is considered only relevant to systems in which there is vast disparity between the emerging and the responding powers leaving no margin for all other strategies'[25]. Thereby, this cluster is very important for further research even though the empirical studies still often contain US hegemonic power. To put it simply, the theoretical contribution of this cluster to the understanding of the concept of soft balancing still does not fully reflect the empirical research.

3.3 Regional Security

The next theme in soft balancing literature has strong correlation with power asymmetry. Being prominent in relation to the security dimension,[26] soft balancing becomes a means of regional security to counter a rising power's influence. Although the term soft balancing has been limited to situations of global unipolarity, many academics have demonstrated that it should be considered in respect to regional unipolarity.

Over the past few years, analysis of soft balancing has played an important role pertaining to regional security. Applying the soft balancing concept to regional systems, academics have examined the conditions under which it occurs.[27] Thus, soft balancing spots states' perceptions of the threat posed by the regional unipole or rising power. For example, McDougall believes that soft balancing can take various forms, and can be pursued with varying degrees of intensity.[28] However, as rightly

Regional Security

First Order Theme Cluster	Organizing Theme
regional unipolar systems	
perceptions of the threat posed by the regional unipole	
variation among regional powers	Regional Security
collaboration in regional institutions	
responses within the region	
reduce the dependency	
keeping the stronger state under control	
to counterbalance the power of a strong neighbor	

pointed out by Friedman and Long: 'soft balancing is not an inevitable reaction to the growth of another state's power [per se]'.[29] Overall, it could be stated that soft balancing allows for different degrees of 'opposition' to the most powerful country in terms of regional security.

Focusing on the responses within the region, some academics can see differences between the major powers on the one hand, and the middle and smaller powers on the other hand. Thus, the impact of rising power has been varied. Some academics stress that soft balancing might be the best strategy for the major powers in the region, however the extent to which soft balancing has been followed is varied. The middle and smaller powers are less able to pursue soft balancing, and they will most probably opt for some combination of accommodation. In contrast, other academics state that a soft balancing strategy is being pursued by both major and smaller powers. Major powers want to avoid a situation where rising powers will play a dominant role, while weaker powers implement it to reduce their dependency on and constrain the influence of stronger states.[30]

The regional security cluster has a strong connection to the next cluster described below—many studies have been conducted with a focus on deepening economic cooperation within coalitions and institutional settings.

3.4 International Trade/Economic interdependence / Interconnectedness of politics and economics

Drawing on this thematic grouping, recent studies have further contributed to the development of soft balancing by examining the interplays within diplomatic coalitions, political integration practices, international institutions, and informal ententes.

International Trade/Economic interdependence/Interconnectedness of politics and economics

First Order Theme Cluster	Organizing Theme
economic dependency and tools or mechanisms of soft balancing	International Trade, interdependence, Institutions
International institutions	
the option to reduce economic dependencies and still benefit from the cooperation with the counterpart	
aid to rivals	
excluding the unipole from multilateral political and economic organizations	
utilization of institutions	
To pursue alliances to obtain outcomes against the will of dominant power	
weaken the persuasive power	
Limit the ability of the unipole	
joint response system	
deepening economic cooperation within alliance	
trading blocs or by using existing institutions to frustrate threatening power	
external balancing	
counter the predominance of the United States (US)	
Challenge US preponderance	
use international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements to delay, frustrate, and undermine US policies.	
Institutional binding or exclusion	
diplomatic entangling and political integration practiced	
restraining the emerging power and discouraging it from carrying out its over-reaching hegemonic aspirations	
diplomatic coordination and entanglement	
strategic non-cooperation	
Institutional binding or bargaining and economic statecraft	
Economic means	
Economic warfare	
economic means by which damage is imposed	
political alignments	
multilateralism	
sanctions	

The analysis shows that this thematic group has several organized themes, meaning that if an author was discussing international trade, he also mentioned economic interdependence and institutions, and vice versa.

Thus, in turning to international organizations and law, bilateral diplomacy, coalition-building, and international institutions, countries seek to constrain the ability of their counterparts to exercise power.

Academic literature in this group is mostly concentrated on the economic dependency and tools or mechanisms of soft balancing. Thus, soft balancing is seen as an option to reduce economic and/or geopolitical dependencies and still benefit from cooperation with the counterpart.

Academics offer a wide range of strategies of soft balancing. However, in this thematic group, many scholars still use soft balancing exclusively in the context of responses by second-tier or major states toward unipolarity and US power. Thus, second-tier major powers abandoned traditional hard balancing 'because they do not fear losing their sovereignty and existential security to the reigning hegemon'.[31] Consequently, scholars define soft balancing as a 'state activity which involves the formation of limited diplomatic coalitions or ententes with the implicit threat of upgrading their alliances, if the United States goes beyond its stated goals'.[32] Pape expounds on this definition arguing that soft balancing 'does not directly challenge US military preponderance but uses nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral US military policies'.[33] According to Pape and Paul, these 'nonmilitary tools' include international institutions, economic statecraft, diplomatic arrangements and strict interpretations of neutrality. Moreover, from geopolitical perspective, strategic partnerships or alignment seeking soft balancing enable weaker states gain leverage against a hegemonic power by joining forces in international institutions or / and through regional complexes. To put the matter bluntly, by soft balancing through the strategic partnership at the geopolitical level, actors can increase their influence greatly.

Others strongly believe that soft balancing is used on the regional level to balance power asymmetry. Consequently, scholars described soft balancing as a policy that pursues alliances to obtain outcomes against the will of dominant power. In this manner, states adopted soft balancing seek to limit the ability of the unipole to 'impose its preferences on others through coordinated action, attempts to augment

power, and countervailing coalitions'.[34] Specifically, on the regional level 'states are able to constrain emerging powers and influence their policies by using institutional mechanisms, rules, norms, and procedures of mutual regulation'.[35] Such arrangements ensure the voice of other states is heard,[36] which enables them to protect their security and interests even in conditions of significant power asymmetry.[37]

In this thematic grouping soft balancing is defined as a 'calculated, focused and nonmilitary strategy that may involve economic statecraft, institutional binding or exclusion, diplomatic coordination and entangling and political integration practiced in order to constrain and restrict an emerging power from pursuing its threatening policies'.[38]

Further, cluster analysis shows that economic statecraft[39] is one of the most important and common instruments of soft balancing. Being a tool of soft balancing strategy, economic statecraft 'is believed to provide decision makers with an effective and relatively cheaper alternative compared with armed conflict that they can implement in order to dissuade an emerging power from pursuing its detrimental policies'.[40]

Another focal organizing theme in the cluster is international institutions. A lot of scholars argue that soft balancing is predominantly undertaken via international institutions, as these structures enable actors to overcome the prisoner's dilemma associated with engaging in balancing.[41] As Pitcairn rightly points out that a weaker state will seek to balance the hegemon and at the same time to decrease its cost of doing so through the institutional platform.[42] Additionally, 'international institutions can facilitate cooperation among states because they reduce uncertainty by providing information, monitoring state behavior, codifying state behavior, and conferring legitimacy'.[43] Moreover, in his recent book, TV Paul stresses the importance of international institutions in specific and these thematic group in general and argues that they are the most viable instruments of soft balancing.[44] Accordingly, his contention is that 'states have increasingly relied on international institutions, limited ententes, and economic instruments to balance power and restrain threatening behavior'. [45] Even though the military capabilities still central in power politics, 'they are not the only feasible instruments of balancing in the contemporary world'.[46] To sum up, this cluster shows the clear distinction between soft balancing and hard balancing, no matter the type of international system, power asymmetry conditions, or hierarchy. Additionally, the review of literature

in this cluster reveals that soft balancing is a strategy mainly used between regional organizations or institutions and states.

3.5 Soft Power

Even though soft power is outside the neorealists' conceptual borders of soft balancing, some academics have accommodated both neoliberalism and constructivism to explain soft balancing. In this respect, soft balancing is reconceptualized as an attempt to restrain a rival by soft power through the utilization of norms, persuasion and cooption, etc.

The increasing importance of soft power in a globalized, interdependent world[47] and the cost of hard balancing to challenge the counterpart both constrain states' strategies and prescribe the implementation of soft balancing to prevent and control competitors. As Keohane and Nye so aptly state, 'power can be thought of as the ability of an actor to get others to do something they otherwise would not do. Power can also be conceived in terms of control over outcomes'.[48] Nye defines soft power as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments."[49] Soft power behavior is displayed through agenda setting, attraction, culture and political ideals, and co-optation.[50] In this sense, soft power is a key to soft balancing, as it expresses the means through which an actor can seek to advance its significant normative interests in the presence of a prevailing or ri-

Soft Power

First Order Theme Cluster	Organizing Theme
attraction rather than coercion or payments	
Beyond the military realm	
attraction through culture and political ideals, and co-optation	
utilization of norms	Soft Power
persuasion and cooptation	
preferences of actors	
growing primacy of soft power in the 21st century	
Attractive power	
non-military power	
sources of soft power	
increasing importance of soft power	
does not pursue an aggressive foreign policy	
cooperation	
increasing global interdependence	

val normative (and cultural) configuration.[51] Nevertheless, the notion of soft balancing differs from Nye's liberal soft power concept, which is based on attraction. Indeed, soft balancing contains what the author calls soft power and attraction but goes beyond that and includes the power to destroy a competitor through economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical means. In other words, soft power and soft balancing are united by the absence of hard instruments or mechanisms. But at the same time, soft power is a tool used to soft balance the counterpart.

The corpus-based and thematic analysis of academic literature was used to understand the state of the art of the publications on soft balancing. Computer-based text analysis identified the most commonly occurring words and phrases in corpora and enabled the author to demarcate the boundaries of the soft balancing studies. The most prevalent content ('meaningful' words) in the corpus allowed the author to indicate the main clusters of the phenomenon and spot the main themes. In the context of the thematic analysis of contemporary literature, five topics are relevant to the soft balancing concept, viz., (1) hierarchy, (2) power asymmetry, (3) regional security, (4) international trade/economic interdependence/interconnectedness of politics and economics, and (5) soft power. Even though all the themes discussed above remain important, they do not fully demarcate the boundary of soft balancing and explain its nature in the contemporary world. Based on the analysis of each cluster as described above, the empirical studies are limited to balance of power rhetoric akin to hard vs. soft and its implications for the United States' hegemonic power. Since the theoretical ground does not reflect the empirical potential of the concept of soft balancing, further development is vital. Additionally, to avoid the further litigation of soft balancing as a concept, it is necessary to sufficiently distinguish soft balancing from other concepts in IR.

4 Alternative IR concepts to soft balancing

In an attempt to rebuff the criticisms raised against soft balancing, which are still quite valid in terms of the fragility of the empirical findings developed so far, this section poses the question of how soft balancing is distinguished from other concepts in the balance of power theory. As Brooks and Wohlforth state, 'soft-balancing proponents have not supplied the conceptual tools to distinguish behavior that is an outgrowth of the systemic balancing imperative from what we might call unipolar politics as usual'.[52] Similarly, Liber and Alexander

argue that due to the lack of empirical support, 'any discussion about soft balancing is a discussion about nothing'.[53] This criticism is valid but should not be treated as a criticism of the conceptual understanding of soft balancing, but rather as a criticism of the empirical studies initiated so far.

For the past four centuries, the balance of power has been the bedrock of international politics and (neo)realist international relations theory. Indeed, structural realism explains international outcomes and general modes of great power behavior (balancing/bandwagoning). Thus (neo)realism sees the existence of an anarchic international system with no central authority to exercise hierarchical order, where states must secure their mere survival.[54] Specifically, Waltz and Walt proposed two strategies that states can choose for better security, namely, hard balancing and bandwagoning. Hard balancing means that states can either arm themselves (internal balancing) or form alliances with other powers to balance against great powers (external balancing).[55] Bandwagoning assumes that states can ally with the great power to seek security assurances.[56]

As was mentioned above, even though, the post–Cold War era left hard balancing behind, its heritage —the US focused approach— keeps restraining the concept of soft balancing and leads to the wrong judgments and conclusions.

Another key point is that the neorealists' understanding described above is rather linear. In such circumstances, soft balancing can be differentiated from the traditional instruments for restraining powers. However, there are still many questions left: When does soft balancing end and hard balancing begin? Is strategic partnership a 'light version' of alliance or a more 'popular version' of bandwagoning? Additionally, based on the initiated corpus analysis above, it emerges that most soft balancing studies have implicitly focused on the structure and hegemonic power. In this matter, the United States' focused approach, conceptually inherited from 'hard balancing', restrains the concept and leads to the wrong judgments and conclusions. For example, most academics tend toward the view that China and Russia are building a durable strategic partnership to soft balance the United States' preponderance in the post–Cold War geopolitical order.[57] At first glance, the designation of Sino-Russian soft balancing against the United States appears to be reasonable, as it is rooted in the common security threat from the West. But the impact on the global balance of power does

not completely explain the relationship between the countries. The Sino-Russian relationship is contradictory and occasionally demonstrates limits and the two states' rivalry for power. Despite the grand ambitions for cooperation declared by the two countries, substantive results often elude them.[58]

The next alternative to soft balancing is hedging. The concept of hedging comes from the business statement 'hedge your bets' and means that the future is uncertain, so 'by waiting and watching while making use of present opportunities, one's options are widened'.[59] Since the development of futures market, hedging theory has become an influential theory in finance. With respect to IR, hedging has emerged as a response to the critique and shortcomings of 'balance of power'. Despite of the fact that IR scholars and policy makers are increasingly pledge to the concept of hedging, it has never been clearly defined and understood in international politics. Many scholars believe that the concept of hedging should be understood in the context of the 'balancing-bandwagoning' range within the 'balance of power' theory, in which hedging is located in between as the state's third strategic choice.[60] Evelyn Goh offers the traditional definition of this term as 'a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality'.[61] Similarly, Medeiros states that hedging is a beneficial strategy for small states that wish to uphold a balanced relationship with two superpowers.[62] In the same manner, Tessman and Wolfe perceive strategic hedging as 'a type of behavior that helps states cope with certain kinds of uncertainty that are likely to exist in unipolar systems'.[63] Additionally, the former author made an effort to reflect on hedging through unipolarity, based on the idea that 'strategic hedging behavior helps second-tier states cope with the threats and constraints they are likely to encounter under conditions of unipolarity, (especially) in a deconcentrating unipolar system such as the one that has characterized the early twenty-first century'.[64] In contrast, Korolev attempts to enhance the understanding of hedging by relating it to the levels of analysis in IR theory, thus, 'instead of placing hedging somewhere between balancing and bandwagoning or attaching it to either end of the balancing-bandwagoning continuum, [his research] argues that hedging is most useful if removed from the system level and tied more closely to regional (interactional) or unit-level independent variables'.[65] And finally, the rest of

the scholars believe that hedging can at best be considered an 'umbrella concept' of multiple dimensions, open to multiple understandings and interpretations.[66]

Following from the above, and based on the empirical research initiated so far, several differences between hedging and soft balancing could be indicated as follows. First, the lack of military force lead to the assumption that hedging and soft balancing could be used interchangeably. Nevertheless, the nature of the poster of these two concepts is completely different. Accordingly, the real empirical ground of soft balancing studies — based on the corpus analysis — is global level and great powers or regional level and regional powers. On the contrary, hedging is typically secondary states and regional powers and/or great powers. The reason behind this fact is that the engagement in balancing is very costly for small- and medium-size states. A strategy of hedging is well-matched with an anarchic system and enables small powers to hedge risks and advance their positions while avoiding the costs of major confrontation.[67] By these means, hedging is mainly the combination of balancing and/or bandwagoning, and this counteraction scratches out the risks of each action, thereby 'either gaining the benefit of buying time to determine whether the state should balance or bandwagon until the strategic landscape's future direction is clarified, or attaining a strategic benefit to maintain the state's neutral position in a manner that maximizes autonomy'.[68] Additionally, based on the empirical ground of hedging research agenda the number of states involved in hedging should be at least three, on the other hand, for soft balancing it`s enough to have two states. This empirical distinction is especially important to avoid the confusion in theoretical explanation of state actions and strategies. Second, regardless of the similarities in relation to the maneuvers and technics both concepts have, hedging is a narrower phenomenon. Hedging is a tool of foreign policy that could be employed for soft balancing, hard balancing or bandwagoning. Soft balancing is a concept that enhances and expands the traditional understanding of balance of power theory. Third, hedging is the strategy to be implemented only in the uncertain environment. Once the uncertainty has disappeared there is no need to 'hedge your bets' and the actors can continue with the primary strategy, whereas soft balancing is usually a long-term approach. At the same time, both hedging and soft balancing have a potential to provide an alternative perspective for general modes of great power behavior that is not directly a product

of US hegemonic power. However, hedging does not show the nature of the relationship between the states and their ambitions. Hedging is a prudent insurance strategy states adopt when facing uncertainties.[69] Such a strategy is aimed at reducing or minimizing the risks only, whereas soft balancing is not about minimizing the risk but about maximizing the conditions and the position.

Conclusion

The presented article sought to conceptually grasp and demarcate the boundary of soft balancing through analysis and decomposition of the existing academic literature. Computer-based corpus analysis was used to provide quantitative confirmation of clusters (the most commonly occurring words and phrases) in corpora and group them in an inclusive order. The most prevalent content ('meaningful' words) in the corpus allowed the author to indicate the main clusters of the phenomenon and spot the main themes. In the context of the analysis, the most popular clusters in the soft balancing literature is hierarchy, unipolarity, and more specifically, the United States' hegemonic power. This cluster defines the empirical significance of soft balancing, even though the concept is facing difficult times due to its critiques. To increase the legitimacy of soft balancing in contemporary IR scholarship, a new strand of soft balancing theorization has come to disciplinary prominence. The second-ranked cluster—power asymmetry—has changed the contour of soft balancing to remedy the shortcomings and to rebuff the criticism of the concept. This thematic group further advances the concept through its theoretical and empirical focus on numerous quantitative and qualitative examples of strategies against regional emerging powers. Even though this cluster shows that soft balancing is formulated as a strategy employed irrespective of the type of international system—whether multipolar, bipolar, or unipolar—it has not overcome the superiority of the hierarchy theme and has not moved beyond the analysis of unipolarity in its empirical research and case studies. Indeed, the corpus-based research shows that the empirical ground of soft balancing studies is mostly second-tier states and major/great emerging powers versus unipolarity and the United States' hegemonic power. Yet, some studies demonstrate that soft balancing has appeared in various international systems throughout history, though this research agenda is rare compared to the United States' hegemonic power.

The next prevalent cluster is regional security. Applying soft balancing to regional systems, the concept has become a means of regional security to counter a rising power's influence. Although the term 'soft balancing' has been limited to situations of global unipolarity, many academics have demonstrated that it can be applied to instances of regional unipolarity. The regional security theme has a strong connection to the next predominant cluster, which is international trade/economic interdependence/interconnectedness of politics and economics. Thus, many studies have been conducted with a focus on deepening economic cooperation within coalitions, institutional settings, bilateral diplomacy, etc. Academic literature in this group mostly concentrates on the ability of economic instruments, international institutions, and limited ententes to soft balance and restrain the counterpart's threatening behavior. This cluster shows the clear distinction between soft balancing and hard balancing, no matter the type of international system, hierarchy, or power asymmetry conditions.

After the analysis of the revealed clusters, it should be evident that the soft balancing strategy exists more or less exclusively in the following scenarios: interstate relations (for example, the United States' soft balancing towards China and vice versa); triangular relations (China and Russia's soft balancing toward the United States)—the most popular scenario in international relations' empirical studies; and relations between regional organizations and states (BRICS' soft balancing towards the United States).

The last prevalent cluster in the corpora is soft power. Although soft power is outside of neorealists' conceptual borders of soft balancing, some academics have accommodated both neoliberalism and constructivism to describe the concept. In this cluster, soft power and soft balancing are united by the absence of hard instruments or mechanisms. But at the same time, soft power should be treated as a tool used to accommodate soft balancing.

Despite the proliferation of soft balancing research, the discussion, as conducted in the 2001–18 period, is the unfinished endeavor of international relations scholars. Thus, there are certain problems and analytical weaknesses associated with studies of soft balancing. For example, soft balancing scholars often quote and/or modify the Pape definition, thereby limiting the application of soft balancing to the unique behavior against the United States under the unipolarity. In recent years, the global dominance of the United States has led

scholars to ask how other states respond to US hegemony, but this is not enough for the conceptualization of soft balancing. It becomes apparent that a clear or uniform understanding of what is meant by soft balancing still requires elaboration as the US-focused approach downplays the existing understanding of the phenomenon and leads to the wrong judgments and conclusions. For example, most academics tend toward the view that China and Russia are building a durable strategic partnership to soft balance the US preponderance and thus constitutes the post–Cold War geopolitical order.[70] At first glance, the designation of Sino – Russian soft balancing against the US appears to be reasonable as it is rooted in the common security threat from the West. But concentrating primarily on the behavior patterns against the hegemonic power does not completely explain the relationship between these states. The Sino-Russian relationship is contradictory and occasionally demonstrates limits and the two states' rivalry for power. Despite the grand ambitions for cooperation declared by the two countries, their relations are characterized by the territorial disputes, unwellness to foster a more integrated cooperation and distrust. Besides the historical and cultural heritage, perhaps, more convincing evidence supporting the rivalry between them are the growing power gap and, as a result, increasing threat perception. There are numerous examples of how China and Russia soft balance each other, including the multilateral platform of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the development of trade agreements and coercive diplomacy. The adopted soft balancing strategies of the competitors have derived from their sophisticated efforts to control the neighboring countries and expand their own power in Central Asia. Ironically, 'Sino-Russian strategic partnership rhetoric' is fueled by bounded empirical research restricted to 'China and Russia vs. US Hegemonic Power'. Thus, the empirical base of soft balancing should be expanded to gain acceptance in the scientific community.

Conceptualizing Soft Balancing Beyond Cold War

Additionally, the concept was established to address the puzzle of the absence of hard balancing against the United States after the Cold War, however, the military and non-military dichotomy in the corpora fails to capture the essential distinction of soft balancing from other concepts in IR, for example hedging. Undoubtedly, the empirical ground of soft balancing as a concept downplays its theoretical potential and doesn't allow academics to clearly validate the distinction.

Thus, despite its theoretical and empirical potential, the soft balancing research agenda remains underdeveloped, largely due to the limitation in the empirical ground and overlaps between it and other related concepts. Consequently, theorization of soft balancing is in progress, albeit significant theoretical criticism has been swirling around theoretical grounds from the very start. Thus, in an attempt to add richness into the understanding of the phenomenon, the discussion was facilitated by addressing the second research question — What have been the conceptual alternatives to soft balancing? The article required a reflection on the conventional wisdom of traditional balance of power theory to distinguish soft balancing from hard balancing, bandwagoning and hedging. For the first two, the difference is rather linear: use of military tools and/or the nature of alliance. However, there are still many questions left: When does soft balancing end and hard balancing begin? Is strategic partnership a 'light version' of military alliance or a more 'popular version' of bandwagoning? The last alternative discussed in the article was hedging. The analysis shows that the lack of military force lead to the assumption that hedging and soft balancing could be used interchangeably. Nevertheless, hedging is a narrower phenomenon that could be employed to soft balance, hard balance or bandwagon. Thus, hedging doesn't show the nature of the relationship between the states and their ambitious. And finally, hedging is a short-term strategy implemented only in the uncertain environment. Once the uncertainty has disappeared there is no need to hedge and the actors can continue with the primary strategy, whereas soft balancing is usually a long-term approach. In particular, hedging is aimed to minimize risk, while soft balancing is aimed to maximize capabilities of a state.

Since the theoretical ground does not reflect the empirical potential of the concept the author suggests an alternative way of expanding the understanding of soft balancing through the creation of the composite index. Thus, the goal for further research is to compose the soft balancing index and validate it empirically.

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Islam, Global Governance and a New World Order

Reviewed by Renat Bekkin

The authors of the peer-reviewed monograph – Leonid Fituni and Irina Abramova – are well known among Russian specialists for their publications on the economy of Arab countries and international economic cooperation. In the monograph *Islam, Global Governance and a New World Order*, published by the Institute of African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, they pay no less attention to political issues than to economic problems. The authors set themselves the task of reflecting "the complex socio-economic processes and the very mixed dynamics of the development of the countries of North Africa, the Near and Middle East over the past decade and the transformations associated with a change in the place of Islam in the polycentric world" (p. 13). Thus, speaking of the Muslim world as a whole, the authors focus on the so-called Greater Middle East.

However, the study of global security issues and the fight against international terrorism, which have been given a lot of space in the book, obliges Leonid Fituni and Irina Abramova to shift their attention not only to Muslim countries, but also to regions where Muslims do not make up the majority of the population. In particular, in the fifth chapter called *Beyond Identity: Migration and the Diaspora* the focus of researchers turns out to be the position of Muslim diasporas in West-

ern Europe. In this chapter, the authors consider the features of migration from different regions of the Middle East and analyse the current situation of Muslim diasporas in European countries.

Particular attention in the book is given to the phenomenon of jihadism. The authors proceed from the fact that the spread of terrorism under Islamic slogans is not so much the result of miscalculations of the security services of European countries, but the result of a well-thought-out policy aimed at 'using them (supporters of radical Islam. – R.B.) openly or blindly for one's purposes' (p. 325). The authors, in particular, argue that 'the West is nurturing, financing, and strengthening the cadre of organizations and structures necessary for it to combat geopolitical rivals' (p. 325). This position obviously has its adherents, including in the Western world itself, however, it needs a more serious evidence base than the one given in the book. Additionally, the impersonal term *the West*, which appears on the pages of the book when it comes to complex political processes affecting a significant part of the world, does not seem to be quite correct. The authors use the concept of *collective West* (p. 9), but it also needs to be substantiated.

However, it would be unfair to blame the authors for a preconceived approach and bias. On the contrary, they try to show that there is a variety of reasons underlying certain recent historical events or phenomena. For example, in Chapter three, devoted to the causes and consequences of the Arab Spring, the authors write the following: 'The authors unequivocally believe that the causes and premises of what is happening lie in the Arab societies themselves and their problems. Nor does it require proof that the revolutionary actions in the region cannot be explained by the influence of just one single factor or reason...' (p. 205).

Rather, we can talk about the presence in the book under review of some elements of a journalistic style, when it comes not to economic issues, but about issues related to world politics and international relations. This is a common phenomenon in Russian scholarly works which touch upon pressing political issues, including international terrorism. The theme of terrorism under Islamic slogans runs throughout the book. Chapter four is devoted to the phenomenon of the Islamic State (IS). Speaking about this terrorist formation, the authors consider issues such as the geography of the spread of IS on the African continent, technology for involving children and adolescents in extremist and terrorist activities, the gender policy of IS among others.

The authors rightly point out the difficulties of a statistical description of organizations like IS. Their study is complicated by the fact that:

> even if the researcher receives the primary data, the reliability of the latter is not easily fully confirmed by alternative methods from other sources. Since, as a rule, samples "from the ground" are small and random, they can differ significantly and even contradict each other. In these cases, the reliability of any initial examination can easily be called into question ... Unlike the exact or natural sciences, repetition of an experiment by other researchers under identical conditions is practically impossible. (p. 256-257).

Nevertheless, the authors as a whole managed to show the essence, as well as the forms and basic methods of activity of IS. When writing the chapter, the authors used materials from their own field research (for example, interviews with employees of one of the prisons in Morocco where representatives of the Islamic State were detained).

However, the most powerful part of the work is still the first three chapters, where the authors consider the economic development trends of the Muslim world (using the example of the Arab countries). Chapter one *The Muslim World: Between Traditional Values and the New World Order* addresses issues such as: Islamic finance and alternative models of global governance, Islamic economic modernization models, and the influence of structural and macroeconomic imbalances on the fundamental trends of socio-economic development. Analyzing the structures of the economies of the Middle East, the authors conclude that avoiding oil dependence is objectively impossible for many countries of the region in the foreseeable future. Regarding economic problems in the modern Arab world, Fituni and Abramova note that:

> the socio-destructive reaction of large masses of the population to structural and economic imbalances is one of the features of the MENA region. In no other large economic and geographical region of the world has the sharp rise in price of consumer goods ... and the clumsy attempts to reform in recent decades led to such outbreaks of violence and bloody consequences as in the Arab world (p. 56).

The authors attempt to introduce a new term: *Muslim economy*, by which they mean 'the modern economy of Muslim countries' (p. 25). The Muslim economy in the monograph is contrasted with the *Islamic economy,* which is understood as "an economy created entirely or mainly on the basis of Islamic law (Shariah)" (p. 25).

I will not discuss the ambiguity of the term *Islamic economy*, which the authors of the monograph under review point out. The concept of *Islamic economy* has already firmly entered the language of theorists and practitioners and is generally accepted among economists and representatives of other disciplines. As for the term *Muslim economy*, an attempt to introduce it into circulation may not be recognized as completely successful.

The authors argue that the words *Muslim* and *Islamic* are complete synonyms. I disagree with this point of view. The definition *Islamic* refers to a concept derived from Islam as a religion. At the same time, the word *Muslim* refers to the adherents of Islam (Muslims). In other words, if we were talking about the *Muslim economy*, it would be more correct to understand by it not the sum of the national economies of Muslim countries, but the totality of households owned by Muslims, regardless of the country of residence. After all, in Muslim countries Christians and representatives of other religions live, as well as unbelievers. All of them are involved in the production of public goods. At the same time, Muslims living outside the Muslim East are also active participants in economic relations. Thus, if we were talking about the economy of countries where Islam is the state religion or the majority of the population is Muslim, it would be preferable to talk about the economy of Muslim countries or the economy of the countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The theme of Islamic finance is continued in Chapter two, *Islamic World and Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities*. It also addresses issues such as institutions and legal instruments of global governance in the system of counteracting international terrorism, the role of aggressive non-state actors in the region, global governance and the development of science in Muslim countries, etc.

Speaking about the prospects for the participation of Arab countries in the world economy and international economic relations, the authors write:

> In the foreseeable future, the determining factors of the active, not passive participation of Muslim countries in the world

> economy and in the formation of a new system of world order will be their natural resource potential and rapidly growing and qualitatively changing population. The growth of human capital through the growth of the scientific potential of the Muslim countries of the continent is an important condition for the realization of their development goals in the 21st century. It is these determinants that will have a significant impact on the development of the global economy and determine the socio-economic prospects of the Muslim states themselves (p. 137-138).

Chapter three *The Neoliberal Order: The Trap of the Arab Spring* discusses the causes and consequences of the revolutions of the early 2010s for the economic development of Arab countries. The chapter gives the main characteristics of the macroeconomic and financial situation in Egypt and Tunisia in the first half of the 2010s. Fituni and Abramova give a balanced and objective analysis of the causes of the mass protests in North Africa. According to the authors, 'the main fundamental problem that led to the collapse of the old regime was the inability of the latter to create the paradigm of (re)distribution of national income adequate to the changing conditions' (p. 158).

Conceptually and methodologically, the book stands in line with the famous monograph *The Islamic Concept of the World Order* by N.V. Zhdanov the first edition of which appeared in 1991.[1] Both of these works present both political and economic aspects of the problem being studied. Despite the fact that Zhdanov's work continues to attract the attention of researchers even today, some conceptual flaws inherent in the Islamic Concept of the World Order can also be found in the book *Islam, Global Governance and a New World Orde*r. This applies mainly to those parts about Islam and the political situation in the Arab-Muslim world. The question of the ideological and political struggle in modern Islam is actually reduced on the pages of the monograph to the problems of jihadism and terrorism under Islamic slogans. The ideology of jihadism is undoubtedly important for a researcher who studies current problems in the Middle East, but it is not the only modern political thought in Islam. The jihadist movement itself is so mottled from an ideological point of view that it requires a separate study. This circumstance, apparently, should explain the insufficiently detailed consideration of this problem in the book under review.

However, despite the controversial points noted above, Leonid Fituni and Irina Abramova's *Islam, Global Governance and a New World Order* is an important work that provides a comprehensive understanding of the political and economic phenomena occurring in the modern Arab-Muslim world. Given the light language and style of presentation, this book could be recommended for educational use.

Endnotes

1 Zhdanov N. *Islamskaya koncepciya miroporyadka: Mezhdunar. pravovye, ekon. i gumanit. aspekty*. Moscow, 1991. The second edition of the book: Zhdanov N. *Islamskaya koncepciya miroporyadka*. Moscow, 2003.

HAHN, Gordon M. *Ukraine over the Edge. Russia, the West and the "New Cold War".* Jefferson: McFarland, 2018. ISBN 978-1476669014.

Ukraine Over the Edge: Russia, the West and the "New Cold War"

Reviewed by Jan Měřička

The Ukrainian crisis came as a new security challenge at the beginning of the 21st century (2013-14). It gave a new opportunity for the Russian Federation to become a much more assertive power than before. This new Russian position has caused a strong Western reaction. Many Western officials and experts label Russian Federation a new threat on the same level as terrorism. G. M. Hahn shows that Ukraine is not just a victim.

The book of G. M. Hahn describes the Ukrainian crisis in a wider context and tries to summarise some key moments of this crisis from the position of Ukraine and some other actors (both external and internal). The author writes his book as a study of the Ukrainian crisis and consists of several internal cases. It is focused on the crisis as a result of several factors, for instance geopolitical, historical and cultural. Relevant Western, Ukrainian and Russian sources (e.g. media reports, internet sources and official documents of international organizations and governments) serve as a source of information for this study which describes the whole crisis including many aspects in a wider, not only political context.

The author aimed the beginning of his book especially at the Russian approach towards international policy for the Eurasian region. He uses scientific studies of traditional writers and experts of international relations theories and security from both the West and the East such as H. F. Mackinder, Z. Brzezinski, A. Dugin or N. Savitskii. Hahn recognises Russian fear of the West (especially based on the Western post-Cold War military interventions) as the main motivation for opposition. In general, Vladimir Putin is described as a pragmatic Russian leader who has changed Russian public wishes (in the field of the international policy) to reality. He has done it in the context of Eurasianism, based on rational thinking instead of any ideology. Huntington's missing conflict potential between pro-Russian and pro-Western elements inside the Ukraine of the 1990s is described, too. Deeper examination of Ukraine's history includes the ancient connection between Ukrainians and Russians, first misunderstanding of Ukrainians and Jews or Ukrainians and Poles (for instance the Great revolt led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky) and of course, the conflict of Galicia. These historical connections as well as clashes made milestones in the way of the rise of Ukrainian nationalism. It was accompanied by the heroization of *Banderits*, who were responsible for participation in the detention of 2 million Jews in 180 concentration camps in Ukraine and the death of 850,000 detained innocent people. The question of Crimea, which was historically an integral part of Russia since 1783 after the war with Ottomans, is also touched. Western expansion (especially NATO enlargement toward Russian border) is described as an argument for Russian disillusion from NATO policy due to broken US promises not to expand NATO towards the East after the unification of Germany. Some other Western mistakes are described in this book (for instance, NATO's intervention without the mandate of the UN such as the bombing of Belgrade) as motivation of Russian assertive behaviour. Few Colour Revolutions in the post-Soviet space in the context of the Russian and the US policy were recognized as factors which show danger of democratic transition by force. The US support of some of these revolutions (especially by a program like USAID) has been responsible for regime changes in many countries all over the world. Obviously, regime change relates to the instability of the country and enlarging of the instability in whole region. Georgia is described by author as a good example of US support of anti-Russian officials like M. Saakashvili, who later moved to Ukraine.

The author uses Brzezinski and focuses on national minority issues for underlining the problems of many cultural, historical or ethnographical differences among national minorities in Ukraine. The Crimean minority which has called for sovereignty since the 1990s played an important role until 2014. The author recognizes cases of pro-Maidan and/or current official Ukrainian propaganda like the glorification of the Ukrainian right movement (included heroization of criminal S. Bandera, connecting of current Russia with crimes of J. V. Stalin or misinterpretation of tragedy such as the Jewish World War tragedy of Baby Yar). Conclusion of the propaganda issue shows Yanukovich's effort to balance his policy between the Russian Federation and the West. European Union and the USA strongly pushed him to cancel relations with Russian Federation and every other Eurasian organisation with the goal of enforcing Western influence in Ukraine.

Even though the book does not include a final summary or conclusion, it presents a large study with numerous correct arguments and facts. It uses the author's detailed and thorough knowledge of history as large scale description of *reasons and results*. The book has been written as neither a pro-Western nor a pro-Russian study and it covers a wide range of Ukrainian current problems.