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RESEARCH ARTICLE

China's Conflict Behaviour
Domestic and International Drivers

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Abstract

The article analyses China's conflict behaviour from 1949 to 2014. The study aims to further our understanding of the country's participation in international conflicts and disputes by presenting the first attempt in the scholarship at a systematic quantitative analysis of China's conflict behaviour. A large-N analysis is carried out through a series of logistic regression models to measure the impact of international and domestic factors. The results of the analysis show that China's conflict behaviour is strongly affected by international factors such as the power gap between China and target states and the presence of territorial claims; at the same time, domestic conditions—intraparty struggle and regime vulnerability—can mitigate the inclination towards the use of force.

Introduction

Although previous studies have offered partial explanations for China's conflict behaviour in the international arena, scholars have favoured specific timeframes or geographical case studies, primarily analysed via qualitative methodologies. This research proposes to advance these studies by examining the country's decisions to engage with international conflicts and disputes throughout its history. In so doing, we strive to offer a quantitative grounding to the numerous case studies developed on China's conflict behaviour over the years. In particular, the article presents the first attempt in the scholarship at a systematic quantitative analysis of China's conflict behaviour between 1949 and 2014 by combining the systemic, state, and unit levels of analysis under an integrated research framework. The research provides a solid empirical basis to discuss qualitative studies and a replicable research method that future studies on China's military posture can adopt.

The first section presents an overview of explanations of Chinese international behaviour. The second section specifies the research design: theoretical model, operational hypotheses, and data. The third section analyses empirical evidence, and the conclusion reviews the main points of strength and weakness of the study.

Alternative Explanations for China's Conflict Behaviour

According to Alastair I. Johnston (1998), China stands out as one of the countries most inclined to use force and get involved in military disputes. Such propensity to conflict has been primarily investigated through approaches drawn from International Relations theory

(IR), considering different analytical levels, i.e., systemic, state, and individual (Breslin, 2009; Chiang Liao, 2016, 2018).[1]

Systemic-level explanations primarily attribute China's assertiveness to offensive and defensive realism. On the one hand, offensive realists argue that the 2008 global financial crisis has affected the balance of power, weakened U.S. clout and bolstered China's. Hence, conflict behaviour is explained in connection to China's superior relative capabilities and the realisation that the U.S. is unable to limit the country's global endeavours (He & Feng, 2012; Goldstein, 2015). On the other hand, defensive realists contend that China's assertiveness stems from its responses to mounting threats to territorial integrity and national sovereignty (Fravel, 2011; Pham, 2011; Friedberg, 2015; Morton, 2016).

However, structural realists have struggled to explain China's behaviour, especially after the global financial crisis, which marked a perceived decline in American power (Chiang Liao, 2018). Structural approaches predicted that China would continue to follow Deng Xiaoping's "passive" doctrine (*taoguang yanghui*), as global trends favoured the rising country (at the U.S. expense). Nevertheless, the country's behaviour has defied such expectations.

In contrast with systemic-level explanations, state-level perspectives emphasize domestic factors as the primary drivers of China's conflict behaviour. Scholars have explored this through three approaches. First, China's assertiveness has been connected to institutional groups, such as military cadres or local government officials, suggesting that changes within these groups influence China's conflict behaviour (Medeiros & Fravel, 2003; Glaser & Medeiros, 2007; Frazier, 2011; Shambaugh, 2011; Lai & Kang, 2014). Second, some attribute belligerence to political élites seeking to bolster their legitimacy during leadership transitions (Goldstein, 2012). Third, rising nationalism is identified as a driver of China's assertiveness (Hughes, 2011; Johnston, 2013; Zhao, 2013; Zhang, 2014). After the 2008 Beijing Olympics, in particular, Chinese leaders showed the need to redirect nationalist sentiments and maintain high levels of legitimacy, thus placing regime survival considerations at the centre of the country's policymaking (Ross, 2013; Chiang Liao, 2018).[2]

However, state-level explanations are dually flawed. First, if domestic pressure truly drove China's conflict behaviour, considering the longstanding continuity of its Communist political system, we would expect to see consistent levels of assertiveness throughout its history (Chiang Liao, 2016). Second, China could be expected to respond to threats to regime survival by attempting to stabilise the international system, thus searching for cooperation instead of conflict, especially in neighbouring areas (Fravel, 2008).

A third perspective consider individual-level factors, drawing from social constructivism to understand how ideas and culture influence foreign policy (Johnston 1995, 1996, 2008). Scholars argue that changes in how political élites interpret systemic pressure explain China's conflict behaviour. These may stem from changes in the beliefs of the predominant élites or leaders (Barnett, 1985; Scobell & Harold, 2003; Lampton, 2014). In the first case, China's assertiveness is attributed to elite triumphalism, as seen in the rhetoric of "national rejuvenation" (Shi, 2013; Friedberg, 2014; Chiang Liao, 2016). In the second case, China's conflict behaviour is linked to leaders' beliefs about the international situation (He, 2013; Lampton, 2014; Brown, 2018). Individual-level explanations overlook the influence of international and domestic contexts on leaders' belief systems.

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[1] Seminal works investigating China's propensity to conflict include Johnston (1998, 2013), Mearsheimer (2006, 2014), Yue (2008), Fravel (2008, 2010), Buzan (2010), Johnston (2013), and Friedberg (2014).

[2] The 2008 Olympic Games has been interpreted as a watershed moment for China's nationalism, as the event was understood as a signal of China's imminent rise to great power status vis-à-vis the American decline. On this point, see Economy and Seagal (2008) and Ross (2013).

The above literature review indicates that an in-depth analysis of China's conflict behaviour needs to factor in systemic *and* unit-level variables. In this article, we tested a set of hypotheses that focus on changes in the balance of power as well as the impact of domestic and individual variables.

Research Design and Data

To explain China's conflict behaviour, we assert the existence of a relation between conflictual behaviour and balance of power, alliance, and territorial claims at the international level, and between external conflict and party cohesion and regime vulnerability at the domestic level. Causal relations are depicted in Figure 1. The direction and the positive or negative signs of the causal arrows are explained below.

We engage with the IR literature on the relevance of the linkages between foreign policy and domestic politics to develop our analytical framework (e.g., Putnam, 1988; Ikenberry, 1996), relying on the assumption that domestic political factors *as well as* systemic considerations do shape states' decisions on war and peace (Bueno de Mesquita, 2002). Moreover, we also draw from the quantitative literature on conflicts which stresses the role played by power and territorial claims in explaining the probability of state involvement in a conflict (Mclaughlin Mitchell & Vasquez, 2014; 2021).

The literature on Chinese politics places a great emphasis on internal dynamics (Christensen, 1996; Ross, 2009: part III). As M. Taylor Fravel (2019) states in his study on the formation of Chinese military doctrine, Beijing reacts to external stimuli, but the way in which it reacts is strongly affected by unit-level factors. Unit-level factors include mainly intraparty struggle (factionalism) and the stability/instability of the regime.

Figure 1. China's conflict behaviour.
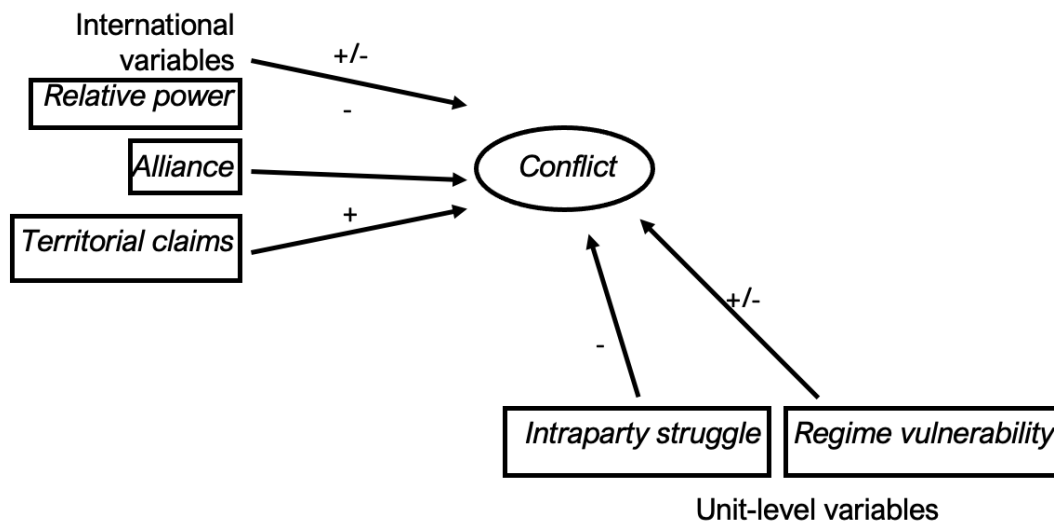
The dependent variable—conflict behaviour—is operationalised by calculating the probability of China's involvement in a militarised interstate dispute (MID) (Jones et al., 1996). From 1949-2014, China was entangled in 363 MIDs over a total number of 9,872 cases of dyad per year.[3]

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[3] We have used the COW's Dyadic MID Database v4.01 (Maoz et al., 2018). The number 9,872 is obtained considering all potential dyads in which China was involved in the period 1950-2014. Given that part of 1949 was still characterised by civil war and the new state was established in October 1950, we started calculating from January 1, 1950.

We have operationalised independent international variables in three ways: change of national relative power, the building of an anti-Chinese alliance network, and the presence of a territorial claim.

Regarding relative power, the literature suggests two opposite hypotheses. Classic balance of power theories (Dehio, 1963; Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979) contend that appetite grows with resources; accordingly, a state with rising power will be more assertive, and the probability of involvement in a conflict will be higher. Other theories of International Relations, more specifically, the bargaining theory of war (Fearon, 1995; Powell, 2002), suggest a very different conclusion. A conflict takes at least two actors, both determined to resort to arms. War is the outcome of a bargaining breakdown that occurs when states cannot agree on dividing a limited resource. This is more likely when it is unclear who has more power. In a situation such as this, states can decide to resort to war to verify their relative bargaining power and how to divide the pie on the battlefield. Thus, the risk of a bargaining breakdown (or the risk of war) is higher when the power gap is not very large, and both states can expect to be better off fighting than not fighting. Where the "balance of power" theory expects that a large power gap (*PG*) will increase the probability of conflict, the "bargaining theory of war" expects that a small capability gap will increase the likelihood of a conflict.

We calculated the power of China yearly, using the CINC dataset (Singer et al., 1972), and then divided it by the power of the target state. We considered a large power gap as a ratio between state A and state B greater than 4 and coded the value of the dyad/year as 0 and a small power gap as a ratio less than 4 and coded it as 1. The threshold of 4 is slightly arbitrary, but it is a compromise between the codification of Stuart Bremer (1992), who suggests a large power gap as a ratio greater than ten, and other studies on national power, which indicate a ratio greater than 3:1 as a critical threshold (Mearsheimer, 1988; 1989). Our first hypothesis generates two different theoretical expectations:

H1a. Under the condition of a large power gap (number of dyads in which the ratio between China's power and target state's power—PG—is more than 4), China's probability of MID involvement increases (balance of power theory).

H1b. Under the condition of a small power gap (number of dyads in which the ratio between China's power and the target state's power—PG—is less than 4), China's probability of MID involvement increases (bargaining theory of war).

Relative power can be increased by piling up political/military resources or building an alliance with another state. Following the logic of external balancing, the hypothesis is that China should be deterred from using its military power when the target state has a defence pact with another great power (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1990; Leeds, 2003). Considering all the potential dyads, we coded a dyad/year as 0 when China interacts with a state that does not have a defence pact with the U.S. and coded as 1 a dyad/year when a state has an alliance pact with the U.S.[4] Thus, our second hypothesis is as follows:

H2. When the target state has a defence pact (All) with the U.S. (number of dyads in which the All value is 1), China's probability of MID involvement decreases.

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[4] For alliance we have used the COW dataset v4.1 (Gibler, 2009). We have considered the alliance of target state with the U.S. because of its paramount role played at the international and regional level.

The third international variable is Chinese territorial claim towards a target state. Territorial issues are a crucial variable in explaining severe interstate conflict. Scholarship on quantitative analysis of conflicts consistently indicates the territorial issue as one of the best predictors of the breakout of a dispute between two states (Diehl, 1991; Bremer, 1992; Tir & Vasquez, 2012; Hensel et al., 2008; Hensel & Goemans, 2021). This is because the territorial issue can have both a tangible value (economic, military, strategic) and an intangible value (historical, symbolic, identity) (Hensel et al., 2008). This point is widely confirmed by the literature on Chinese foreign policy that stresses the paramount role played by territorial integrity in Beijing's international behaviour (Swaine & Tellis, 2000; Scobell, 2003; Fravel, 2008; Medeiros, 2009). We have identified China's territorial claims since late 1949 using secondary literature. China has been involved in territorial issues with several countries. Some of these disputes are still underway: Bhutan, India, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the South China Sea. Others have been settled: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, and Russia. We coded a dyad/year without a territorial claim as 0 and a dyad/year characterised by the presence of a territorial claim as 1. Our third hypothesis is as follows:

H3. When China has a territorial claim (TC) with the target state (number of dyads in which TC value is 1), China's probability of MID involvement increases.

At the unit level, we considered two main variables: the degree of leadership cohesion and the risk of regime collapse. One of the most important features of Chinese society, affecting all policy decisions in a pervasive way, is factionalism (Nathan, 1973; Pye, 1981; Unger, 2002; Huang, 2008). Although the studies on factionalism mainly dealt with domestic political issues (Bo, 2007), the widespread feeling among researchers was that the dynamics between factions had some effect on foreign policy as well, as in the case of the struggle between Maoists and pro-Soviets (Yu, 1994, 242).[5]

To assess the weight of unit-level variables, we considered the intensity of factionalism, measured by the extent of intraparty struggle, and the level of threat to the regime derived from social instability.

Party unity is considered a central factor in explaining the capacity of Chinese leadership to act assertively in the military field (Fravel, 2019, p. 21). In a situation characterised by a low level of party unity, we can expect a less assertive foreign policy and a lower probability of China's involvement in external conflicts. To measure the level of party unity, we considered as evidence of a leadership division three factors: the presence of a reshuffle of the Politburo before the end of the mandate; expulsions, removals, and purges of élite Party members; and attempts at power transitions outside traditional norms.[6] These criteria have produced a division of periods of unity/disunity largely overlapping with that proposed by Fravel, so we are quite confident in its reliability. We coded a dyad/year with a high intraparty struggle as 1 and a dyad/year with a low intraparty struggle as 0. The fourth hypothesis is as follows:

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[5] In the literature, an ongoing debate persists regarding which factions—defined here as patron-client clusters of interconnected officials following Nathan (1973)—constitute relevant political units in China (e.g., Shih et al., 2012; Fisman et al., 2020; Cheung, 2022, 2023; Fracois et al., 2023). Despite the proliferation of factions in media accounts, scholars face challenges in measuring them due to the opaque nature of China's political system. However, this research does not aim to provide a systematic study on factions—detailing their organization, changes in membership, and power dynamics—but rather focuses on examining the broader dynamics of factionalism and their impact on China's foreign policy decisions, recognizing the influence of political elite fragmentation on the formulation of foreign and security policy.
[6] On this criteria, see Teiwes (1984, 1993).

H4. Under the condition of high intraparty struggle (IPS) (number of dyads in which the IPS value is 1), China's probability of MID involvement decreases.

If there is a scholarly consensus about party unity and international assertiveness, interpreting the causal relationship between social instability and China's conflict behaviour is more complex. This ambiguity mirrors the lack of consent in the IR literature on the diversionary explanation of external conflict (DeRouen, 1995; Fordham, 1998; Levy, 2001; Mclaughlin Mitchell & Prins, 2004). That the concern for social stability/instability is paramount for Chinese policymakers is a matter of fact (Feuerwerker, 1972). However, identifying the direction of the causal arrow is slightly more complicated. We can single out two opposing positions, well represented by Allen Whiting on the one end and Taylor Fravel on the other. Allen Whiting sees a dangerous correlation between domestic instability and China's external behaviour, summarised by the expression "enemy without and trouble within" (Whiting, 1975, p. 28).[7] Thomas Christensen (1996) finds that external conflict was strongly correlated with domestic instability at the time of the Great Leap Forward, when aggressive international behaviour was used to mobilise popular support for the regime's policies. More recently, Lyle Goldstein (2001) proposed an explanation for the 1969 Sino-Soviet border clashes based on diversionary theory. The conflict resulted from Mao's tentative of using an external enemy to prompt a "rally round the flag" effect and alleviate the centrifugal pressures generated by the Cultural Revolution (Goldstein, 2001).

Fravel states a very different connection between domestic instability and external conflict, epitomized by the expression "conflict within and cooperation without" (Fravel, 2005; 2008). According to Fravel, "regime insecurity best explains China's many attempts to compromise in its territorial disputes" (Fravel, 2005, p. 5). A leaning towards compromise in a situation of domestic turmoil would result from three factors: 1) the need to gain external support for an opposing domestic threat, 2) the need to concentrate political resources on internal repression and not on international security, and 3) the effort to boost the regime's international legitimacy.

We used the inflation rate as a proxy to assess the role played by regime vulnerability (RV).[8] A high level of regime vulnerability presents a dyad/year with an *RV* index one standard deviation above the mean (coded as 1). Given the lack of consensus on the causal relation between domestic instability and external behaviour, our last hypothesis is split into two opposite theoretical expectations:

H5a. In a situation of high regime vulnerability (number of dyads with China showing an RV score one standard deviation above the mean), China's military behaviour will be more assertive, with an increased probability of MID involvement ("enemy without and trouble within").

H5b. In a situation of high regime vulnerability (number of dyads with China showing an RV score one standard deviation above the mean), China's military behaviour will be less

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[7] "The combination of a perceived enemy on the border and serious internal crisis increases the likelihood of a 'worst case' analysis in Peking" (Whiting, 1975, p. 232).

[8] On the use of different proxy for measuring regime vulnerability (inflation rate, unemployment rate, misery index), see De Rouen (1995); Fordham (1998); and Mclaughlin Mitchell and Prins (2004). Data on Chinese inflation rate have been obtained by World Bank for the period post-1987. For the period 1953-1986 data are from Franses (2020), Burdekin and Wang (1999), and Chow and Wang (2010). The lacking data for 1950, 1951 and 1952 have been calculated, by interpolation, as the average value of the successive three years.

assertive, with a smaller probability of MID involvement ("conflict within and cooperation without").

For factoring in individual variables, in particular the unique role of Mao, and the transformation of the international system, we also inserted several control variables that identify critical periods of China's international history: Maoism, 1949-1979 (coded as 1);[9] the Cold War, 1949-1989 (coded as 1); the Sino-Soviet split, 1957-1988 (coded as 1); and the rise of the "China threat" issue, 1995-2014 (coded as 1).[10]

Empirical Analysis

We assume that independent variables interact both with the dependent variable and among them. We thus performed a multilevel logistic regression to measure every variable's impact when operating simultaneously (Model 1 in Table 1).[11] To assess whether the associations identified remain constant when different time spans are considered—or are time-bound—we introduced four control variables: the distinction between the Maoist and post-Maoist periods (Model 2) (which permits us to analyse the role played by individual factors), the end of the Cold War (Model 3), the Sino-Soviet split (Model 4), and the ascent of China to a world power status (Model 5).

All factors considered in 1949-2014 (Model 1) operate in the expected direction and are statistically significant (except alliance). We supposed that Beijing's involvement in an MID could be strongly linked to its relative power. However, as specified in the research design, analyses of the impact of national power produce different expectations. The "balance of power theory" states that an increasing power gap (*PG*) will produce instability and an incentive to behave more aggressively; conversely, the "bargaining theory of war" expects that a small power gap will increase the probability of miscalculation in a crisis and, accordingly, the probability of a bargaining breakdown and a conflict outbreak. Empirical evidence strongly supports a view of China's conflict behaviour as more consistent with the "bargaining theory of war" (Hypothesis H1b). A small *PG* between China and the target states increases the probability of Beijing involvement in an MID significantly (*p* < .001): the smaller the power disparity between China and the target state is, the greater the probability that a dispute escalates to the military level. This logic is particularly evident when examining China's participation in military disputes against East Asian competitors and, above all, in the case of China's confrontations against India. Miscalculations have stirred mutual misinterpretation of behaviour, with India fearful about Chinese aggressiveness and border reconfiguration, and China worried about India's underestimation of its rank/power. Indeed, at times of crisis, Beijing and New Delhi have been prone to take up arms.

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[9] Maoism is referred to in this article as a period in Chinese history characterized by the influence of Mao Zedong's assumptions and worldviews on the country's political system (Lovell, 2019). When discussing Maoism as a variable, we engage with literature that examines the impact of predominant leaders, such as Mao Zedong, on Chinese foreign and security policy (Herrman et al., 2001). We contend that despite developments in China's political system and leadership competition within the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution, the core principles of Maoism continued to shape the country's foreign policy and conflict behaviour. Even reformers aimed to align with Mao's original ideological framework, understood as the "correct line" of thinking (Samarani, 2017).

[10] We have chosen the year 1995, because in scholarly literature this is considered as the moment in which the China threat issue appeared (Roy, 1996), and because it is the year in which China's power, measured using the COW's CINC index, surpassed America's power. For a contrary view on the power balance between the U.S. and PRC, see Beckley (2018).

[11] Multilevel regressions sidestep the problem of non-independence of the observations within the clusters.

Table 1. Logit model: China's involvement in militarised disputes, 1949-2014.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Power gap	2.116***	1.286*	1.781**	2.191***	1.892**
	(.611)	(.662)	(.636)	(.608)	(.628)
Alliance	-.060	-.631⁺	-.291	.062	-.195
	(.346)	(.372)	(.353)	(.351)	(.350)
Territorial claims	1.769***	1.689***	1.641***	1.813***	1.667***
	(.410)	(.406)	(.412)	(.409)	(.412)
Intraparty struggle	-.569***	-.731***	-.658***	-.508**	-.626***
	(.142)	(.149)	(.145)	(.146)	(.144)
Regime vulnerability	-.513*	-.144	-.493*	-.520*	-.624*
	(.247)	(.260)	(.249)	(.247)	(.251)
Maoism		1.434***			
		(.163)			
Cold War			.726***		
			(.162)		
Sino-Soviet Split				-.268⁺	
				(.150)	
China Rise					-.504**
					(.171)
Constant	-7.118***	-7.524***	-7.387***	-7.067***	-6.832***
	(.625)	(.656)	(.634)	(.621)	(.636)
Observations	9,782	9,782	9,782	9,782	9,782
Log likelihood	-802.717	-760.738	-792.205	-801.101	-798.169

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed test), standard error in parentheses.
⁺p < .10

The alliance variable (*All*) presents a negative sign, as expected (i.e., a deterrent effect on Beijing's initiative), but it is statistically insignificant. Empirical data show that policymakers in Beijing seemed quite indifferent, for the whole period of 1949-2014, to the risk that a military intervention against a country allied with the U.S. could trigger a confrontation with Washington. This is slightly puzzling. We expected that, for different reasons, a country's defence pact with the U.S. could influence China's strategic calculus. Before rapprochement, the U.S. was the main enemy and the primary external actor posing an existential threat to China, thus avoiding an escalation with a U.S. ally was a paramount goal. At the time of the Sino-Soviet split, to avoid an attack on a U.S. ally could signal goodwill and an alignment with Washington's policy. To better validate these presumptions, we look at other periodisations below.

As expected, territorial claims predict well China's conflict behaviour (Hypothesis H3). It works in the right direction (when a territorial issue is at stake, Beijing's confrontational approach is more likely) and has a high statistical significance (*p* < .001). The presence of a territorial claim (*TC* = 1) increases the probability of China's decision to escalate the level of conflict or resort to arms in a dramatic way. This empirical evidence is consistent with the alleged "obsession" of Chinese policymakers towards territorial integrity stressed by

scholarly literature. As Andrew Scobell (2003) notes, the defence of sovereignty from external interference, territorial integrity, and national unification are all cases in which the use of force is amply justified. On these issues, the Chinese leadership feels authorised to use military force. This explains the heightened sensitivity and propensity to use force in situations such as the border conflict with India, the Tibetan issue, or a prospective threat of independence from Taiwan. This result partially contradicts what Fravel says, i.e., that China has been less warlike than other states regarding territorial issues. "China has been more likely to compromise over disputed territory and less likely to use force than many policy analysts assert, international relations theories might predict, or China scholars expect" (Fravel, 2008: 3). In fact, our data demonstrates that when territorial issues are at stake, China's foreign behaviour is no less prone to military escalation than that of other governments.

A cursory look at China's MIDs shows that 77 out of 363 militarised disputes are of territorial type (21%). Considering only MIDs for which a precise classification is offered (as a territorial, policy, or regime change issues), this figure shifts to 77 out of 153 (50.3%).[12] Considering that the number of territorial claims per year is 686, these data mean that 11.2% of Chinese territorial claims escalate to a militarised dispute. The distinction between territorial claims and territorial disputes may explain the discrepancy between our findings and Fravel's. Our empirical evidence says that China is prone to conflict behaviour for territorial issues; however, the fact that only a fraction of territorial claims escalates to military confrontation is also consistent with Fravel's model. This gap between potential and actual territorial disputes may either be due to the low salience of some issues (Hensel et al., 2008) and/or the result of the constraining effect played by domestic variables on external intervention, such as the lack of cohesion inside the Communist Party and regime insecurity. Now, we analyse the effects of these two variables.

The literature is consensual in maintaining that the level of elite cohesion is crucial to explain the international behaviour of a nation (Schweller, 2004, p. 181). The empirical evidence about China's conflict behaviour is consistent with our hypothesis (H4). The association between intraparty struggle and MID involvement is negative and statistically significant ($p < .001$). A high intraparty struggle (*IPS*) moderates Beijing's propensity to intervene in a militarised dispute. In other words, when the Chinese communist elite is afflicted by harsh intraparty struggle, it will be less inclined to display assertive behaviour, and the probability of MID involvement decreases. A regime weakened and fragmented by intraparty struggle is characterised by a pressing need for stability. On the one hand, engaging in military disputes in this phase would make the CCP risk of aggravating imbalances among institutional groups—especially favouring the military clique—and worsening internal disparities. On the other hand, the intraparty struggle would make consensus impossible, and conflicts would thus widen internal divides and further destabilise the party. This factor can mitigate the pressures generated by the balance of power considerations and the presence of territorial claims.

In the same direction works the last domestic variable considered: regime vulnerability (*RV*). This factor has generated two contrasting hypotheses (H5a and H5b): the first states a positive association between a high *RV* and MID involvement; the second, a negative association. Empirical data seem more in line with the thesis proposed by Fravel: domestic turmoil reduces the pressure to be involved in an external conflict and not the opposite. The statistical association is robust ($p < .05$), and the negative sign is compelling evidence that Chinese leaders are little inclined to use force in a diversionary way.

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[12] In the COW dataset there are many non-classified disputes (210). These figures are consistent with Johnston (1998).

In summary, the empirical data are consistent with all our hypotheses except Hypothesis H2 (the deterrent role of alliance). International factors, such as the change in the balance of power and the presence of a territorial claim, are the best predictors of China's involvement in an MID. However, unit-level variables, such as intraparty struggle and regime vulnerability, can constrain Chinese policy-makers inclination to react assertively (i.e., remaining involved in a military clash).

When control variables are considered, these findings do not differ significantly (Models 2, 3, 4, and 5). The consistency of data across different time spans provides evidence of the robustness of our results. Both considering the change produced by the end of the Cold War (Model 3) and the change in the relationship with the Soviet Union/Russia, characterised by periods of amity and enmity (Model 4), the role played by our variables remains substantially the same. China's conflict behaviour does not seem to be affected by the end of bipolarism and by the troubled alliance with Moscow. All variables work in the expected direction and are statistically significant. The only exception is, again, the role of alliance. Even the control variable "China Rise" (Model 5) causes no particular changes in the weight and direction of independent variables.[13]

More interesting are the results produced by the individual control variable: the role of Mao (Model 2). In this case, two variables change significantly: alliance and regime vulnerability. By considering the periodisation between Maoism and post-Maoism, the role of alliance works in the expected direction (deterrent role) and becomes statistically significant ($p < .10$). Notwithstanding Mao's well-known disdain for America's power, considered a paper tiger (Schram, 1969; Shambaugh, 1991), his attitude regarding a country allied to Washington seems to be inclined towards prudence. In Maoist China, the presence of a defence pact of a target state with the U.S. reduces the likelihood of MID involvement in a substantial way. When dealing with countries under the umbrella of American extended deterrence, Mao appears to be less reckless than previously assumed.[14]

The result relating to the regime's vulnerability is also very interesting: at the time of Mao, *RV* has less importance in the Beijing conflict decision. Social instability appears irrelevant when Mao's control variable is factored in. Probably, Mao's paramount and undisputed role enabled him to ignore bottom-up pressures. Mao manipulated social pressures more than the other way around. This logic, in particular, explains China's participation in conflicts at times of severe social instability, such as the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution.[15] Mao's confidence in his worldview and understanding of how China should be administered remained key determinants of his impenetrability to the potential effects of social instability.[16]

Therefore, even controlling for different time spans, the findings of our model remain very robust and consistent. The only time-bound effect, as could be expected, is partially determined by Mao's idiosyncratic role in the Chinese political system.

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[13] By analysing the odds ratio, the only thing that can be inferred is a slightly more important role played by power consideration in the post-1995 period compared to the previous period. A fact that possibly could be interpreted as a sign of a more confident/assertive China.

[14] The significance of this result is confirmed by bivariate analysis: the association between MID involvement and alliance in the Maoist period presents a *p value* < .01.

[15] On this point, see Christensen (1996) and Goldstein (2001). As Fewsmith and Rosen note (2001), the capacity of social pressures to affect Chinese foreign policymaking is greater when there is a fragmented leadership.

[16] As a striking example, take China's support of the 1960 Congo crisis in the middle of the disastrous effects of the Great Leap Forward.

To present logistic regression findings as substantive results, Table 2 reports the predicted probabilities of China's MID involvement based on the full Model 1.[17] International variables—power gap and territorial claims—are associated with a significant increase in the probability of China's MID involvement. They display an overriding role. When the value of the power gap shifts from large to small, the probability of MID involvement increases by 204%, and when there is a territorial claim at stake, the probability of MID involvement increases by 154%. The role of a defence pact of target states with the U.S. is noninfluential. As predicted by neoclassical realism,[18] domestic conditions modify the effect of pressures deriving from international stimuli. In particular, an increase in intraparty struggle reduces the likelihood of China's MID involvement by 27%. The shift of regime vulnerability from low to high reduces the probability of involvement in a militarised dispute by another 26%.

Table 2. Predicted probability of China's involvement in MIDs.

Variable	Predicted probability	Delta
Power gap		
large (0)	.025	
small (1)	.076	.051
Alliance		
no (0)	.026	
yes (1)	.025	-.001
Territorial claims		
no (0)	.024	
yes (1)	.061	.037
Intraparty struggle		
low (0)	.030	
high (1)	.022	-.008
Regime vulnerability		
low (0)	.027	
high (1)	.020	-.007

Summing up, the probability of China's MID involvement is highest when:
The power gap is small; *plus* The target state has no defence pact with the U.S. (this variable is not statistically significant except for the Maoist period); *plus* There is a territorial claim at stake; *plus* The leadership is cohesive; *plus* There is a low level of regime vulnerability.

Conclusion

We identified five factors that might affect China's conflict behaviour. These are Beijing's relative power, a disputant's alliance with the U.S., territorial claims, the intraparty struggle within the ruling Communist Party, and the country's regime vulnerability.

Our analysis of the impact of China's relative power on its conflict behaviour has pointed to an increase in Beijing's probability of participating in an MID when the power gap is small. In our operationalisation of the power gap variable, we relied on the CINC dataset, which

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[17] Predicted probability of each variable, when it assumes the value of 0 or 1, is calculated holding other variables at their mean value.
[18] On neoclassical realism, see Rose (1998), Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro (2009), and Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell (2016).

presents a measure of power focused on combining a country's military, demographic and economic strengths. Although the CINC is useful, as it ensures consistent long-term temporal coverage, the dataset fails to account for short-term power components (such as military preparedness) and thus offers a selective power estimate.

The alliance variable has no statistical significance in our model, except when the analysis exclusively focuses on the Maoist period. Indeed, while Chinese policymakers generally appear not to be deterred by a disputant's alliance with the U.S., this tendency is reversed under Mao. On the one hand, these findings corroborate historical works debating the extent and durability of Mao's revisionist foreign policy (Feng, 2009; Yahuda, 2016). On the other, disregarding the presence of disputants' alliances with the U.S. picks up on China's understanding of a hub-and-spoke international relations model that places Beijing at the centre of the system and other international actors around it. This conformation, therefore, would make a country's alliance with the U.S. irrelevant to Beijing's strategic considerations.

The territorial claim is the most salient variable affecting China's involvement in MIDs. The presence of a territorial claim, in fact, significantly increases the likelihood that the country will take up arms. The goals of territorial integrity and national unity have not only been constituting part of the "Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", which have informed the country's approach to foreign policy since 1954 but have also remained at the forefront of the Communist Party's legitimacy to rule.[19] Nonetheless, we also observed that only a limited number of China's territorial claims escalate into conflict, thus explaining the partial incongruity of our findings on a territorial claim with Fravel's. Consistent with neoclassical realism, we have explained this limited number of escalations because of the effect of domestic variables on systemic stimuli.

At the state level, we noticed that intraparty struggle negatively affects China's MID involvement, supporting the notion that élite cohesion remains central in explaining states' international behaviour. This is even more striking in the case of Beijing, given that the country is a one-party regime overconcerned with maintaining internal stability and ensuring the continuity of Communist rule. Therefore, entering conflict at highly divisive junctures risks precipitating disparities by favouring certain party groups over others.

Last, our findings indicate that regime vulnerability reduces China's participation in MIDs, supporting that Beijing remains wary of employing diversionary tactics. The only exception to this result occurs when the analysis is exclusively focused on the Maoist period: in this case, social pressures are, in fact, irrelevant. We hypothesised that Mao's unique grasp of the country's social and political system allowed him to disregard *bottom-up* pressures in his calculations. It should be noted here that the unavailability of official statistics on China's unemployment and inflation rates, especially for the 1950s, forced the authors to rely on secondary literature and estimates calculated through interpolation to compile the regime vulnerability variable.

A long-term quantitative investigation of China's conflict behaviour represents our main contribution to the literature. In addition to building on Johnston's 1998 study, the quantitative analysis offers a framework to test for the insights drawn by several qualitative-oriented investigations, which have constituted most studies conducted on China's military behaviour. By doing so, we provide a quantitative foundation to complement these case studies. Moreover, by relying on an approach that combines systemic and country-specific variables, the paper moves towards identifying a multidisciplinary perspective that can facilitate the dialogue between IR theory and area studies.

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[19] The 2049 celebration marking the centenary establishment of the People's Republic fundamentally revolves around territorial ambitions.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Birth of a Nuclear Base
The US, Italy, and the Cold War Path to La Maddalena

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Abstract

This article reconstructs the path that led the US and Italy to negotiate and eventually agree on the homeporting of a US submarine tender in La Maddalena, Sardinia, which became the de-facto main US nuclear submarine base in the Cold War Mediterranean. Unlike what has been claimed by anti-base authors, according to the records of the Department of State the opening of a US base in La Maddalena in 1972 was not an achievement of a long-term US foreign policy goal, but a compromise. Indeed, the Department of Defense aimed to homeport a submarine tender in the much more strategical Augusta Bay, Sicily, while the remote La Maddalena was proposed by Italy, whose government (unsurprisingly) negotiated with the US pursuing its own national interest.

Introduction

The US military presence in Italy has been highly controversial since the end of the Second World War, and especially since 1954, when the US and Italy signed the Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement (BIA), a still-classified framework agreement disciplining US military facilities and activities in Italy that paved the way to the deployment of sizeable US forces in this NATO country (Duke, 1989, pp. 195-214; Nuti, 1993, pp. 261-272; Saiu, 2014). Over the decades since, a number of military facilities and basing rights in Italy have been agreed to the US under the BIA and its amendments, which as in many other countries hosting US military bases (Yeo, 2011) has led to bitter debates, intense criticism, and strong anti-base movements (Ronzitti et al., 1990; Cooley, 2008, pp. 195-212; Di Ernesto, 2010; Yeo, 2011, pp. 101-116; Bedini, 2013). One of the most famous cases is that of La Maddalena, an archipelago located between Sardinia and Corsica that from 1972 to 2008 hosted a US Navy base where a submarine tender was homeported, which entailed routine visits by US submarines, say nuclear submarines, one of the most powerful weapons ever produced by mankind.

Since 1972 activists and scholars have been addressing the issues posed by the US naval base in La Maddalena, such as the reasons for the opening of this military facility and its eventual impact on the local environment and civil society. As far as the humanities are concerned, many valuable contributions have been made available in fields such as ethnology (Orsini, 2022) and sociology (Esu, 2020). With regard to history, all the contributions have faced the obstacle posed by the fact that most civilian and military official sources on the US naval presence in La Maddalena were and still are classified, which has made several historical reconstructions incomplete if not inaccurate despite their

sometimes praiseworthy heuristic effort. This is especially the case of the historical works published by anti-base activists and authors, who generally depicted the US presence in La Maddalena as the achievement of a long-term goal of the US foreign policy dating back to the XIX century Barbary Wars finally made possible during the Cold War by an Italian government unwilling or unable to protect its own national interests from the political, economic, and environmental point of view (Dessy, 1978; Sanna, 1994; Dore, 2005; Di Ernesto, 2010, pp. 51-53). These reconstructions dealing with some of the most sensitive politico-military aspects of the history of the US Navy base in La Maddalena have had a wide resonance in public opinion but reflect little more than the mere political orientation of their authors, who have argued such theses without any documentary evidence. On the contrary, this article aims to fill some of the many historiographical gaps on the US base in La Maddalena by providing a first reconstruction of the politico-military path that led the US Navy to La Maddalena entirely based on official sources, specifically the first relevant US diplomatic files on this subject that have been made available to researchers to date.

The Cold War Mediterranean Context

The set of politico-military events that led to the opening of a US Navy base in La Maddalena can be traced back to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and to its two most immediate naval outcomes: the Soviet show of weakness concerning blue-water capability, and the deployment in the Mediterranean Sea of US Polaris-class submarines armed with submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) to compensate the removal of the US Jupiter medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBM) from Italy and Turkey (Goldstein & Zhukov, 2004, pp. 28-33). For these reasons, in 1963 the Soviet Union started to deploy warships in the Mediterranean, which up to that time had been left with no permanent Soviet naval presence. In the following years, the number of vessels deployed by the Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean kept growing, eventually reaching a turning point in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War with the creation of a permanent Mediterranean naval squadron, the 5th *Eskadra* (Amme, 1969; Lewis, 1976, pp. 55-59; Goldstein & Zhukov, 2004, pp. 38-42).

This steady expansion of the Soviet Navy's capability in the Mediterranean caused some concern in NATO countries, including Italy, a country in the middle of the Mediterranean located only a few hours' sail from Libya, which had been often hosting calls by the 5th *Eskadra* (Goldstein & Zhukov, 2004, pp. 38-40), and Malta, a non-aligned country on its way to get rid of any British military presence (La Nave, 2019, pp. 369-429). By January 1971 Italy's concerns had been made clear to the US by the Head of the NATO Office of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Eric Da Rin[1]. As reported by the US Ambassador to Italy Graham A. Martin, senior Italian military officers and political leaders felt that "the whole Southern flank of NATO" had been "neglected in NATO's preoccupation with the Central front" and feared that this might eventually lead the Soviet Union to "exploit the tensions of the post-Tito period in an attempt to extend the Brezhnev doctrine to the Adriatic"[2]. Once again, the main security concern for Italy was the border with Yugoslavia, whose then 78-year-old president Tito had cancelled his visit to Rome just a few days before Da Rin's comments because of some minor but still ongoing Italian-Yugoslav border disputes (Bucarelli, 2008, p. 40; Mišić, 2018, pp. 148-149). As noted by Martin, the outcome was that despite its concern

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[1] Graham A. Martin (US Ambassador to Italy) to US Mission NATO, Secret Telegram no. 219, Jan 14, 1971, in National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NARA), Record Group 59 – General Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Subject Numerical Files 1970-1973 (A1 1613-D), box no. (b.) 1751, folder (f.) DEF IT 1/1/70.

[2] Ibid.

for the Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean Italy was diverting its defense resources to Northern Italy, preventing any "desirable expansion of [the] Italian role in [the] Mediterranean"[3].

The New US Navy Homeporting Policy

Italy's unwillingness to further invest in its Navy, coupled with the ongoing withdrawal of the British Royal Navy from the Mediterranean and the 1966 withdrawal of De Gaulle's France from NATO's military command structure, made once again the defense of NATO's Southern Flank largely an American task (Kaplan & Clawson, 1985, pp. 10-12). This, combined with the steady expansion of the 5th *Eskadra* and the overall Mediterranean politico-military scenario could not but entail an increase in the US 6th Fleet capability. This led the US Navy to change its policy concerning homeporting in the Mediterranean[4]. Up to that time, all vessels assigned to the 6th Fleet had been homeported in the East Coast of the United States and rotated periodically. By contrast, under the new US naval policy, a number of vessels assigned to the 6th Fleet were to be homeported in the Mediterranean[5], "in the general area of planned operations and not subjected to long, hazardous transits associated with rotational deployments of [Continental US] homeported ships"[6].

For the US homeporting 6th Fleet vessels in the Mediterranean meant of course the need to find suitable homeports and to agree on their use with the relevant Mediterranean allies. As a result, the US started negotiations with Greece, Italy, and Spain[7]. Among the three, Italy could be seen as the best location for homeporting US vessels for a number of reasons that went beyond its geographical position in the middle of the Mediterranean and the fact that it was both a member of the NATO and of its military command structure. Indeed, Italy was the only democratic country of the three and its economy and standard of living were much more developed compared to Franco's Spain or the Colonels' Greece, which meant a better standard of living for the dependent families that were to follow the US Navy servicemen to their new duty stations. In addition, it must be finally outlined that the headquarters of the Allied Forces Southern Europe (AFSOUTH) were based in Naples, where the US Navy already had several facilities constituting the US Naval Support Activity (NSA) Naples, including a naval hospital.

The city of Naples was the site asked for by the US in January 1971 when they filed the first request for homeporting 6th Fleet vessels in Italy, two patrol gunboats and a destroyer tender[8]. Besides the geographical location of the city, the reasons that made the US opt for Italy and specifically for Naples were of course its adequate harbor and dependent facilities, but also the estimate that its urban area and the existing extensive support facilities could easily absorb the housing demand produced by the relocation of some 300 families. Rome welcomed this request, and in February 1971 Italy and the US signed an amendment to the

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[3] Ibid.

[4] US Department of State (DoS) & US Department of Defense (DoD) to United States Embassy Rome (USER), Secret Telegram no. 077336, May 3, 1972, in NARA, RG 59, A1 1613-D, b. 1751, f. DEF IT-US 1/1/70.

[5] "Overseas Homeporting of U.S. Navy Units", Confidential Memorandum attached to Marshall Wright (DoS Acting Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations) to James W. Fulbright (US Senator Chairman Committee on Senate Foreign Relations), Confidential Letter, Jan 26, 1973, in Ibid.

[6] DoS & DoD to Rome, Secret Telegram no. 077336, May 3, 1972, in Ibid.

[7] Martin to William P. Rogers (US Secretary of State) & Melvin R. Laird (US Secretary of Defense), Confidential Telegram no. 4586, Aug 11, 1972, in Ibid.

[8] Rogers to USER, Secret Telegram no. 001276, Jan 5, 1971, in Ibid.

BIA allowing the homeporting of two patrol gunboats and a destroyer tender in Naples, where the three US units arrived that very same month[9].

During the following months, the patrol gunboats homeported in Naples proved very useful in patrolling Mediterranean waters and surveilling Soviet naval units, for the benefit of the NATO's Southern flank and especially for that of their homeport country, Italy[10]. However, homeporting two patrol gunboats and a destroyer tender was not enough to face the increasing tasks of the US Navy in the Mediterranean, whose scenario was changing quickly, as the 5th *Eskadra* was constantly intensifying its operations in the Mediterranean, Libya had gotten rid of US and British military presence since 1970 and had started to be supplied by the Soviet Union, and after the comeback of Domenico "Dom" Mintoff to power in June 1971 Valletta decided to re-negotiate the settlement on NATO bases in Malta and declared *persona non grata* the Italian commander of the NATO Allied Naval Forces Southern Europe (COMNAVSOUTH) Gino Birindelli, which resulted in the relocation of COMNAVSOUTH to Naples (La Nave, 2022, pp. 410-435).

The Submarine Issue

Before the 1971 Maltese elections, the US Navy had already planned to strengthen the 6th Fleet and therefore "NATO effectiveness in the Mediterranean" (Scott Thompson, 1977, p. 71) by increasing its own submarine capability[11]. Unlike other vessels, such as patrol gunboats, the solution designed by the US Navy to achieve this goal was not homeporting its submarines in the Mediterranean: these special warships, often nuclear-powered and armed with submarine-launched ballistic missiles, were to stay homeported in the US. Therefore, after the new US Navy planning a larger 6th Fleet submarine capability was to be achieved through an increase in both the number of the submarines rotated to the Mediterranean and the length of their deployment thanks to the homeporting of a submarine tender in the area. This of course entailed finding a suitable site for homeporting a submarine tender to repair and refill US-homeported submarines rotated to the 6th Fleet, as well as negotiating the homeporting of this vessel with the hosting country, which according to the US Navy would ideally be Italy. After the Department of State and the US Embassy in Rome approved this project[12] the US Navy conducted a survey of Italian ports and by November 1971 identified what was deemed to be the most suitable site: Augusta Bay, Sicily[13].

The reasons behind the US Navy's choice were manifold[14]. The first self-evident one was the location: Augusta Bay is a natural port close to two choke points separating the Mediterranean Sea into the Western and Eastern Seas, the Strait of Sicily and the Strait of Messina, and lies just a few hours of navigation from Malta and Libya. Furthermore, Augusta lies less than 30 miles off the Airport of Sigonella where the US Navy had a Naval Air Facility (NAF) under the BIA and the Italians stationed their 41st Antisubmarine Warfare Wing. In addition, since World War II Augusta Bay naval facilities had already been used by the US Navy, whose warships – including submarines – already called to this port frequently and had already obtained a clearance for visit by nuclear-powered warships. Moreover, the size

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[9] Wells Stabler (USER Deputy Chief of Mission) to DoS, Secret Telegram no. A-131, Feb 24, 1971, in Ibid.

[10] DoS & DoD to Rome, Secret Telegram no. 077336, May 3, 1972, in Ibid.

[11] Rogers to USER, Secret Telegram no. 024179, Feb 10, 1972, in Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Laird, Memorandum for John L. H. Chafee (US Secretary of the Navy), Apr 8, 1972, in Ibid.

[14] Laird to Rogers, Secret Letter, Apr 8, 1972, in Ibid.; Ronald I. Spiers (DoS Director Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs) & Martin J. Hillenbrand (US Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs) to Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson (US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs), DoS Action Memorandum, May 19, 1972, in Ibid.

of Augusta, a town with a population of about 35,000 inhabitants, was appraised to have the potential to easily absorb the housing demand produced by the 920 US servicemembers that would relocate there with some 300 dependent families[15].

However, the desire of the US Navy to homeport a submarine tender in Augusta Bay, though backed by many good technical reasons, soon clashed with the will of the Italians. Indeed, since the very first contacts between the US Chief of Naval Operation Elmo R. Zumwalt and the Italian Ministry of Defense and the Italian Chief of Naval Operations, the US were recommended to opt for La Maddalena, Sardinia, or at least to also examine the ports of Trapani, Sicily, and Brindisi, Apulia, before making their final decision[16].

To this day no Italian available archival source can explain the reasons for Italy's unwillingness to host a submarine tender in Augusta Bay. However, making some hypotheses is possible: at that time the town of Augusta and its port were facing an unprecedented economic and demographic expansion, mainly due to the large petrochemical complex that had been established in the area in 1949 and had attracted a number of investments ever since (Adorno et al., 2008). Therefore, from the point of view of the Italian political and military authorities, the homeporting of a large US naval unit such as a submarine tender might have posed a threat to the further economic growth of the area.

By contrast, it is quite easy to make some hypotheses on Italy's suggestion of La Maddalena, an archipelago between Northeastern Sardinia and Southeastern Corsica made up of the homonymous main island and dozens of minor and often unpopulated islands. The whole archipelago, then numbering some 11,000 residents, was a scarcely populated area facing a demographic decline with an economy mainly based on the local Italian naval base. For almost two centuries La Maddalena had been hosting a naval facility, and most of its population had either come from Corsica to escape service for the French or from other parts of Sardinia and Italy for service reasons, something which had shaped a community strongly bound to the Italian Navy both culturally and economically (Orsini, 2022). Therefore, it is very likely that from the Italian point of view, the homeporting of a submarine tender as well as the establishment of any other military facility in La Maddalena was seen as an asset for the local economy, as well as a guarantee of better reception from the local population. In this respect, it has to be highlighted that already in the early 1950s, when the US and Italy were negotiating the BIA and the US Navy planned to build a large naval facility in Porto Conte, Northeastern Sardinia (Saiu, 2014), a civilian area close to Sardinia's second and third largest cities, Sassari and Alghero, Italy had opposed the development of the project in Porto Conte, and proposed to divert it to La Maddalena[17].

From Augusta to La Maddalena

The official on-site survey for the homeporting of a US submarine tender in Italy was conducted by personnel of the US Navy and of the US Embassy in Rome in March 1972[18]. From

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[15] Rogers to USER, Secret Telegram no. 024179, Feb 10, 1972, in Ibid.; Spiers & Hillenbrand to Johson, DoS Action Memorandum, May 19, 1972, in Ibid.

[16] Rogers to USER, Secret Telegram no. 024179, Feb 10, 1972, in Ibid.

[17] "Meeting on 10 February, in the Ministry of Defense, Rome, Italy, between the Italian General Staff and members of their military services and U.S. military representatives, regarding the proposed U.S. facility requirements in Italy and its possessions", Top Secret Memorandum, Feb 10, 1953, in NARA, RG 59, Miscellaneous Lot of Files, Lot File no. 58 D 357, Subject Files Related to Italian Affairs, 1944-1956 (A1 1285), b. 10, f. 430.01 Italy – Status of Forces and Base Rights 1949-1954.

[18] Martin to Rogers, Secret Telegram no. 0867, Feb 11, 1972, in NARA, RG 59, A1 1613-D, b. 1751, f. DEF IT-US 1/1/70; DoS & DoD to USER, Secret Telegram no. 040482, Apr 7, 1972, in Ibid.

the technical point of view, the results did not change the mind of the US Navy, which confirmed its strong preference for Augusta "Because of its central location, dependent support potential, nearby US Navy airfield and current clearance for visits by nuclear-powered warships"[19]. The Department of Defense communicated its preference for Augusta to the Department of State, asking the authorization to open official negotiations with Italy for the "immediate use of Augusta Bay, Sicily, or a mutually acceptable port, as an attack submarine upkeep site and ultimate homeport of an attack submarine tender"[20].

During the following weeks, the Department of State and the Department of Defense drafted the instructions to be sent to the US Embassy in Rome. It had to be considered the fact that during the March survey in Augusta and La Maddalena the Italian Navy officers had informally communicated to their counterparts that the Italian Navy strongly recommended La Maddalena instead of Augusta, and furthermore that the Italian Navy "would not oppose a request for homeporting at Augusta Bay, but neither would they support it on the political side. On the other hand, they indicated that a request for homeporting at La Maddalena would receive their active support"[21].

The instructions finally sent to Martin on April 24, 1972, highlighted both the strong, motivated preference of the US Navy for Augusta and what had been communicated by the Italian Navy. For these reasons, the cable proposed a solution aimed at providing "flexibility in negotiations" through the request for hosting the submarine tender that was to be rotated in the Mediterranean between July and December 1972 "at both Augusta Bay and La Maddalena during its deployment to assist in further evaluating the capabilities and limitations of each location *vis-à-vis* ultimate homeporting"[22]. In any case, by that time the most important factor seemed to be promptness, as the Department of State and the Department of Defense wished to move as rapidly as deemed by Martin into discussions with the Italian government. For this reason, on one hand, it was asked that a US Embassy officer who was to be in charge of dealing with this subject would return to Washington for consultations with State and Defense officials, and on the other one the US Navy had to be authorized as soon as possible by the Italian authorities to "commence radiological environmental monitoring surveys at each potential tender site". These surveys were to start at least three months before the arrival of the submarine tender and – as explained in the cable – were ideally to be made jointly with the Italian authorities, also because they were mainly aimed at providing the means to demonstrate to the Italian government that the US nuclear-powered warships have had no effect on the environment.

At first, these instructions were not extensively commented on by Martin, who just announced that an Embassy officer was to come to Washington and explain the Embassy's orientation on this subject and pointed out that no approach to the Italian government on radiological environmental monitoring surveys had to be done before the forthcoming Italian general elections on May 7 and 8 in order to prevent any possibility that the Italian Communist Party (PCI) would exploit the issue during the election campaign[23]. However, the fact remained that the negotiation policy initially conceived by the Department of State and the Department of Defense was plainly aimed at taking time and putting the Italians before the evidence of the better suitability of Augusta. This alone meant trying to obtain something that the Italians had already informally communicated they were unwilling to concede and would be more likely to irritate them than speeding up the negotiations on the

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[19] Laird to Rogers, Secret Letter, Apr 8, 1972, in Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] DoS & DoD to USER, Secret Telegram no. 040482, Apr 7, 1972, in Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Martin to Rogers, Secret Telegram no. 2420, Apr 27, 1972, in Ibid.

homeporting of a submarine tender. In addition, the forthcoming negotiations with Italy on homeporting were further complicated by the fact that on April 25, 1972, the Department of State received from the Department of Defense the request to homeport two additional patrol gunboats and a patrol craft tender in Naples, which of course entailed an amendment to the BIA and specific negotiations with Italy[24]. Also in this case the instructions received from Washington by the US Embassy in Rome stated that promptness was deemed the most important target to be achieved, as it was desired "the earliest possible" approval of the Italian government and therefore actual deployment of the vessels[25].

During the following days, the Department of State and the Department of Defense discussed the submarine tender homeporting issue with the officer of the US Embassy to Italy who had specifically returned to Washington, James B. Devine, who pointed out Ambassador Martin's "reservations in seeking homeporting rights in Augusta Bay"[26]. The outcome of these consultations was communicated to the US Embassy in Rome on May 8, 1972, final day of the Italian general elections. The new final instructions for Ambassador Martin were to file to the Italian government "the request to homeport of an attack submarine tender in La Maddalena and for use of La Maddalena by a rotationally deployed tender commencing in July 1972"[27]. The instructions anyhow went further, specifying that the Italian government was to "be appraised that, should further study of La Maddalena reveal it to be unsuitable for homeporting", the US wanted to "leave open the option for consideration of Augusta Bay or other mutually agreeable ports as an alternative homeporting site". However, promptness remained the most important aspect of the action, as much as the cable stated that "If homeporting, per se, becomes an issue which portends delay, rotational deployment should be separated from the issue and sought as the most urgent matter".

As the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Alexis Johnson would acknowledge a few days later, despite declaring the will to "leave open" other options these instructions were basically aimed at requesting "homeporting rights for the submarine tender at La Maddalena", since this proposal would "probably be better received by the Italians and perhaps result in an expedited reply on their part" than the request of Augusta Bay desired by the US Navy[28].

The Official Negotiations on Homeporting

The two linked aspects of promptness and Italy's orientation proved therefore to be the most important aspects for the US, whose ambassador in Rome quickly approached the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to seek the Italian government's "approval" for homeporting a submarine tender in La Maddalena and two patrol gunboats and a patrol craft tender in Naples, as well as "permission to carry out radiological survey at La Maddalena as soon as possible"[29]. Ambassador Martin's action was fully backed by the Department of State, whose officers agreed with the head of mission in Rome that the US had "a much better chance of obtaining homeporting rights in La Maddalena" and pressing

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[24] Ibid.; G. Warren Nutter (DoD Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs) to Spiers, Secret Letter no. I-23480/72, Apr 25, 1972, in Ibid.
[25] DoS & DoD to USER, Secret Telegram no. 077336, May 3, 1972, in Ibid.
[26] Johnson to Laird, Secret Letter no. 7206535, May 20, 1972, in Ibid.
[27] DoS & DoD to USER, Secret Telegram no. 079956, May 8, 1972, in Ibid.
[28] Johnson to Laird, Secret Letter no. 7206535, May 20, 1972, in Ibid.
[29] Martin to Rogers, Secret Telegram no. 2784, May 16, 1972, in Ibid.

for Augusta Bay "could jeopardize the present good relations" with the Italians with respect to the visits to Italy of nuclear-powered warships[30].

On June 1, 1972, the US Embassy received the first, informal feedback by the Italian Ministry of Defense, who reported that the Italian Navy would shortly authorize the radiological survey at La Maddalena[31]. However, several weeks had passed since the official homeporting request, so the US Embassy, whose one of the two main goals was promptness, decided to check with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs whether "substantial problems had been encountered"[32]. The latter replied that no substantial problems had been encountered so far and the request had been transmitted to Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti for review, emphasizing that the delay in responding to the US request was mainly due to "absence from Rome of high-ranking Ministry officers who have been attending various NATO meetings and preoccupation of other government leaders with forming of new government"[33].

The forecast that no substantial problems would be encountered proved soon to be correct, as on June 21, 1972, Da Rin communicated that the Italian Prime Minister had approved the US "request to deploy a rotational submarine tender to La Maddalena, Sardinia, beginning in July 1972 and to homeport a tender there commencing in March 1973"[34]. Da Rin underlined that this was just an unofficial notification, and that the official permission would be issued only when the "paperwork" was completed, but also informed Martin that the US Navy could "start the wheels in motion". The US Ambassador to Italy recognized that this meant that several details had to be worked out both in Rome and in La Maddalena prior to the actual deployment of any US submarine tender in the Sardinian archipelago. However, Martin appreciated that Andreotti had agreed to the US request despite the "severe criticism" that would follow from the political left and the "acute sensitivity inherent in a continuous nuclear submarine presence in Italian water". According to the US diplomat this was a demonstration of Italy's attachment to "allied efforts to bolster NATO's posture on the Southern flank", as well of the "political courage" of a government that viewed "the concept of burden-sharing in a broader framework than just defense expenditures"[35].

Rome's will to cooperate to the defense of NATO's Southern flank through the homeporting of 6th Fleet vessels in Italian ports was to be pointed out two days later, when the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informally communicated that the request for homeporting two additional patrol gunboat and a patrol craft tender in Naples had been approved by the Italian government[36]. The official approval would eventually be issued only a few days later, on July 11, 1972[37]. Two more days later the Italian government also formally approved the request for the rotational deployment of a submarine tender at La Maddalena and the eventual homeport of a submarine tender at the same location[38]. However, as reported by Ambassador Martin, Da Rin had indicated that the use of La Maddalena by nuclear submarines had to await the completion of all the paperwork. With respect to the latter, the Italian government had specified that the formal documentation had to take into

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[30] Spiers & Martin to Johnson, DoS Action Memorandum no. 7206535, May 19, 1972, in Ibid.
[31] Martin to Rogers, Secret Telegram no. 3167, Jun 1, 1972, in Ibid.
[32] Martin to Rogers, Secret Telegram no. 3272, Jun 7, 1972, in Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Martin to Rogers & Laird, Secret Telegram no. 3598, Jun 21, 1972, in Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Martin to Rogers & Laird, Secret Telegram no. 3622, Jun 12, 1972, in Ibid.
[37] Martin to Rogers & Laird, Secret Telegram no. 4031, Jul 12, 1972, in Ibid.
[38] Martin to Rogers & Laird, Secret Telegram no. 4055, Jul 13, 1972, in Ibid.

consideration the "particular functions" that the tender would be performing and "spell out in some fashion" the US "assurances regarding safety precautions"[39].

To comply with the requests of the Italian government Ambassador Martin suggested to incorporate in a separate note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the "Statement by the US Government on Operation of US Nuclear-Powered Warships in Foreign Ports", a document also called "Standard Statement" that listed the responsibilities acquired by the US "to salvage or otherwise make safe any United States warship which might be incapacitated in a foreign port"[40]. On July 18, 1972, the Department of State approved this proposal and forwarded to the Embassy in Rome the text of the "Standard Statement", whose language specified among others that: the US vessels could not discharge any effluent or other waste "which would cause a measurable increase in the general background radioactivity of the environment"; the host government could "take surveys at his desires, in the vicinity of the warship to assure itself that the visiting ship" was not "creating a radioactive contamination hazard"; the host government would be notified immediately in the event of any "accident involving the reactor of the warship during a visit"; the host government would be informed with some 24 hours in advance of any visits of US nuclear-powered warship[41]. However, at the same time, the Department of State asked that after the completion of the paperwork concerning the use of La Maddalena the Embassy would seek from the Italian Government a blanket clearance for routine visits to La Maddalena by US submarines[42]. The cable explained that this clearance was deemed necessary to give the US Navy the flexibility needed to use La Maddalena as a submarine upkeep site, since under the then existing agreements the US were required to agree by naval or military *attachés* for each routine visit made by US vessels. However, as also stated in the "Standard Statement" the US would in any case notify the Italian Navy of the names of the US submarined to be tendered in La Maddalena, and for "purpose of harbor safety local Italian Navy authorities" would be "informed in advance of submarine movements at La Maddalena".

On July 19, 1972, the day after receiving the said instructions from Washington, the US Embassy to Italy sent a *note verbale* with the language of the "Standard Statement" to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs[43]. The following day the submarine tender homeporting issue was once again faced by Da Rin, who reiterated that before the completion of formal paperwork, there were to be no tending operations or submarine visits to La Maddalena[44]. This was highlighted to the Commander in Chief of the US Naval Forces in Europe (CINCUSNAVEUR) William F. Bringle by Ambassador Martin, who outlined that up to that time, everything had gone "very smoothly" with the Italians, who had even approved the arrival of the submarine tender to La Maddalena before the final completion of the approval process. For this reason, the diplomat explained, for the US there was "a great deal to be gained by doing the first movements exactly right with the meticulous regard for Italian sensitivities about Italian sovereignty", and any mistake at that stage could "seriously jeopardize vitally needed Italian cooperation in the months ahead". According to Martin Italian cooperation was indeed soon going to be "vastly more important" than ever, since "It would be the height of folly to assume that the Soviets" would not respond to the expulsion of their military personnel

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[39] Ibid.

[40] "Statement by the US Government on Operation of US Nuclear-Powered Warships in Foreign Ports", quoted in DoS & DoD to USER, Confidential Telegram no. 129764, Jul 18, 1972, in Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] DoS to USER, Secret Telegram no. 129765, Jul 18, 1972, in Ibid.

[43] USER to Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Note Verbale no. 465, Jul 19, 1972, quoted in Martin to DoS & DoD, Confidential Airgram no. A-50, Jan 23, 1973, in Ibid.

[44] Martin to William F. Bringle (Commander in Chief of the US Naval Forces in Europe), Confidential Telegram no. 4674, Jul 20, 1972.

from Egypt occurred a few weeks before (Badolato, 1984) differently than "they did to their humiliation at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, which resulted in a vast expansion of Soviet naval power"[45].

Besides the growing strategic importance of the collaboration with Italy, Ambassador Martin's sensitivity to maintaining the best possible relations with Italy in the naval field was also justified by the fact that many issues were not to be solved by the mere completion of the paperwork on the homeporting of a submarine tender in La Maddalena. Indeed, even though the US and Italy proceeded to an exchange of *note verbales* and eventually signed an Amendatory Protocol to the BIA on August 11, 1972, granting the homeporting of a US submarine tender in La Maddalena[46], many problems were still unsolved. Above all, the Italian government had not commented the "Standard Statement", and no blanket clearance had been obtained for the US submarines' calls to La Maddalena. With respect to this last issue, the present archival state of the art does not allow to determine whether and when the US obtained by the Italian government the sought blanket clearance for US submarines' visits to La Maddalena. It has very likely been the case, since the US would have been in any case required to forewarn the Italian Navy of any movement of US submarines, and therefore avoiding going through *attachés* for each single call to La Maddalena seems a reasonable request. However, to date it is impossible to confirm it and until further official records are made available to the researchers this will remain one of the many historiographical gaps in the history of the US Navy's presence in La Maddalena.

Guarantees and Normalization

On August 28, 1972, the issue of the guarantees for the calls of nuclear-powered warships in La Maddalena was once again raised by Da Rin, who informed the US Embassy in Rome that from the point of view of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the section of the Standard Statement dealing with the US "liability in the event of a nuclear accident" was too vague, and the Italian government desired "something more specific"[47]. In this respect, Da Rin referred to a 1964 agreement on the use of Italian ports by a US merchantman, the nuclear ship *Savannah*, where the US had agreed to pay compensation for any responsibility which might be found by an Italian court "according to Italian law, for any damage to people or goods deriving from a nuclear incident in Italian waters"[48]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs communicated that fully realized "the need for different agreements covering merchant vessels and warships", however, desired to devise a "new liability language" similar to that in the *Savannah* agreement. Da Rin underlined that this was a very important issue, since despite the homeporting of a submarine tender had been already approved and tending operations had begun, Italy would "not consider the matter formally closed until the question of guarantees had been settled".

In September 1972, the Italian Navy finally released the news that the homeporting of a submarine tender in La Maddalena had been granted to the US Navy, and the Italian press and public opinion immediately focused on this new US military presence in Italy, quickly

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[45] Martin to Rogers, Confidential Telegram no. 4988, Sep 1, 1972, in Ibid.

[46] USER to MFA, Secret Note Verbale no. 540, Aug 8, 1972 & MFA to USER, Secret Note Verbale no. 540/471, Aug 9, 1972 & "Additional Protocol Modifying the List of Installations Agreed Upon In Principle in Connection With the Agreements Between the United States of America and Italy on Bilateral Infrastructure Signed on October 20, 1954", enclosed to USER to DoS, Secret Airgram no. A-529, Aug 11, 1972, in Ibid.

[47] Martin to Rogers & Laird, Confidential Telegram no. 4954, Aug 31, 1972, in Ibid.

[48] "Agreement Between the Government of the United States and the Government of Italy on the Use of Italian Ports by the N.S. Savannah", quoted in Ibid.

seizing on the nuclear aspects[49] (Orsini, 2022). In this context, Da Rin raised once more the issue of the guarantees with the US Embassy, stating that from the point of view of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs it had not been resolved. In addition, the Italian diplomat complained that the vagueness of the Standard Statement would not help the Italian government handling the matter before the Parliament. However, commented Da Rin, Rome realized that no "agreement on new liability language" was likely to be reached before the Italian Parliament would debate the issue of the homeporting of a US submarine tender in La Maddalena on October 2, 1972, so the Italian government would be in the meantime satisfied if the US would submit a "definitive and detailed explanation" of how the US envisioned "the claims language of the Standard Statement operating in the case of Italy in the event of nuclear accident".

To meet the Italian government's request the US Embassy forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 2, 1972, a memorandum on the guarantee in case of nuclear accident in which the US government assured "responsiveness in case of a nuclear incident"[50]. During the following weeks, the Italian government overcame the parliamentary debate on the homeporting rights in La Maddalena granted to the US Navy, an issue that would eventually be faced successfully by Prime Minister Andreotti also during his October 1972 visit to Moscow, when Soviet Prime Minister Alexei K. Kosygin confronted him on the matter[51]. By October 1972, the hardest time caused by the publicity given to the homeporting agreement was over, and on November 2, 1972, Da Rin authorized its notification to the NATO[52].

In November 1972, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Giuseppe Medici emphasized to the press that "radiological surveys conducted at La Maddalena confirmed that there had been no contamination"[53]. By the end of 1972, the political storm caused by the homeporting of a US submarine tender seemed to have calmed down, as could also be proven by the fact that at the beginning of January 1973 the US and Italy were envisaging handling the remaining aspects of the implementation of the tender homeporting through a military-to-military agreement[54]. In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented to the US Embassy a *note verbale* stating that after an assessment of the "undertakings" assumed by the US government with respect to "both technical-operational safeguards and responsibilities for possible risks" the Italian government had judged these undertakings "to be in consonance with the requirement for the protection of [Italian] national interests", and therefore took note of the assurances given by the US government "concerning the stationing of a support unit at La Maddalena, as well as to any other operation involving Italian territorial waters"[55].

Conclusions

By January 1973, the chapter of the US-Italian agreements on the homeporting of a US submarine tender in La Maddalena was closed. The negotiations that led to this result during almost a year of diplomatic talks could be appraised as overall satisfactory for both countries, even though they both had to concede something. Rome had conceded the

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[49] Stabler to Rogers & Laird, Secret Telegram no. 4954, Sep 20, 1972, in Ibid.
[50] USER to MFA, Memorandum, Oct 2, 1972, quoted in Martin to DoS & DoD, Confidential Airgram no. A-50, Jan 23, 1973, in Ibid.
[51] Martin to Rogers & Laird, Telegram no. 6360, Oct 26, 1972, in Ibid.
[52] Stabler to Rogers, Telegram no. 6545, Nov 2, 1972, in Ibid.
[53] Stabler to Rogers & Lairs, Confidential Telegram no. 7359, Dec 1, 1972, in Ibid.
[54] DoS to USER, Confidential Telegram no. 004677, Jan 9, 1973, in Ibid.
[55] MFA to USER, Note Verbale no. 054/40, Jan 17, 1973, quoted in Martin to DoS & DoD, Confidential Airgram no. A-50, Jan 23, 1973, in Ibid.

homeporting of a US submarine tender in Italy and therefore accepted an almost continuous US nuclear submarine presence in its territorial waters, which had led to a domestic political storm and to the protests of the Soviet Union. However, Italy had secured a NATO capability in the Mediterranean that Rome wished for but was not willing to pay for. In addition, Italy had secured that the site of homeporting was La Maddalena, where the presence of a US naval facility could not but help to boost the already military-industrial oriented local economy; in the meantime, the port of Augusta had been left free to continue its ongoing expansion driven by civilian activities without the unavoidable interference caused by the continuous calls of US submarines. Finally, Rome had secured from the US some guarantees and undertakings in case of nuclear accidents that were considered adequate by the Italian government, who therefore deemed to have pursued the Italian national interests also with respect to this sensitive aspect. On the other hand, the US had promptly secured the homeporting of a US submarine tender in the Mediterranean and therefore extended the capability of the 6th Fleet, even though they had to accept to open a new naval base in the remote Tyrrhenian archipelago of La Maddalena instead of the location desired by the US Navy in Augusta Bay, and eventually provide to the Italian government explicit "responsiveness in case of a nuclear incident". In any case, the two allies had secured an agreement that strengthened the defense of NATO's Southern flank and of the Mediterranean, a sea that within months was to come back in the spotlight with the Yom Kippur War and the consequent reinforcement of the 5th *Eskadra*.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine as an Identity Project
Disentangling the Roots and Dynamics of Russia's Long War over Post-Soviet Identity

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Abstract

In this paper we will devote our attention to the evolution of the narratives promoted by the Russian Federation around the Russian identity in post-Soviet times, focusing on their impact on the other former Soviet republics. Here we will move from an ideational dimension to concrete policy-making: in particular, our attention will go to the legal dimension of Russian identity-building. By reviewing legal acts and programmatic documents adopted by the Russian state over the last decades, we will identify the unfolding "normativization" of the identity project in post-Soviet Russia and its implications for Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. As we will see in the final section of the paper, the case of 2022 Russia's military invasion of Ukraine shows how the initial ideational dimension can evolve into concrete policies, such as the process of "passportization," which unfolded in 2014-2022, making ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers abroad again part of a legally-binding community of Russian citizens under the control of the Russian state.

Keywords: War in Ukraine; Russian Federation; Russian diaspora; Passportization; Near Abroad.

Introduction[1]

The controversial events that brought to the contested annexation of the self-proclaimed Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics and the Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia to the Russian Federation in September 2022 have been followed by an intense discursive process enacted by Russian officials around the shape of national identity. The ceremony for signing the treaties on the accession of the four regions to the Russian Federation, which took place on September 30 in the Grand Kremlin Palace's St. George Hall, was the opportunity for Vladimir Putin (Prezident Rossii, 2022b) to formalize the restored "unity" (edinstvo) – built on a "common destiny and thousand-year history" (obshchaia sudba i tysiacheletniaia istoriia) – after the "tragedy of the collapse of the Soviet Union"

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[1] Marco Puleri is the author of the following sections: "Introduction"; "The Internal, External and Legal Dimensions of National Identity: the 'Russian nation', the 'Russian diaspora', and the 'Russian citizens'"; "From an Ideational Dimension to Policy-Making: the Making of Russians (Beyond Russia)"; "From Geopolitics to Biopolitics: Passportization and the Defence of Russian Citizens in the Near Abroad"; "Concluding Remarks". Dmytro Mamaiev and Marco Puleri co-authored the section: "The Case of Passportization in Ukraine and the Normativization of the Russian Identity".

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(posle tragedii raspada Sovetskogo Soiusa), whereby "millions of people" – who, "by their culture, faith, traditions, and language, consider themselves part of Russia" – showed their determination "to return to their true, historical Fatherland" (v svoe podlinnoe, istoricheskoe Otechestvo). As a result of the so-called referendums on joining Russia in the occupied territories of Ukraine – which took place even if Russia did not have complete control of the respective administrative borders of the four Ukrainian regions, the annexation was thus certainly aimed to legitimize the progress of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, but also to crystallize the shaping of a new identity project for Russia. In a similar vein, as Marlene Laruelle (2022) highlighted, this war could be meant both as "a strategic conflict with the West to reshape the post-Cold War European order *and* an identity project for Russia". Most fundamentally, whereby "the strategic aspect has been well studied, the second roots of the war are more complex because the Kremlin has produced multiple ideological narratives on Russia's nation building" (Laruelle, 2022): thus, a long-term perspective seems more suitable to understand the current war as the result of the "progressive reinvention of the country's political and territorial identity".

In this paper, we will devote our attention to the evolution of the narratives promoted by the Russian Federation around the "Russian identity" in post-Soviet times, focusing on their impact on the other former Soviet republics and moving from an ideational dimension to concrete policy-making. In particular, our focus will be on the crystallization of the idea conveyed by the Russian political elite around the reunification of "historical Russia" – in territorial and spatial terms – passing through the reunification of its "people" – in societal and humanitarian terms. Looking at the development of policies relating to "compatriots" (sootechestvenniki) and the "Russian world" (Russkii mir) between the late nineties and the 2000s, we will be able to identify the gradual transition of these rhetorical and ideational constructs to a "normative" level. Here our attention will go precisely to the legal dimension of Russian identity-building: i.e., by reviewing legal acts and programmatic documents adopted by the Russian state over the last decades, we will identify the unfolding "normativization" of the identity project in post-Soviet Russia, and its implications for Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. As we will see in the final section of the paper, the case of the 2022 military invasion of Ukraine shows how the initial ideational dimension can evolve into concrete policies, such as the process of "passportization," which unfolded in 2014-2022, making ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers abroad again part of a legally-binding community of Russian citizens under the control of the Russian state.

The Internal, External and Legal Dimensions of National Identity: the "Russian Nation", the "Russian Diaspora" and the "Russian Citizens"

The identity project advanced by Russian officials in support of the ongoing war in Ukraine has a long history and goes far beyond the dynamics of the current political crisis: it can be better understood as an attempt to shape a definitive answer to "the multiple challenges to Russia's post-Soviet identity" (Kazharski, 2019, p. 71) that have emerged during the last three decades. According to Aliaksei Kazharski's categorization, these challenges, or "lines of fragmentation", run along several spheres of the Russian post-Soviet experience, which can be summarized as follows:

> The territorial line of fragmentation refers to the discrepancies between the current, legally defined borders of the Russian Federation and the persisting 'geopolitical imaginaries' that are inspired by notions of a greater territorial past, reflected in concepts such as 'historical Russia.' The societal or humanitarian line of fragmentation refers to a sense of having lost large numbers of kin population now resident in the 'near' or even 'far' abroad. This is reflected in notions such as 'divided people.' The historical line of fragmentation refers to ruptures in ideological

foundations of state-building projects which correspond to different periods of Russian history. Finally, the ethnocultural line of fragmentation refers to challenges of contemporary Russian federalism that has had only limited success in coping with national tensions inside Russia proper. (Kazharski, 2019, pp. 72-73)

The pressing need for a response to the challenges to national identity has been viewed as a priority for political and intellectual elites in Russia since the collapse of the USSR (Tolz, 2004, pp. 177-178). Nonetheless, the same elites have often been divided over the process of reinventing the country's political identity. In her 2011 study on Russian nation-building, Oxana Shevel came to identify five main nation-building projects "reflecting the dominant ways of imagining the 'true' Russian nation" (Shevel, 2011, p. 179), which she classified as follows: a) the nation defined by the territory of the existing state; b) the nation as ethnic Russians; c) an Eastern Slavic nation; d) a Russian-speaking nation; e) a nation defined by the territory of the former USSR. Over the course of Russia's post-Soviet history, the internal division over the plural definitions of the Russian nation – each having its own promoters and following a "civic" or "ethnic" understanding of Russian identity alternatively – has gradually resulted in the contradictory nation-building agendas advanced by Russian officials in recent decades, whereby "all five definitions of the Russian nation are problematic" in terms of "potential irredentism and consequences for Russia's territorial integrity", thus "making their adoption in state policy difficult" (Shevel, 2011, p. 267). It is no surprise that still in 2017 Marlene Laruelle (2017) referred to Russian nation-building as a "balancing game" in the domestic ideological market. In a similar vein, Helge Blakkisrud (2016, p. 267) highlighted how even during Putin's third term (2012-2018) "the Kremlin's response […] has been to deliberately blur the boundaries between the civic rossiiskii and the ethnic russkii identities", thus "holding up the Russian language, culture and traditional values as the core of this identity".

Undoubtedly, among the lines of fragmentation mentioned by Kazharskii, the societal or humanitarian one has recently embodied a central role in structuring the current narrative around the war in Ukraine, whereby since 2014 – after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas – Russian officials "made finely honed references to the divided nature of the Russian nation and Russia's legitimate moral duty to take care of Russian communities outside Russia and to respect their supposed desire to rejoin the motherland" (Laruelle, 2015a, p. 88). Such a turn is the result of the progressive blurring of the different ideational dimensions of the Russian nation, paradoxically moving the debate over Russian national identity *beyond* the territorial borders of the Russian Federation: the Russian-speaking "diaspora" thus became an integral part of this evolving pattern of Russian identities (and their use for political ambitions).

Following these lines, it is necessary to clarify the peculiar position of the "external dimension" of the Russian national identity, by making a clear reference to the kind of "diasporic community" constructed by the Russian authorities in recent decades. Rather than describing the latter as an entity, we should focus on its role in articulating a response to the multiple challenges to Russia's post-Soviet identity. By using the term diaspora, here we refer thus to "a category of practice", which "is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties" (Brubaker, 2005, p. 12). Borrowing Brubaker's definition, we deal with a category "with a strong normative change", which "does not so much describe the world as seek to remake it". This definition fits well the urgency of Russian political and intellectual elites, while witnessing the disintegration of the territorial boundaries of the Soviet state. As Valery Tishkov retraces:

> After the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the problem of the diaspora evolved quickly, when it was transformed into a political and even a

> humanitarian challenge. Unlike the earlier diaspora, most of this new community had not emigrated from Russia, but rather were displaced from Russia because international borders had shifted and the Russian state had shrunked. (Tishkov, 2008, p. 3)

Thus, when using the term "Russian diaspora", we should refer to a discourse emerging in the Russian political and intellectual debate around the societal impact of the "migration of borders" (Jašina-Schäfer, 2021, p. 1) following the political transition from Soviet to post-Soviet times: a process turning Russian speakers "into minorities with disputed membership". On the one hand, Brubaker (2000, pp. 1-2) described such an imagined community as an "accidental diaspora" determined "by the movement of borders across people", which "might better be characterized as post-multinational" – rather than post-national, since it occurred as a result of the disintegration of a previously multinational political structure. On the other, in their 2018 study on the Russian-speaking populations residing in the other fourteen states emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ammon Cheskin and Angela Kachuyevsky (2018, pp. 18-19) highlighted how "it is hardly possible to talk of a unified diaspora in the post-Soviet space", since "the disparate internal conditions of each separate state lead to a wide range of possible reactions to Russia's diasporising policies". Mikhail Suslov goes even further in the introductory section of his 2017 study on Russia's policy towards its diaspora, by claiming that we cannot even describe the latter as "Russian":

> […] the Russian diaspora is not a diaspora in the strict sense, and nor is it 'Russian'. This 'Russian diaspora' is in fact a post-Soviet diaspora, its homeland no longer in existence. So, when today's Russia, which is a nation-state of Russians, tries to appropriate this effectively non-Russian diaspora, it creates tensions, ironies and confusions. (Suslov, 2017, p. 10).

Yet, in the decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the "lack of a fixed definition of the diaspora" provided the Kremlin with several opportunities to constantly reshape it according to the specific goals to be achieved. Nonetheless, an emerging paradox for the Russian elite has been the one of dealing with "the political subjectivity of the Russian diaspora": as Suslov (2017, pp. 9-10) highlights, "in order to achieve the desired level of political mobilization, a diaspora must have a political project, but because Russian elites (reasonably) fear losing control over this project by giving a voice to those disloyal to Kremlin, a true political project is not present". This controversial situation has eventually given rise to the need for a gradual convergence between the "Russian diaspora" and "Russian citizens", first in an ideational dimension and then in concrete terms of policy-making, in order to guarantee a tighter control of the state over the inherent diversity of Russianness and to use the latter as a foreign-policy tool.

Unsurprisingly, as Shevel could observe still in 2011, it is within the ideational framework of the Russian diaspora where "the vexing nature of Russia's nation-building dilemma may have found a surprising legal solution" (Shevel, 2011, p. 179). A thorough reading of the legal dimension of Russian nation-building sanctioned by the act on "compatriots" (sootechestvenniki) – primarily addressing former Soviet citizens residing in the newly-independent states – and the citizenship laws in 1991 and 2002, invites us to reconsider how an "in-depth look at the politics of Russian policy-making about citizenship can shed light on the larger process of nation-building in Russia" (Shevel, 2012, p. 113).[2] As we will read in

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[2] As Shevel (2012, p. 111) points out in her study on citizenship policy in post-Soviet Russia: "Citizenship laws of all states define what can be called the 'official' nation of a given state – the group officially recognized as 'us' rather than 'other' by the state. This group consists of those included in the original body of citizens when

the next section, an exemplary case is the 1999 compatriots' law, which came as an initial response to the long debate over the nature of the societal and humanitarian line of fragmentation challenging Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the long term, it paradoxically did not "not solve the contradictions associated with each of the nation-building agendas", but instead legalized "the ambiguity on the question of the nation's boundaries" (Shevel, 2011, p. 179). At the same time, while on the one hand it guaranteed "the government a way out" of "Russia's nation-building dilemma" (Shevel, 2012, p. 140), on the other today it allows the government "to pursue a broad range of policies in the name of compatriots and admit into the body of the official nation only those whom it sees as desirable" (Shevel, 2012, p. 142). Through the analysis of the legal dimension sanctioning the belonging of the "desirable members" of the "diaspora" to the "Russian nation" we may thus witness how the hybridization of the ideational and normative features of the political language in Russia comes to take shape (and, eventually, to be institutionalized) as an instrument for exerting, on the one hand, state's control over domestic nation-building and, on the other, influence over the contested "near abroad".

From an Ideational Dimension to Policy-Making: The Making of Russians (Beyond Russia)

In order to understand the crucial role played by the "external" dimension of Russian identity in post-Soviet times, we may retrace the evolution of the categorization of the Russian diaspora in the domestic political debate since the early 1990s. As we will see, the result of the evolving pattern of state narratives over "Russians abroad" mainly responded to the need for balancing and appropriating the diverse stances that had already been advanced by the different actors involved in the domestic political struggle.

In the early 1990s, a contested debate over Russian foreign policy in the Near Abroad was at the core of the tensions between the Presidential administration under Boris Eltsin and the Parliament. This dynamic highly impacted on the roots of the Russian strategic vision of its diaspora, making the "societal or humanitarian" line of fragmentation a true bone of contention in the newly-born Russian Federation. As Suslov retraces as part of the first phase of Russia's Diaspora Policy (1991-1997):

> [...] in the beginning, the vision of diaspora was couched in the oppositional to President Yeltsyn right-left revanchists, who dreamt about the restoration of the Soviet Union and consequently constructed the category of 'compatriots abroad' in the inclusive imperial way, with the view of using the victimized Russians in the 'near abroad' as a means to anesthetize the trauma of the disintegration of the country. (Suslov, 2017, p.17)

Even the first ideal (and, later, normative) definition of the diaspora in the Russian political debate reflected a privileged interest in the role of the so-called "compatriots" (sootechestvenniki) in the Near Abroad. Interestingly enough, at the time this claim was not advanced by the presidential administration, but by an oppositional political movement emerged right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in late 1991: the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO), under the leadership of Dmitrii Rogozin. Going back to the main ideas advanced by the KRO in the manifesto issued in 1994, it is possible to highlight the "distinctive voice" of the movement:

> [...] today, in spite of the political borders which have cut up the country, the existence of the Russian nation [russkaia natsiia], connected by a unity of culture, historic past and historic mission, has not ceased [...] WE WERE A UNITED NATION AND WE SHALL

citizenship law was first adopted plus those entitled to simplified access to citizenship without having to fulfill naturalization requirements".

> RETURN TO NATIONAL UNITY.[3] Only having overcome the division of the Russian nation [russkaia natsiia] it is possible to restore civil dignity to millions of people, to revive Russia and save her priceless culture from annihilation […] We are all Russians [russkie] to the extent that we accept Russian [russkaia] culture, feel the link with Russian [russkaia] history and realise responsibility for the future of Russia. (Savelev et al., 1994, p. 11)

As Laruelle (2015b, p. 7) highlighted, the movement "called for protecting Russian minorities and, if possible, for modifying borders in order to integrate Belarus, Transnistria, at least part of Ukraine, and northern Kazakhstan into the Russian Federation". While these geopolitical ambitions remained quite unique, at the time KRO's general position in support of Russian minorities came to be widely shared by other factions in the Parliament, and resulted in the approval of the first Declaration on the support of the Russian Diaspora and the Protection of Russian Compatriots abroad, and the establishment of the Council of Compatriots, by the State Duma in 1995. The document differentiated between the diaspora per se and the compatriots, whereby the latter were described as follows: "[…] any person who is a native of the USSR and Russia or his direct descendant, but who is not a citizen of the Russian Federation" (Gosudarstvennaia Duma, 1996). This early articulation of "compatriots" reflected the nature of the first Citizenship Law in Russia, approved still in the late-Soviet era in 1991, which "defined the 'official' Russian nation as all Soviet citizens by making them eligible for Russian citizenship either automatically or through a simple declaration" (Shevel, 2012, p. 120): at the time, as Shevel retraces in her 2012 study, the "Russian citizenship politics […] can be characterized as informed by both national identity considerations and practical concerns", since the law reflected an "understanding of the nation and the state prevalent at the time" and the late-Soviet Russian "hope that some form of union state could be preserved" out of the decaying USSR (Shevel, 2012, pp. 122-123). Only later, the 1993 amendment to the citizenship law, which sanctioned that former Soviet citizens were not required to renounce their prior citizenship before acquiring the Russian one, made Russian authorities push for "dual citizenship" as the ground for future political integration in the post-Soviet space.[4] The specific reference to the new territorial configuration after the fall of the USSR as the primary marker of the identity of the compatriots in the 1995 declaration came then to be further remodulated in the contested political climate in the late 1990s, whereby the approval of the first law "On the State Policy in Relation to Compatriots Abroad" in 1999 already embodied a wider cohort, and reflected the "voluntaristic" dimension supported by KRO:

> Compatriots abroad (hereinafter referred to as compatriots) are citizens of the Russian Federation permanently residing outside the territory of the Russian Federation […] Are also recognized as compatriots individuals and their descendants who live outside the territory of the Russian Federation and who, as a rule, belong to the peoples historically living on the territory of the Russian Federation, and who have made a free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal ties with the Russian Federation […]. (Federalnyi Zakon, 1999)

The law reflected the tumultuous experience of the political debate in the 1990s, giving birth to an "inclusive" legal definition of compatriots, reflecting interests that go even

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[3] Emphasis in original.

[4] Along these lines, the compatriots' legal paradigm started to be developed in parallel to the strategy of dual citizenship, which was harshly opposed by the other post-Soviet states, and reflected not only a renewed ambition for regional integration, but also a practical concern for the fate of Russians in the former Soviet republics and the threat of their massive migration flow to the Russian Federation (see Shevel, 2012, pp. 123-124).

beyond the post-Soviet region and reach the so-called "Global Russians" residing in the West.[5] Only after Putin's rise to power in 2000 did the presidential administration reappropriate the concept for the sake of a global strategy that was still to be developed. It is no surprise that already in August 2001 the President signed the "Concept of Support for Compatriots" (Kontseptsiia, 2001), which included several directions for making the compatriots an integral part of concrete "foreign and domestic policy"-making. Among them, we may mention:

- the use of international mechanisms and procedures for ensuring and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of people belonging to minorities;

- the financial and economic support of Compatriots in the Near Abroad;

- the support for their resettlement to Russia on a voluntary basis or due to emergency circumstances;

- the support for public organizations and associations of compatriots.

A few months later, in October 2001, Vladimir Putin's speech at the First International Congress of Compatriots living abroad would have eventually crystallized the emerging position of the new presidential administration on the territorial and "spiritual" identity of the "Russian-speaking community", making clear their strict link to the Russian state (and the "Russian World"):

> The Russian-speaking community, together with Russian citizens, now ranks fifth in the world. Tens of millions of people who speak, think, and, perhaps, more importantly, feel in Russian, live outside the Russian Federation […] There has long been a heated debate about who should be considered compatriots. We often try to put what is challenging to measure and explain in words into legal formulas. This probably needs to be done. However, compatriots are not only a legal category. And even more so, it's not a question of status or any benefits. This is primarily a matter of personal choice. A question of self-determination. I would say even more precisely, spiritual self-determination. This path is not always easy. After all, the concept of the "Russian world" from time immemorial went far beyond the geographical borders of Russia and even far beyond the boundaries of the Russian ethnic group. (Vsemirnyi koordinatsionnyi sovet, 2001)

The overlapping between the policy of "compatriots" and the idea of the "Russian world" is not accidental in this speech by Putin from 2001, and can only be understood by looking at the philosophical and conceptual work developed by those figures who worked close to Eltsin's political establishment in the second half of the nineties, and in particular the so-called "polittekhnologi" – political technologists (or, *gumanitarnye technologi* – humanitarian technologists): i.e., a class of intellectuals and consultants of the Russian political elite working on the "professional engineering of politics" in times of electoral campaign or strategic planning regarding domestic or foreign policy (see Wilson 2023). Among these, two figures experiencing mixed fortunes in Putin's political establishment and becoming political advisors to the Russian President – Petr Shchedrovitskii until 2006 and Gleb Pavlovskii until 2011 – are those who in the 1990s gave shape to the repertoire of

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[5] For a comprehensive understanding of the concept of Global Russians, see Ageeva and Akopov's definition: "[…] global Russians are individuals who, even while not residing in Russia, identify with Russian civilization, remain immersed in Russian language and cultural environments, and are actively engaged with Russian society. At the same time, their international professional recognition allows them to contribute to cultural, intellectual and economic developments at a global level. Furthermore, Global Russians have the capability and inclination for critical thinking about Russia's social developments" (Ageeva & Akopov, 2022, p.1340).

Russian political discourse around the formation of the so-called idea of the "Russian World".[6]

Already in 1996, Pavlovskii and Shchedrovitskii worked within the so-called Russkii Institute, an autonomous organization founded in March 1996, whose statutory objective was to promote the formation of Russian cultural and social identity. Within a renewed intellectual reflection around the fragmented nature of Russian identity, this first elaboration of the idea of the "Russian world" was aimed "to theorize the community of the Russian speakers on the globe", acknowledging that "today it was the Russian diaspora, which became more important than core Russia, because the diaspora was better adapted to globalization" (Suslov, 2018, p. 335), thus radically revising the center-periphery relations in the traditional imperial and Soviet understanding. In his 1999 essay titled 'Russkii Mir i transnatsionalnoe russkoe' (The Russian World and the Transnational Russianness), Shchedrovitskii could define the centrality of the Russian world (and the Russian diaspora) within the new geopolitical framework:

> During the 20th century, under the influence of enormous historical changes, world wars and revolutions around the globe, the Russian world emerged as a networked structure of large and small communities that think and speak Russian. It is no secret that barely half of the population of the Russian world lives on the territory delimited by the administrative borders of the Russian Federation. (Shchedrovitskii, 1999)

This original framing of the Russian World had nothing to do with the spatial or territorial dimension, but had a humanitarian value, promoting an alternative de-territorialized and decentered imagery of the global Russian-speaking community as a network of partnerships, where "this is the diaspora, which is invited to exert influence on core Russia, not the reverse" (Suslov, 2018, p. 336). Only the appropriation of the concept by state actors in the early 2000s will then revert the balance of powers between the "core Russia" – i.e., the Russian state – and the "Russian diaspora", creating a newly-territorialized understanding of the concept, where the Russian world is depicted "as a kind of the solar system, revolving around its only centre of gravity – the Russian Federation" (Suslov, 2018, p. 338). In this new normative understanding, the Russian world becomes "a geopolitical entity", which "is now defined as a monolithic body of the Russian people, Russian state, Russian lands, Russian culture and Russian values" (Suslov, 2018, p. 344), thus answering and intersecting the territorial and societal-humanitarian lines of fragmentation of Russia's post-Soviet identity.

As Suslov highlights in his 2017 study, in the early stage of diaspora policies the fluidity of the ideal dimension of the Russian diaspora as being conceptualized by Russian officials eventually came to determine the lack of clear strategy and structure for the concrete actions of the Kremlin in terms of policy-making. It was only in the 2000s that the gradual convergence of categories such as the Soviet legacy, Russian language and Russian ethnicity created a target group for national policy-making that made the so-called Russians in the near abroad become "the main object of the Kremlin's policies of instrumentalizing diaspora", such as "passportization, repatriation and irredentism" (Suslov, 2017, p. 12). As Aliaksei Kazharski highlighted in his 2019 study, indeed, also "spatial constructs of 'great' or 'historical' Russia have been activated in discourses on the Russian 'near abroad'", whereby Russian political discourse gradually "framed post-Soviet integration as the task of

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[6] As Suslov retraces in his study dedicated to the prehistory of the concept: "The authorship of the 'Russian world' is contested among several intellectuals including Gleb Pavlovskii, Petr Shchedrovitskii and Iurii Krupnov. In fact, they all belong to the same mildly conservative network of intellectuals, whose most important 'nodes' could be found in the group of 'methodologists' [...], Foundation for the Effective Politics, and the circle of 'new conservatives' [...]" (Suslov, 2018, p. 334).

'gathering lands' as opposed to giving them away (sobirat', a ne razdavat' zemli) and 'restoring historical Russia in its historical borders'" (Kazharski, 2019, p. 77).

Within this evolution of Russian diaspora policies, Ukraine played again a crucial role: the "Orange Revolution" taking shape in Kyiv in 2004 and distancing Ukraine from the Russian-led integration process influenced the "Kremlin's perception that it was defeated in its neighborhood" (Laruelle, 2015b, p. 10), and only then "Russia's compatriot policy became increasingly reinterpreted to suppress the elements of partnership while highlighting its confrontational element as Russia's soft-power instrument in its struggle with the West" (Suslov, 2017, p. 24).

The institutionalization and systematization of diaspora policies occurred through the creation of new bodies, such as the Russkii Mir Foundation in 2007 and the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) in 2008. The former was the final result of the alternative identity project elaborated by the Presidential Administration in the early 2000s, aiming to shape a new framework for Russia's public diplomacy not only in the Near Abroad, but also in the West (see Laruelle, 2015b). As Lara Ryazanova-Clarke retraces in her 2014 study, the aim of this new institution:

> is to create a new space for a Russian-speaking identity, a network that aspires to integrate Russian 'compatriots' […] who live outside the mainland, along with a broader range of those who are 'interested in Russia' and 'are concerned about its future'" (Ryazanova-Clarke 2014, pp. 249-250).

On the other hand, Rossotrudnichestvo was established as a new federal agency with the role of promoting "cultural diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and cooperation with compatriots, which is unparalleled with any Western cultural diplomacy institutions but remain characteristic for the Russian understanding of 'international humanitarian cooperation'" (Koval, Tereshchenko 2023, p. 14).

Differently from the Russkii Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo was the result of the revamping of the RoszarubezhTsentr (Russian Center for International Science and Culture Cooperation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), which had been founded in 1994 to foster relations of Russia with foreign countries. As Koval et al. (2023, p. 32) retrace in their study on Russian cultural diplomacy under Putin, the Decree establishing the new federal agency came "less than a month after Russia's troops invaded the territory of Georgia", as a result of "Russia's realization that it needed to reconsider its approach to the use of soft power and re-evaluate its weight in light of the 2003-2004 colour revolutions in Eastern Europe and the deterioration of attitudes towards Russia in the aftermath of its 2008 attack on Georgia". The same year, an amendment to the new 2002 Citizenship law – which will be discussed in the following section – extended the right to facilitated access to Russian citizenship to the participants in the "compatriots resettlement program", which had been launched in 2007. Later, in 2010 the 1999 compatriots' law was also amended, and further blurred the boundaries of the compatriots group: now it was "not to limit the 'compatriots' designation to 'peoples which have traditionally lived on the territory of the Russian Federation", but was there "to extend it to 'Russians and Russian-speakers and representatives of other nationalities living in states of the far and near abroad'" (Shevel, 2011, p. 195).

From Geopolitics to Biopolitics: Passportization and the Defence of Russian Citizens in the Near Abroad

It should be no surprise that among the new strategic goals of the 2008 Foreign Policy concept approved by then President Dmitrii Medvedev the Russian diaspora came to be mentioned as being an integral part of a broader foreign-policy strategy:

> […] to protect the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad, on the basis of international law and existing bilateral agreements, considering the multi-million Russian diaspora – the Russian World – as a partner, also in expanding and strengthening the space of Russian language and culture […]. (Kontseptsiia vneshnei politiki, 2008)

Most importantly, the reformulation of diaspora policies made their role crucial in creating the ground for the future direct involvement of the Kremlin in the domestic affairs of the states in the Near Abroad: namely, the liberalization of citizenship policies, together with peacekeeping operations, in territorial conflicts, shaped the so-called practices of "passportization", whereby the Russian Federation could now have the right to intervene in defence of the Russian citizens in the region according to international law. Also in this case, as Laruelle highlights, we witnessed the gradual legitimization of stances that had already emerged in the 1990s, as being advocated by the KRO, first, and then Rodina, the party formation of the former KRO leader Dmitrii Rogozin[7] in the early 2000s:

> Whereas the KRO–Rodina network advocated that Russia should grant compatriots a legal status enabling their defense manu militari, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Duma have always emphasized the state's inability to defend people who are not legally citizens of the Russian Federation–that is, until the Ukraine crisis of 2014. (Laruelle, 2015a, p. 93).

Indeed, already in 2008, the defense of Russian citizens in South Ossetia was advanced as the main justification for the Russian military intervention in Georgia, whereby the so-called passportization policies promoted by the Russian Federation since the early 2000s created a situation where "more than 90 per cent of the residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia had obtained Russian citizenship before the 2008 war" (Nagashima, 2019, p. 186). Interestingly enough, the then President of the Russian Federation, Dmitrii Medvedev, in his statement on the situation in South Ossetia clearly referred to the national interest of the Russian Federation, mentioning the need for protecting "Russian citizens" abroad:

> Civilians, women, children, and older people are dying today in South Ossetia, and the majority of them are citizens of the Russian Federation. In accordance with the Constitution and the federal laws, as President of the Russian Federation it is my duty to protect the lives and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they may be. (Prezident Rossii, 2008)

As Toru Nagashima poses in his study on Russia's passportization policy toward unrecognized republics, passportization acquired "a legal basis" for its development only within the framework of the new citizenship law of the Russian Federation, which was approved in 2002, when again "the conflict between the national idea and the logics of state-building […] was resolved in favor of the state" (Shevel, 2012, p. 127).[8] Till the end of 2000, all the former citizens of the USSR living outside Russia could register to acquire Russian citizenship according to the 1991 citizenship law: the law reflected the common concern of the Russian political elite after the "reduction" of the Soviet territorial borders, and within

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[7] It is no surprise that in the Putin era Rogozin himself gradually became a central figure in the country's political establishment: first, as the chairman of the Duma Committee for Foreign Affairs between the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, then as the Russian ambassador to NATO between 2008 and 2011, and again between 2011 and 2022 as Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and the Space Industry and Director General of Roscosmos. In September 2023, he was appointed aspirational senator by the governor of the Russian-occupied Zaporozhe Oblast.

[8] As Nagashima (2019, p. 189) highlights: "While the old citizenship law of 1992 was based on the idea that the open citizenship policy would foster future political integration in the former Soviet space, the concept of the new citizenship law of 2002 was derived from economic pragmatism and the belief that the 1992 citizenship law imposed an undue economic burden on Russia".

this framework, for example, the KRO was able to help informally residents in Abkhazia to secure Russian citizenship from 1998 to 2001 (Nagashima, 2019, p.188). However, after the approval of the 2002 law, in order to obtain Russian citizenship, former Soviet citizens who were not born within the territory of the Russian Federation had to fulfill the same requirements as other foreign citizens. At the same time, according to Article 14 of the 2002 legal provision, the new law "provided a loophole for residents in the breakaway regions to become Russian citizens in a simplified procedure", exempting them from the five-year residence requirement (Nagashima, 2019, p. 190). Interestingly enough, this article came to be included as part of the new citizenship law as a result of the political pressure made by the communist deputies Anatolii Chekhoev and Viktor Alksnis, advocating for "compatriots' rights", who managed to have their amendment plan to the presidential draft accepted in the final version of the law.

Thus, even if initially "the passportization policy was not embedded in the Kremlin's general policy", it became pretty active in Abkhazia in June 2002 "on an ad hoc basis, considering developments in international relations" (Nagashima, 2019, p. 190).[9] This dynamic made the "passportizazion policy" become a reactive measure in those neighboring political contexts where contestation could arise against the political will of the Kremlin, making it both a valuable foreign-policy instrument and a tool for sustaining new potential identity projects. As Gerard Toal could already highlight in 2017:

> The policy change proved significant because it gave bureaucratic state form to imagined communities of identity and belonging—*russkii* (ethnic Russians), *rossiyanye* ("Russians"), *sootechestvenniki* ("compatriots"), and those within *Russkii Mir* (the "Russian World")—beyond Russia's borders. Geopolitics was more transparently expressing itself as biopolitics (the management of populations). (Toal, 2017, pp. 140-141)

Most fundamentally, the prehistory of the policies implemented by Russia in the 2000s comes to be truly important when addressing the dynamics in Ukraine even long before February 2022, whereby already since 2014 the instrumental use of the legal framework for Russian citizenship in times of territorial conflicts became a widespread practice making only in 2020 "a total of 409,549 people who were previously citizens of Ukraine" become Russian citizens – i.e., "62% of the total number of all those who received a Russian passport" (Gulina, 2021) the same year – thus legitimizing the political goals of the Kremlin.

The Case of Passportization in Ukraine and the Normativization of the Russian Identity Project

A conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been ongoing for more than ten years: i.e., long before it turned out in the form of the full-scale aggression by the Russian Federation that occurred on 24 February 2022. Since 2014, the Ukrainian government and representatives of public organizations on all possible platforms have been rejecting the Kremlin's assertions that a civil war is allegedly going on in Ukraine (International Crisis Group, n.d.). Following the narrative of assistance to the "rebellious Donbass", Russian President Vladimir Putin kept on promising an "adequate response" in the event of an offensive by the Ukrainian army on Donets'k and Luhans'k (Prezident Rossii, 2018). And, according to Putin's address to the Russian citizens on 24 February 2022, the need for a "special military operation" in Ukraine was required in order "to combat Ukrainian fascists and nationalists who crossed their red lines with regard to the Donetsk and Lugansk regions" (Prezident Rossii, 2022c).

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[9] The impact became quite relevant in Abkhazia and South Ossetia already few months after the start of passportization: in the former the percentage of Russian citizens grew from 20 to 70 % already in June 2002, while in the latter it reached more than 80% by January 2003.

According to the Kremlin, such a "type of oppression from the Kyiv regime" has led to the emergence of so-called "rebels" on the territories of "Donetsk/Luhansk People's Republics". Actually, as Konstantin Skorkin retraced in a 2023 article emblematically entitled *Who decided on the boundaries of the 'Russian World'? A brief history of Donbas separatism*, the roots of this war should be related to the early 2000s, whereby: "Since the Orange Revolution, in 2004, the Russian authorities have been deliberately pitting the residents of various Ukrainian regions against each other – and the clash has now grown to massive proportions, with enormously bloody consequences" (Skorkin, 2023). This process involved the growth and participation of Kremlin-funded organizations mobilizing the "Russian diaspora" in pursuing Donbas separatism, which have been very active in the region since late 2000s: e.g., the Ukrainian branch of the Russian state-sponsored Institute of Diaspora and Integration (or Institute of CIS countries) established in 1996 in Russia to provide a comprehensive study of socio-political and economic processes in the post-Soviet space, and the problems of Russian compatriots, which was led by the State Duma deputy Konstantin Zatulin – who already in 1994 was appointed as the head of the Duma Committee for the Compatriots abroad (Institut stran SNG, n.d.); or the Russian Center in Luhans'k funded by the Russkii Mir Foundation (Russkii Mir, 2009). In other words, the history of "Donbas separatism is a vivid example of what Putin's 'soft power' can become in the post-Soviet region", whereby the Kremlin was able to use "the local Russian-speaking population as an instrument for meddling in the internal affairs of a neighboring country" (Skorkin, 2023).

The same is true for the dynamics bringing to the rise of the Anti-Maidan movement in Donbas in 2014, whereby the "governance crisis precipitated by the Euromaidan protests created a moment of opportunity for a cross-border network of pro-Russia activists to seize power in Donbas and beyond in southeast Ukraine" (O'Loughlin et al., 2017, p. 125), bringing to the revival of the secessionist imaginary of "Novorossiya",[10] which was described by Laruelle (2018, p. 195) as "a live mythmaking process orchestrated [...] by different Russian nationalist circles" who were not directly linked to the presidential administration – even if "Novorossiya" acquired public legitimacy in the Russian public discourse also thanks to Putin's use of the term in April 2014. At the same time, as O'Loughlin et al. (2017, p. 127) retrace in their historical reconstruction of the "Anti-Maidan movement", "the Kremlin appears to have authorized the Russian security services to use their influence to create territorial governance problems for the new pro-Western Government in Kyiv", by gathering a "plethora of networks", such as former Communist Party members, imperial nationalist groups and financial-economic regional groups, around "their opposition to the new government in Kyiv after February 2014" – i.e., after Viktor Ianukhovych's removal from power.

Nonetheless, during 2014-2022, following the Russian perspective, Ukraine has been fighting with its own people, whereby Ukrainian officials "openly and with impunity call for the murdering of Russian people [russkikh liudei]" (PRRFUN, 2022). At the same time, in 2022 the Kremlin's narrative changed, also as a result of passportization policies. On the occasion of the extraordinary meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, which was convened on February 21, 2022, to discuss the potential recognition of the sovereignty of

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[10] The historical term "Novorossiya" describes the Russian province of the Russian Empire created in the territories north of the Black Sea that were conquered after several wars with the Ottoman Empire in the late XVIII century, expanding then as to include the newly-acquired lands around the Azov Sea. As O'Loughlin et al. (2017, p. 125) retrace, in spring 2014, Donbas rebels "posted maps of Novorossiya as comprising eight oblasts of southeast Ukraine", and later the leaders of the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donets'k and Luhans'k even "announced the creation of Novorossiya as a confederal Union of People's Republic" – but already one year later the project was officially suspended.

Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics, Dmitrii Medvedev came back to stress the need for defending "Russian citizens" residing in the territory of the self-proclaimed republics:

> About 800 thousand citizens of the Russian Federation currently live on the territory of these two unrecognized entities. In this case, I mean, Vladimir Vladimirovich, not even the Russian world, which we take care of, help, and support in every possible way, but the citizens of the Russian Federation. Russian Citizens who live in another country. These are our people. I would like to emphasize that here we deal with people who not only speak Russian, but are citizens of our country. (Prezident Rossii, 2022a).

Most fundamentally, the passportization process implemented by the Russian Federation in times of war in Ukraine is an exemplary case of the instrumental use of the evolving pattern of Russian identities, gradually making "compatriots" and/or the "Russian world" in Ukraine again part of a legally-binding community of Russian citizens under the control of the Russian state. Since the beginning of 2014, it is essential to note that, in addition to humanitarian consequences, residents of Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCAs) of Ukraine have been faced with substantial bureaucratic issues: one of them was to obtain their legal documents from Ukrainian authorities. For example, following the developments of the Spring-Summer 2014, the process of applying for Ukrainian citizenship has seriously deteriorated, especially when it comes to the children who traveled from NGCA or Crimea to Government-controlled areas (GCAs). In order to start with a passport procedure, a person entering the GCA of Ukraine had to deliver supporting documents about his/her age and the age of the child, and to declare at the checkpoint about the need to obtain a passport: i.e., a person was allowed to enter the GCA only after age verification and affiliation by Ukrainian Armed Forces/border guards (Ukrainian State Migration Service). In general, the issue of legal documents of Ukrainian citizens who remained in the territory that has not been under the control of the Government of Ukraine within the boundaries of Donets'k and Luhans'k regions has been and remains quite acute. The presence or absence of a passport is a significant factor affecting the legal status of citizens of Ukraine and the exercise of their rights and freedoms. Moreover, a person who does not have an identity document would be limited in accessing an entire range of services (administrative, social, banking, etc.). In a broader sense, a lack of a passport can lead to cases of statelessness (Dickinson, 2021). This situation has become even more relevant after 24 February 2022.

Undoubtedly, in 2014-2022, the entire discourse about the issuing of legal documents in GCAs of Ukraine has been largely influenced by the series of decrees released by the Government of the Russian Federation in order to ease the process for the acquisition of the Russian passport by specific categories of Ukrainians at the beginning (2014-2018), and eventually for entire Ukraine (since 2018 and onwards). The Russian approach towards a simplified procedure for issuing Russian passports for Ukrainian citizens found its first step already in 2014. On 18 March 2014, the Russian Government released a Decree On the admission of the Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation (Dogovor, 2014). Article 5 of the Agreement states that "from the date of admission of the Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation and the formation of new subjects within the Russian Federation, citizens of Ukraine and stateless persons permanently residing on that day on the territory of the Republic of Crimea or on the territory of the federal city of Sevastopol are automatically recognized as citizens of the Russian Federation". Back in 2014, according to the Russian media, it was necessary to bring an application, a national passport of a citizen of Ukraine, including a stamp with the registration of a place of residence on the territory of the Republic of Crimea or the federal city of Sevastopol by March 18, 2014. The process of issuing a new passport lasted, according to the Migration Services of the RF, up to three months from the date of application (Domcheva, 2014). According to Ukrainian authorities,

the Russian passport, which the Russian Federation forcibly issued for citizens of Ukraine in Crimea, should have been taken as a mean to ensure the necessary living conditions for the period of occupation. At the same time, there was no envisaged punishment for having this passport unless a person worked as a civil servant in Ukraine (BBC Ukraina, 2015).

The facilitation of the rights of Ukrainians on the territory of the Russian Federation evolved further in 2018, when the Government of the Russian Federation released the Decree 'On increasing the term of temporary stay in the territory of the Russian Federation of Ukrainian citizens permanently residing in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine' (i.e., NGCAs of so-called DPR and LPR) (Pravitelstvo RF, 2018). The main objective of this Decree was to increase the continuous period of temporary stay on the territory of the Russian Federation for the citizens of Ukraine up to 180 days from the date of entry into the territory of the Russian Federation. In April 2019, Russian President Putin released another Decree on the simplified procedure for issuing Russian passports for the residents of Donbas (Prezident Rossii, 2019).[11] According to the new Decree, there is an overall need to abide by the principles of international law and to apply a right for admission to the citizenship of Russian Federation in a simplified manner for the citizens of Ukraine who currently reside in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. A similar approach might be found in a 2014 Decree, when President Putin ordered to consider citizenship applications in a period that would not exceed three months from the moment of document submission (Federalnyi Zakon, 2014). Moreover, both decrees focus on children (youth under 18) and clarify precisely how orphans, in particular, may apply for the acquisition of Russian citizenship. Eventually, since April 24, 2019, citizens of uncontrolled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions also obtained a right for their children to apply for Russian citizenship. It was taking some time for the responsible services of the Russian Federation to decide whether to grant citizenship to the applicants. Documents were issued in the Rostov region in case of a positive decision.[12] Several special posts were deployed there for such a reason (DNR, 2019).

The following important Decree impacting on the procedure for issuing Russian passports dates back to July 24, 2020, when the Federal Law 134 of the Russian Federation on simplifying the procedure for admission to Russian citizenship came into force (Gosudarstvennaia Duma, 2020). According to the mentioned law, starting from July 24, 2020, foreign citizens on the territory of the Russian Federation have been granted a right to apply for Russian citizenship in a simplified manner. It has been advanced to the point that foreigners did not need to denounce their primary citizenship to become Russian citizens. This law aimed to target citizens of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Ukraine who already had a residence permit in the Russian Federation to allow them to apply for citizenship without complying with the conditions on the period of residence. Furthermore, on November 4, 2020, President Putin signed a complementary Decree (No. 665) on the simplified acquisition of citizenship by the residents of the so-called 'DPR' and 'LPR' (Ukaz, 2020). This complementary Decree aimed to ease the procedure of applying for Russian citizenship for the holders of the passports of the so-called 'DPR' and 'LPR'. At that time, the Russian migration service no longer required the passport of Ukraine as a prerequisite for

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[11] The decree came to be approved a week after the results of Presidential elections in Ukraine, which saw Volodymyr Zelenskyi winning 73,22% of votes in the second round against his rival Petro Poroshenko. Commenting on the new Ukrainian president's statements on the potential release of Ukrainian passports to Russian citizens subject to political persecution, Vladimir Putin could highlight how if "Russia and Ukraine issue passport to each other's citizens, they will quickly come to a 'common denominator' […] We will have a common citizenship" (Bulanov, 2019).

[12] Rostov is a Russian region bordering Ukraine. Since 2014, the border crossing point is uncontrolled due to its seizure by the forces of the so-called 'Luhansk and Donetsk People Republics'.

application. The conditionality of possessing only a passport of the so-called 'LPR/DPR' or a residence permit of the Ukrainian NGCAs provided a right to apply for a Russian passport without leaving the areas of Luhansk and Donetsk regions. According to information from Russian authorities in 2019, more than 650 thousand people had already received Russian passports in the Donbas (Roth, 2021). Ukrainian response at that time was not sharp enough, and only a draft law aimed to deprive of Ukrainian citizenship those who have voluntarily applied for the Russian one was submitted to the Ukrainian Parliament by MPs for consideration (Verkhovna Rada, 2021).

The 2022 full-scale invasion only exacerbated the situation with a forced passportization of the occupied territories of Ukraine. Ukrainian citizens who resided in Ukrainian NGCAs at the time of invasion, currently encounter tremendous difficulties in exercising their rights without having a Russian passport. To be more precise, nationals without Russian passports might be deprived of access to healthcare and humanitarian aid, which is available for the 'citizens' of the RF. According to President Putin's most recent Decree, starting from July 1, 2024, residents of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions who do not hold the Russian passport will be considered 'foreigners' or 'stateless' and might be deported to Russia or detained in the detention facilities (Sullivan 2023). Currently, ongoing debates within the Russian political spectrum question whether those who do not hold a Russian passport should be allowed to apply for a residence permit in order to keep their life in one of the above-mentioned regions of Ukraine "annexed" (or occupied, according to Ukrainian authorities) by the RF.

Overall, the policy of passportization in the occupied Ukrainian territories might be compared with the one Russia pursued in Abkhazia (i.e., in the internationally recognized territory of Georgia). However, there are signs of even stricter measures for the 'integration' of the Ukrainians residing in NGCAs, whereby Russian standards (i.e., Russian ruble, Russian passport, and Russian media) seem to be the only alternative for people who turned out to be in the territories of Ukraine controlled by the Russian Government (Durnev, 2021). The lack of a Russian passport or a passport of the so-called 'DPR/LNR' may lead to detention without any justifications. Recently, RF also started to issue individual numbers and medical insurances along the line with Russian passports. Amendments to the labor codex of the so-called 'DPR' are another objective RF aims to implement for even more advanced integration of the controlled territories.

Most fundamentally, moving to the impact of these legal acts on the "core" of the "Russian nation", as Olga Gulina (2021) could highlight already in July 2021: "Contemporary Russia has been adding new citizens who, by virtue of their status and territorial location, represent a particular group of Russian 'subjects' on the territories of unrecognized countries". These new "naturalized Russian citizens […] have, de iure, all the rights and obligations of Russian nationals": this is true also for their entitlement to vote in elections, as it happened on the occasion of the 2021 Russian parliamentary elections, whereby of "the roughly 200.000 voters, three quarters voted electronically at de facto polling stations (so-called 'information centers on the territory of the 'DPR' and 'LPR'); one quarter travelled to polling stations in the neighboring Rostov region in Russia" (Burkhardt et al. 2022, p.4).

Even if "this direction of Russian migration policy remains a 'stumbling block' in relations with other countries and may become a challenge for Russia in the future", at the same time this approach undoubtedly creates a new normative approach to the new identity project for Russia, moving from the ideational dimension to a new concrete strategy for policy-making. Such a perspective comes to be confirmed by the further developments in the months following the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, whereby the process of passportization was only scaled up. Another important Decree was adopted on 25 May 2022, which aimed primarily to ease the procedure for obtaining Russian

citizenship for residents of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine (Ukaz, 2022a). A few months later, on July 2022, Putin also signed the amendments to the Law of 24 April 2019, regarding the simplified acquisition of Russian citizenship by the nationals of Ukraine, citizens of the so-called 'LPR/DPR', and stateless persons (Ukaz, 2022b): indeed, the amendments expanded the range of action not only to the citizens of so-called 'LPR/DPR' but also to all the citizens of Ukraine.

On the one hand, nowadays, the impact of this process makes it almost impossible to talk about the potential reintegration of Donbas or any other occupied territory under Ukrainian control in the foreseeable future. Apart from the active hostilities on the territory of Ukraine, one of the main challenges consists in the very fact that for Ukrainian officials the presence of Russian passports for a significant part of Ukrainian citizens, regardless of where they live, will be an immense danger to the existence of Ukrainian statehood - in the political, economic and military spheres. And the realities of 2022 have demonstrated it clearly. On the other, the final step towards the normativization of the new Russian identity project came to be included in the legal and programmatic acts approved in late 2022 and early 2023. It is no surprise that the first of these documents to be approved was "The Concept of Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad" (Kontseptsiia gumanitarnoi politiki, 2022), emphasizing the role of Russian culture and identity as one of the main spheres to be advanced in the domain of foreign policy and public diplomacy. Here, among the main goals, "the defence, preservation and continuation of the traditions and ideals pertaining to the Russian World" are clearly stated, whereby the document highlights the gradual convergence between Russian culture and state through the need for "neutralizing anti-Russian attitudes of political-ideological nature".

Later, in the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, which was approved in March 2023, while emphasizing Russia's role in fulfilling "the unique mission of maintaining the global balance of power and building a multipolar international system", we witness a new emphasis on the need for securitizing both "the defence of Russian citizens and organizations from foreign illegal encroachments" and the "support of compatriots living abroad", which are included together in the same section among the priorities of Russian foreign policy. In order to counter "the campaign of Russophobia unleashed by unfriendly states", Russia, as being "the core of the civilizational community of the Russian World", is inclined to pay primary attention to its diaspora by:

> "[...] promoting the consolidation of compatriots living abroad who are constructively disposed towards Russia, and providing them with support in the development of their rights and legitimate interests in the states of residence, especially in unfriendly states, their preservation of the all-Russian cultural, linguistic identity and Russian spiritual and moral values, and ties with the historical Motherland" (Kontseptsiia vneshnei politiki, 2023).

Here the reference to "compatriots living abroad who are constructively disposed towards Russia [konstruktivno nastroennykh po otnosheniiu k Rossii sootechestvennikov]" is, by no means, accidental, whereby we think about the number of Russians fleeing Russia after the start of the invasion (and the partial mobilization starting in September 2022) that is constantly growing, thus creating a new Russian diaspora in several foreign countries.[13] In conclusion, the need for securitizing the identity project promoted by the Russian state becomes even more urgent in times of war: and along these lines, it is no surprise that the new Citizenship Law of the Russian Federation (Federalnyi Zakon, 2023), approved in April 2023, includes an extensive number of grounds for the deprivation of citizenship – which

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[13] See, for example, the latest report entitled *The Motherland Abroad: The Impact of Russians Fleeing the War*, which was published by the Italian Institute for International Political Studies in November 2023 (ISPI, 2023).

were not present in the 2002 law – that are mostly based on security reasons or actions threatening national security.

Concluding Remarks

As Laruelle (2022) puts it, the discursive process around Russian identity gaining momentum in the Kremlin after the start of the full-scale aggression against Ukraine could be seen not only as an instrument for legitimizing the military intervention in the neighbouring country and its progress, but also as "the most coherent patchwork formulated so far because it is broad enough to encompass many different readings", conflating "state projection abroad, nation-building, regime securitization, and Putin's self-vision as a ruler whose historical role in bringing back power and dignity, as well as lost territories, will not be questioned by future leadership". Within this framework, we may understand not only how "identity issues" shape the current war on Ukraine, but at the same time how the current war on Ukraine is also reshaping the identity project in Russia: the contradictory challenges to Russia's post-Soviet identity, or the respective "lines of fragmentation" – be they territorial, societal, historical or ethnocultural – emerging since the 1990s are now mended and securitized in a new normative language merging both the "internal" and the "external" dimensions of the Russian nation-building.

Here, the need for a gradual convergence between the "Russian diaspora" and "Russian citizens" in the new identity project promoted since 2022 thus reflects a long-term process, first unraveling in an ideational dimension and then in concrete terms of policy-making, which is aimed not only to guarantee a tighter control of the state over the inherent diversity of Russianness "abroad", but also to solidify the idea of a legally-binding community of Russian citizens lying both *within* and *beyond* the political borders of the Russian Federation. In light of our analysis, we may first value the growing role of the presidential administration since the 2000s as being the true "balancing actor" among the different ideas (compatriots; russkii mir) emerging in the domestic political and intellectual debates. At the same time, we may recognize how the realm of citizenship policies has played the role of the "balancing language" through which a new identity project for Russia gradually came to be articulated and sanctioned: as Shevel (2012, p. 113) puts it, the "crux of the politics of citizenship" in Russia has always been "the question of what part of the former Soviet citizenry constitutes 'us'". Along these lines, we may understand how the case of the process of "passportization" in times of war in Ukraine is there to play the role of both a foreign policy instrument *and* a tool for identity projects: it responds to the need, on the one hand, for legitimizing the direct involvement of the Kremlin in the domestic affairs of its neighbouring state and, on the other, for making ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers abroad again part of a legally-binding community of Russian citizens under the control of the Russian state.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enhancement of Women's Representation and Evolving Political Myths on the North Coast of Java

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the enhancement of women's involvement in politics and the local community's evolving myths in the coastal areas of Java. This study employs qualitative research, by selecting political and cultural figures as the main informants. The theoretical framework employed involves exploring the relationship between politics and myth, along with the theories of women's political representation. The results of the research, conducted in the Pekalongan region of Java, show that women's participation in local politics has increased. The region is known to have local communities that preserve ancient traditions, including a myth that stipulates that women should be among the candidates to serve in regional leadership. This research finds optimism for more women to become involved in politics.

Keywords: Women; Myths; Descriptive Representation; Java; Indonesia

Introduction

Many studies of women and politics in various regions of Indonesia are related to cultural issues, reflecting Indonesia's significant ethnic diversity. More than a thousand ethnic groups in Indonesia occupy large and small islands, such as Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, and others. Many experts consider that women's lack of involvement in politics is related to cultural attitudes, which still consider women to be secondary. According to Jensen (1995), cultural factors presume male dominance and there is little to contradict the forces of traditional culture. Therefore, the study of women's involvement in politics within this male-dominated cultural context is always important. According to Matland and Montgomery (2018), it is imperative to explore the cultural foundations that support women's political involvement in response to changing times. This study aims to examine the ways women's involvement in politics in the coastal areas of Java are being enhanced by the local community's evolving myths.

Viewed simply through raw numbers, balance is indeed lacking between female and male representatives. The representation of women in politics in general in Indonesia is still below 30% (Umagapi, 2020). This number illustrates descriptive representation, defined as how the gender and ethnic composition of legislative institutions reflects the composition of their voting communities (Phillips, 2020). It is important to encourage the presence of voters' representatives in the legislative body so that substantive representation can be realized. Phillips (2020) emphasizes that substantive representation extends beyond descriptive representation. Cowell-Meyers and Langbein (2009) highlight how the presence

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of female members in the legislature can foster understanding and increase awareness of the importance of taking action.

A study by Bratton and Haynie (1999) found that female representatives generally have the same opportunities as male representatives to propose policies. However, minority groups, such as women, have a much smaller chance of seeing their proposed policies adopted. The main mechanism in elections is still decision-making based on the will of the majority of voters. Likewise, Mendelberg et al. (2014) show the importance of having more women as political representatives to voice the aspirations of women as a minority group. Geissel and Michels (2018) emphasize that recognizing the power of the victorious majority simultaneously harms the interests of minorities.

In a society that has absorbed a variety of foreign cultural practices, such as in Pekalongan on the north coast of Java, women's participation in local politics is an interesting issue to examine through the lens of the research findings reviewed at the beginning of the discussion. The main question formulated in this research is how women's involvement in politics has increased in the coastal areas of Java, and what local myths have developed in the society that could explain this increase. To address the research question, this paper is divided into four main sections. The first reviews the literature regarding women's representation and presents the issues; the second explains the methodology used in this research. The third section discusses Javanese cultural norms and existing myths about women and politics. The last section presents the conclusions of this research.

Literature Review

Descriptive representation is important because the presence of voter representatives in a legislative body enables substantive representation to be realized. Descriptive representation describes the gender and ethnic composition of legislative institutions, and the degree to which it reflects the gender and ethnic composition of their voting communities (Phillips, 2020). In other words, descriptive representation ensures that diverse groups in society are represented in political institutions. This fosters greater political legitimacy and enhances citizens' sense of representation. Then, Phillips (2020) describes substantive representation as an outgrowth of descriptive representation. Substantive representation is the effect of the direct presence of women representatives in a legislative body, where female politicians contribute to strengthening the position of women by articulating their interests. This illustrates how political representatives can act in accordance with the interests of voters, advocating for policies and ensuring that the voices and needs of the communities they represent are heard and met.

Likewise, a study from Lovenduski and Norris (2003) emphasizes that the presence of women in political institutions serves as an affirmative policy in promoting gender equality. The presence of more female elected representatives is crucial in achieving a balanced representation of genders, advancing public policy agendas related to gender issues, and supporting the capacity of women as political leaders. Meanwhile, Phillips (2020) says that women need to be included in politics, arguing for a mechanism the author dubs the "politics of presence". Phillips emphasizes that if political decisions are taken by mostly male legislative members, or if most members have never experienced discrimination, or are from an ethnic majority, this will create problems in representation (LSE Government, 2017).

An increase in the number of women in a legislature is expected to have an effect on addressing women's interests. Studies by Celis (2006) and by Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) show that women's representatives can make a unique contribution to advocating for women's interests. Therefore, it is important to raise women's issues in other institutions as well. Phillips and Asenbaum (2023) emphasized that politically, the "presence" of women

is important in various domains, not only in legislative institutions, but also in public institutions, organizations, and even companies because of the diversity of views and experiences they can offer.

Lombardo and Meier (2019) suggest that viewing symbolic representation as an effect of descriptive representation is reductive, because it limits our understanding of the relevance of symbolic representation. Symbolic representation presents constituents at a symbolic level, imparting narrative elements that enable or limit the political position and actions of women or other social groups. Perhaps because the issue of women's involvement in politics has been such a long and complex narrative, the myth has emerged that women are incapable and should not be involved in politics. According to Magdy (2020), politics and myth can be linked throughout the history of human life because humans live through experiences with myths that can guide human actions in reality. In fact, in the view of Apolte and Muller (2021), even educated people often believe in political myths. Individuals in groups have intuition, fallible though it may be. Social interactions that occur can also affect the balance of myths – the shared assumption that a given practice or understanding is right or wrong.

Flood (2013) states that political myths are narratives about past, present, or predicted political events, which are designed to be comprehended and imbued with meaning by society. These myths do not hold sacred status but are instead accepted as true by a group. They can also manifest in iconic forms such as paintings, posters, monuments, and ritual ceremonies. A political myth is an ideologically characterized narrative aiming to portray a genuine depiction of a set of past, present, or predicted political events and is generally accepted as valid by a social group.

Akindele et al. (2020) emphasize that women's involvement in politics seems now to have moved beyond this mythical problem, since women are able to demonstrate their competence in the world of politics. Akindele et al.'s findings show that leadership ability is not determined by gender, but by individual qualities, skills, and experience. The idea that women and children are still merely discussing issues among themselves is just a myth. This needs to be emphasized, to show the public that many women are starting to have vital, non-mythical roles in the real world of politics.

However, it must be acknowledged that there are still double standards and stereotypes regarding female politicians compared to their male counterparts. Teele et al. (2018) state that a majority of respondents in their investigation in the U.S. revealed a preference for female candidates. The respondents acknowledged that male and female candidates have the same profiles. However, when the researchers looked more closely, they discovered a distinction. Candidates who fit the typical home profile—that is, those who are married with children—are preferred by both elites and voters. This puts many women who want to work in politics in a difficult situation. If societal norms around women's familial responsibilities clash with the demands of a full-time political profession, it is probable that the underrepresentation of women in politics will persist.

In Indonesia, many experts attribute the low involvement of women in politics to cultural factors. Aspinall et al. (2021) identified several factors contributing to the gender gap in political representation in Indonesia, including women's willingness and capacity to compete, the attitudes of political parties towards female candidates, and general voter sentiments. In their view, widespread patriarchal attitudes are a significant barrier, alongside structural weaknesses (Aspinall et al., 2021). Their findings are echoed by other experts who have researched women's political participation across various Indonesian regions. Studies by Selinaswati (2019) and by Sari and Havifi (2021), for instance, illustrate that despite the matrilineal lineage of the Minangkabau people in West Sumatra, women still face obstacles to participating in politics. In Sulawesi, the patriarchal culture

significantly influences women's political participation (Lapian et al., 2022). Rhoads (2012) provides a comprehensive study revealing low levels of women's political engagement in Bali, attributed to the resurgence of traditional institutions and local identity through decentralized policies. Likewise, in East Nusa Tenggara province, women have very limited opportunities to hold strategic positions in decision-making bodies (Kollo & Sunarso, 2018).

However, few experts have conducted research on women in politics as it relates to culture and myth. Gender, on the other hand, involves the complex relationship between women and men, encompassing social, cultural, and institutional dynamics. The construction of gender in society is inherently tied to the cultural context that surrounds it; they cannot be separated. In this context, studies of women's participation in politics and local culture often spark stimulating conversations.

Research Method

This research employs qualitative research methods to construct knowledge by understanding individual's unique viewpoints and the meaning attached to those viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Our primary goal is to construct the socio-political reality related to the development of myths in the local political arena of Pekalongan Regency, which is part of the northern coastal area of Java. It seeks to explore the increase in women's representation in politics in this region and investigate any links of potential relevance between the two. The selection of informants utilized the snowball technique (Audemard, 2020), starting with specific individuals and then extending to subsequent informants. The snowball technique employed in this study can be visualised as in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Schematic of the Snowball Technique.
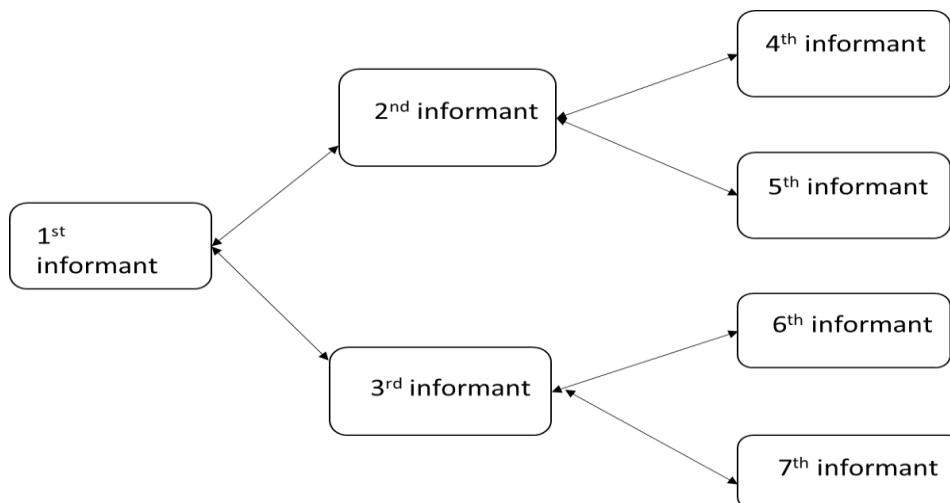
Source: developed from Audemard (2020).

The initial interview was conducted with the first informant, namely RA, who was chosen for being a cultural figure and an academic associated with a university in Pekalongan. In response to RA's insights, the writing team continued interviews with informants IN (cultural figure and entrepreneur), IS (cultural figure from the regional government), H (political figure), and L (academic), as indicated in the scheme. While the team spoke to additional informants such as A (batik entrepreneur), B (batik entrepreneur), C (regional government), S (regional government), and others, only information provided by the five informants

initially described is included in this article, due to its strong relevance. A process of impartiality was followed in the selection of informants. In order to ensure objectivity and comparability, a range of backgrounds from various groups were taken into account when selecting informants. Both female and male informants were chosen; from academic and non-academic backgrounds (including political actors); from the regional government and cultural community groups. In this way, we endeavour to ensure that the selection of informants is unbiased.

In addition to interviews, the research is supported by different data, obtained from sources such as the Pekalongan Regency Government (Cultural Service), the Pekalongan Regency website, scientific journals, and other reference sources such as regulations and election results documents. Subsequently, the authors analysed the data using Silbergh's (2001) approach of constructing an analytical framework consisting of pertinent theoretical structures. The analysis begins with a process of data clarification to ensure consistency. Data clarification is intended to sort out relevant data that will be used for this research. It was followed by the theoretical abstraction of information and facts from the field, enabling the formulation of fundamental statements. Data analysis begins when the data is discovered and continues throughout the research process to yield meaningful and interesting findings. Data analysis occurs by examining findings and delving into their meanings. In the next section, we provide an overview of the Indonesian socio-political context, with particular reference to the region we are studying, then the following section presents the results.

Women and Politics in Javanese Cultural Norms and Existing Myths

This article refers to several important research findings related to Javanese women and politics with respect to enduring cultural norms and the historical journey of Javanese society. A study by Kurniawati (2015) showed that in Javanese culture, the position of the mother is respected by both men and women. The election of a female leader illustrates that the candidate is perceived as "the mother of the people". In line with Kurniawati, Marwah (2016) showed that strength in Javanese tradition is marked by the ability to concentrate power in the hand of the ruler. In this context, feminine signifiers of the centralization of power relate to fertility, prosperity, stability, and glory. Moreover, harmony and orderliness are also dimensions of femininity, while fertility pertains to agricultural land. Hence, since the land is the source of people's lives in Java, people call it *ibu pertiwi*, meaning motherland (Handayani & Novianto, 2008). The mother figure in Javanese culture holds a very important position of trust. A study by Harini et al. (2024) shows that a woman who becomes a leader with a leadership approach rooted in Javanese culture will balance the values of assertiveness, respect, maintaining harmony, and consensus.

Today, the focus on women's political participation has spread to many parts of Indonesia. This is especially true since the enactment of Presidential Instruction No. 9 in 2000, concerning Gender Mainstreaming in National Development. Follow-up in the political field included a quota policy beginning with the 2004 election, which requires that the candidates nominated by political parties are at least 30% women. However, women's political participation in Indonesia is still not optimal. According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Republic of Indonesia (2023), the Gender Development Index is 0.941, placing Indonesia just above Cambodia and Timor-Leste – among the newer ASEAN countries. A contributing factor to this low placement is that the political

participation rate, indicated by the share of women serving in the legislature, is still only 20.87%.

Myths still abound that women are incapable of leading in the political sphere. This assumption is based on stereotypes suggesting that women are less likely to make firm decisions, or that they are less likely to be strong leaders because they are fragile and prioritize emotions. This perceived weakness is also related to the misconception that women are incapable of negotiating and reaching political agreements. Kroeber and Krauss (2023), studying Germany and parliamentary oversight activities in the Bundestag between 1949 and 2013, emphasized that these gendered behaviours stem from different behavioural expectations and levels of risk aversion between women and men. Women tend to be more risk-averse, perhaps making them more suited to institutional roles in the legislature. This implies that gender differences shape perceptions regarding their respective roles as members of the government and the opposition.

In this article, we want to highlight different myths, particularly those that go hand in hand with the legends and traditions of local communities. The myth we cover in the study vividly illustrates how some believe leadership training should be undertaken by women. In the context of a society like Pekalongan that has experienced a variety of foreign cultural influences, women's participation in local political practices is an interesting issue, particularly in view of the research findings noted at the beginning of the discussion regarding women's participation in politics in other parts of Indonesia.

Pekalongan Regency is part of Central Java Province, Indonesia. This coastal community has traditionally had a fairly egalitarian culture, which meant that the inhabitants of the north coast of Java have been relatively free from rigid social distinctions between upper, middle, and lower classes. This distinguishes the area from the densely stratified Javanese communities in other parts of the region, especially those near the historical Javanese power centre, Surakarta-Yogyakarta. In these central regions of Javanese power, people from different classes even use different languages; the higher the social class, the more fluent and refined the Javanese language spoken. The northern coastal range, however, has been quite isolated from the central zone of Javanese control for geographical and topographical reasons. According to a local sociologist, RA, (interview on July 21, 2021), people in the northern coastal region of Java are relatively unfamiliar with the rigid social strata of other parts of Indonesian society. Therefore, the language used is the same across all social groups.

Most coastal regions in Indonesia rely on fishing for their livelihood (Widaningrum & Wahyudi, 2023). However, on the north coast of Java, especially in Pekalongan, the main occupation of the people is trading, usually as *batik*[1] traders or entrepreneurs. The history of trade in the northern region of Java started with the arrival of Arab and Chinese traders several centuries ago (Lombard, 2008; Vlekke, 1960). The structure of the livelihoods of the Pekalongan *batik* traders and entrepreneurs was conveyed by the Pekalongan cultural figures RA (interview on July 21, 2021) and IN (interview on September 15, 2021).

In this structure, governed by merchants or entrepreneurs, IS, a Pekalongan Cultural Bureau figure, said in an interview on September 17, 2021, that women in Pekalongan have long been accustomed to working outside the home. Culturally, the north coast of Java, like Pekalongan, is quite open to women's roles and positions. They play an important role by working in community, especially as *batik* artisans or traders. It is common for local women

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[1] Batik is a traditional cloth that is part of Indonesian cultural heritage and has received recognition from UNESCO as a Masterpiece of Intangible Heritage of Humanity (see https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/indonesian-batik-00170).

to have employment in the community, and not only in the home. Such a cultural framework could also facilitate negotiations on the role of women in politics.

In the context of these cultural foundations, local people have a myth about the pair of regent and deputy regent candidates who are chosen in every election: the elected pair must consist of a man and a woman, whether the regent candidate is male or female. Initially, this was a community experience articulated by a few people, but it has since developed into a belief held by most members of the community in that area. Based on the results of follow-up interviews conducted by researchers with local cultural expert RA (April 22, 2024), it can be seen that local communities in the rural areas of Pekalongan Regency are very likely the source of this myth. RA gave the example of a local community in the Kutorojo area. Here, where adherence to Javanese cultural traditions is still strong, people believe that leaders must have a balance of strength (masculinity) and softness (femininity) in order to carry out their duties and obligations well. From this perspective, the feminine dimension is needed in the figure of a leader. What RA reports is actually in line with several studies mentioned at the beginning of this subsection, which indicate that a leader figure in Javanese society has a mandate to promote harmony, reflecting a strong association with femininity (see Handayani & Novianti, 2008; Kurniawati, 2015; Marwah, 2016; Harini et. al, 2024). This shows that many rural village communities in Pekalongan still experience the Javanese cultural order as one of the influences on their lives, including when choosing a leader. We will reflect in more detail on the myths of current local political life in the following section.

The Increase of Female Representation in Local Politics: A Mythical Issue?

With the implementation of a policy in advance of the 2004 Indonesian elections mandating that at least 30% of nominees to the legislature be women, the number of women being elected has been increasing. The quota policy has been designed precisely to bring a growing number of women into the legislature, so to promote substantive representation of women in representative institutions. The quota policy provides a mandate for female legislative members to represent women's interests, while also undermining negative stereotypes regarding women's capacity as politicians. So far, however, women's substantive representation still depends on the institutional environment and applicable norms (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008).

In Indonesia, since the minimum 30% quota policy was enacted for political candidates, women's representation has fluctuated, but still remains below 30%. In the national legislature, women's political representation has seen a gradual, irregular increase, from 11.82% in the 2004 elections to 20.87% in the 2019 elections. Meanwhile, in Pekalongan, women's representation in the regional legislature was 15.6% in the 2004 elections and increased to 26.67% in the 2019 elections, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Share of Women Elected to National and Pekalongan Regency Legislatures in the 2004–2019 Elections.

Election	National (%)	Pekalongan Regency (%)
2004	11.82	15.60
2009	17.86	17.90
2014	17.32	24.44
2019	20.87	26.67

Source: The House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (dpr.go.id); The General Elections Commission (kpu.go.id); https://www. infografik-keterwakilan-perempuan-di-dpr-dalam-angka Pekalongan Regency in Figures, BPS.

Table 1 illustrates the political representation of women in Pekalongan in each election of the past two decades, with achievements above the national percentage. This is certainly good, even though it has not yet reached the target minimum of 30%. The results of the 2019 election in Pekalongan showed encouraging progress in women's participation in politics and government (Table 2).

Table 2. Membership of the Regional Representative Assembly of Pekalongan Regency according to Political Parties and Sex in 2019–2024 Period.

Political Parties in the Pekalongan Regency	Male	Female	Total
PKB	12 (80%)	3 (20%)	15
PDI-P	8 (72.72%)	3 (27.27%)	11
PPP	4 (66.66%)	2 (33.33%)	6
Gerindra	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	5
PAN	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4
Golkar Party	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4
Total	33 (73.33%)	12 (26.67%)	45 (100%)

Source: DPRD Kabupaten Pekalongan (https://dprd-pekalongankab.go.id)
Note: percentages in brackets refer to the total number of representatives of each party.

Table 2 aims to enhance our understanding of the representation of women in local politics, particularly in regional legislatures. As depicted, in the Pekalongan Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD) (Regional Representative Assembly), out of 45 total members, 33 are male and 12 are female, giving a rate of representation for women of 26.67%. This number is commendable as it approaches the 30% target set by positive policies in Indonesia aimed at increasing female representation in government. From the perspective of political parties and gender, among the ranks of Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), which holds the highest number of seats with 15 representatives, only 3 are female members, while the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) has the same number of women out of 11 representatives in total.

The executive branch, meanwhile, has also embraced more women in government positions. Out of the 29 heads of Organisasi Perangkat Daerah (Regional Organizations), three women serve as Heads of Service. Notably, the current Pekalongan regent, Laila Fadia Elfaouz Rafiq, the executive of the regional government, is a woman, as is the chairperson of the Pekalongan DRPD, Dra. Hj. Hindun, M. H. Then, three strategic positions within the Pekalongan DPRD are also occupied by women: the Chairperson of Commission C is Hj. Endang Suwarningsih, while Dra. Hj. Hindun, M. H. also sits as Chair of the Budget Agency and of the Deliberative Body (Table 3).

Table 3. Women and Their Position in the Regional Representative Assembly in 2019–2024 Period.

	Position	Male	Female
1	Chairperson of DPRD	–	F
2	Chairperson of Commission I (Government and Law)	M	–
3	Chairperson of Commission II (Development)	M	–

4	Chairperson of Commission III (Economy and Finance)	–	F
5	Chairperson of Commission IV (People's Welfare)	M	–
6	Chairperson of Budget Agency	–	F
7	Chairperson of Deliberation Agency	–	F
8	Chairperson of Honorary Body	M	–
9	Chairperson of Regional Regulation Formation Body	M	–
Total		**5**	**4**

Source: DPRD Kabupaten Pekalongan (https://dprd-pekalongankab.go.id/)

Tables 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate that women's political representation has indeed increased, both in the regional legislature of Pekalongan and also in strategic positions in the legislature's leadership. This increase in representation in strategic locations in the coastal region differs significantly from the findings of Kollo and Sunarso (2018), who observe that women in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, have not had the opportunity to hold strategic positions in the decision-making process. Their findings regarding women and politics are unfortunately common in other regions of Indonesia, such as Sulawesi (Lapian et al., 2022). The reason can be probably found out in the patriarchal culture which significantly influences women's political participation. However, in addition to that, Aspinall et al. (2021) indicates that the gender gap in political representation in Indonesia is influenced by a variety of factors, including the willingness and capacity of women to compete, the attitudes of political parties towards female candidates, and the sentiments of voters in general. Nevertheless, in the context of the movement to strengthen women's strategic positions in general, such as in Pekalongan Regency, women's involvement in politics is no longer regarded as a peripheral issue.

Furthermore, in every regional election of regents and deputy regents (*Pilkada*) in Pekalongan Regency, there are myths that continue to develop, and which seem to potentially influence ongoing political contestation. H, a female political figure in Pekalongan (interviewed on September 1, 2022), stated that in elections for regent and deputy regent, a pair of candidates must have one female if they aim to win. This implies that the idea that a party slate must have both a male and female in order to win the election for regional head has achieved a kind of mythical status among regional politicians. Table 4 illustrates that in the five elections for regent and deputy regent of Pekalongan Regency, the winning pair has always included a woman in one of the two roles.

Table 4. Regents and Deputy Regents of Pekalongan Regency from 2001.

Period	Regent	Gender	Deputy Regent	Gender
2001–2006	Amat Antono	M	Siti Qomariyah	F
2006–2011	Siti Qomariyah	F	Wahyudi Pontjo	M
2011–2016	Amat Antono	M	Laila Fadia Elfaouz Rafiq	F
2016–2021	Asip Kholbihi	M	Arini Harimurti	F
2021–2026	Laila Fadia Elfaouz Rafiq	F	Riswadi	M

Source: Kabupaten Pekalongan (pekalongankab.go.id); https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daftar_Bupati_Pekalongan

In the 2001 Pilkada (regional elections), the elected pair featured a male candidate as regent and a female as deputy. In the 2006–2011 Pilkada, the winners were a female regent and a male deputy, while in 2011–2016 and 2016–2021, the winning pairs for the regional elections featured male regents and female deputy regents. Most recently, in the 2021 *Pilkada*, the winners of the regional elections were the female regent and male deputy regent candidates.

The myth that has developed in Pekalongan society, therefore, is that when electing the regional executive, if a woman is nominated to become regent, then there must be a male partner as a candidate for deputy regent, and vice versa. If the candidate pairs are both male, then it is believed that they cannot win the regional election. In the end, the mythical narrative that has developed seems to provide a significant opportunity for women to take part in regional elections. This was described by a political figure from Pekalongan DPRD (the Regional Representative Assembly) during an interview on September 1, 2022.

> "*Dampak dari mitos tersebut maka partai itu terdorong oleh budaya, bahwa mitos itu diakui oleh mereka. Bahwa yang jadi (pemenang pilkada, penulis) itu mesti lanang karo wedok. Partai-partai pun mencalonkan itu.*"

> ("The effect of this myth is that the party is guided by the culture, that the myth is recognized by them. That the winner (of the election, ed.) must be a man and woman. The parties also nominated them.")

Since legislative elections are open and proportional, political parties are more focused on nominating candidates for the legislative assembly with high electability potential. These candidates can even come from outside the party; they are not necessarily party cadres. The selection of candidates proposed by the party is indeed within the party's power, and the nomination process tends to be more centralized than democratic (Budi, 2020). Figures outside the party are often seen as more popular choices to increase electability. This is also a strategy employed by many parties in regional head elections, where political parties often seek popular figures to promote as candidates for regent and deputy regent pairs. Interestingly, in selecting the desired figures, political parties in Pekalongan specifically target female candidates to nominate alongside men.

The local myth surrounding the winning pair of regent and deputy regent candidates in every election so far insists on the inclusion of both a man and a woman, regardless of the gender of the regent candidate. This notion, as described by Flood (2013), resembles a narrative message that functions as a predictive element regarding future leadership partnerships. Flood suggests that these myths are not revered as sacred, but rather accepted as truths within a community. According to Magdy (2020), politics and myths have been intertwined throughout human history, as myths often influence human actions in reality. In the context of this paper, the evolving myth has served as a distinct driver for political parties to nominate women as candidates to office. It may also influence voters to base their political choices on regent and deputy regent candidate pairs composed of both genders, whether they be men and women or women and men.

In selecting candidates for regent and deputy regent positions in local elections, political parties will certainly seek to choose individuals who show both capacity or potential, as well

as high electability. Additionally, the parties will ensure that their nominated pair includes at least a woman. In the context of women's representation in the political sphere, this is perceived as beneficial, as the figures the parties draw from outside their ranks can be men or women. As one of the informants put it:

> "*Mesti munculnya itu, laki-laki dan perempuan, sehingga ini sudah menjadi mitos dan tinggal kapan dipecahkan mitos itu. Sehingga kadang-kadang partai-partai juga, apa iya sih harus perempuan, kalau laki-laki kuat ya laki-laki aja gak apapa, tapi nyatanya ya dia enggak berani mencalonkan. Dan dicari tokohlah dari mereka-mereka mencari perempuan dari mana pun.*"

> ("It's the way it has to be, men and women, so this has become a myth and it's just a matter of time before the myth will be debunked. Sometimes the parties think: is it true that there has to be a woman? If men are strong then men are fine – but in reality they don't dare to nominate [only men]. And so, they look for figures from them – they look for women from anywhere.")

Candidate pairs for regent and deputy regent can utilize mythological narratives to influence public opinion and change the perception of the masses to vote for them in the *Pilkada* (regional election). The myth has grown and developed into a kind of tool to legitimize the candidacy of the nominees. Myths can also be used to instil confidence and strengthen the position of candidates for regent and deputy regent in the eyes of the local community. At a more extreme level, myths can also be used as a tool to manipulate people's beliefs and emotions to achieve certain political goals. Apolte and Muller (2021) state that even educated people often continue to believe in political myths. According to them, individuals in groups have intuition, even if that intuition sometimes errs. Social interactions affect the balance of myths so that there is a balance of truth that is pursued by all individuals in the group.

In view of the current political landscape in Pekalongan Regency, it seems that the myth that women cannot participate in politics has already partly evolve into a new political myth asserting that women are equally capable. Notions regarding women's inability to succeed in politics are on the brink of being debunked. This is evidenced by Akindele et al. (2020), whose research demonstrates women's ability to participate in politics, surpassing mere myth.

Similarly, the political myth ingrained in Pekalongan's local society regarding regent candidate pairs deserves its own reconsideration. While its relevance in politics is uncertain, perhaps this myth has evolved to advocate for greater representation of women in the political sphere. Considering the findings of this study, which indicate a growing trend of support for female candidates coming also from public opinion, suggesting more open positions towards gender equality, there is an increasing space for women's political representation in Pekalongan. This underscores the importance of recognizing that women can engage in politics, addressing the full spectrum of political issues – the economy, education, human rights, health, safety, the environment – and not solely families and societies.

Conclusion

This research concludes that there has been an increase in women's involvement in politics in the northern coastal areas of Java, particularly since the 2004 Indonesian elections, when a reform requiring that candidates nominated by political parties are at least 30% women was issued. The political process in the region appears to be quite in harmony with the local egalitarian culture, which supports women's involvement in public spaces. Additionally, locals appear to hope that executive political leadership in the region will be shared between men and women as a complementary pair.

The number of women in the Pekalongan regional legislature is also increasing, even though they have not yet met the target minimum quota of 30% women elected as member. Women in regional legislatures hold quite strategic positions in decision-making, and many hope that this representation will not only be descriptive but also substantive. Furthermore, women hold strategic positions in the region's executive leadership, alternating as regional and deputy regional heads, aligning with a local myth that political leaders should consist of both men and women. Perhaps because of these mythical beliefs, there has been significant progress in women's involvement in local politics.

This suggests that when women excel in leadership roles, it is crucial that their success becomes common knowledge. Based on the results of this research, it is important for studies on women and politics in Indonesia to explore more deeply the local wisdom, culture, and political myths that are likely to encourage the increased involvement of women in politics.

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Disclosure statement

The team of authors hereby declares that the team does not have any conflict of interest with any party regarding the articles compiled.

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INTERVIEWS

Interview with H, Political Figure in Pekalongan, September 1, 2022
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RESEARCH NOTES

China's climate change policy post-Kyoto (2009-2015):
Applying the bureaucratic politics approach

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Abstract

China is regarded as the world's leading emitter of carbon dioxide. Having ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which binds countries to pursue emission reduction targets towards climate change mitigation, it faced international pressure to cut its carbon emissions. Accordingly, this aptly illustrates the country's evolving climate change policy that is mainly shaped by domestic considerations and its ascent to global supremacy. Using bureaucratic politics approach to examine a one-party state like China, this study finds that government ministries engaged in bargaining as the competition for power and influence intensified. In particular, the China Meteorological Administration and the Ministry of Environmental Protection asserted influence on climate change policy during the early years of international negotiations, while the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seized control of the policymaking process on climate change by mainstreaming economic development in the agenda. However, China's rise as an economic giant, along with the accompanying threats of climate change, prompted the leadership to adopt a low-carbon green growth strategy, which eventually became the country's ideal development path for the long-term.

Keywords: Bureaucratic Politics; China; Climate Change; Climate Policy; Sustainable Development

Introduction

China is the world's top energy consumer and carbon dioxide emitter, accounting for 30 percent of global emissions (Shan et al., 2018). In 2017, China's carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion reached 9.2 gigatons, which was roughly 27 percent of the world's total, exceeding the combined total emissions of the United States and the European Union (Sandalow, 2018). In 2006, China became the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs), overtaking the US, according to data from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (Falkner, 2016). With China's rapid economic growth starting in the 1980s, the country's carbon emissions associated with fossil fuel combustion, cement production, and manufacturing increased significantly.

As a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), China agreed to cooperate internationally to combat climate change. It has actively participated in negotiations under the UNFCCC and ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 2002,

which set internationally binding emission reduction targets for developed countries (also known as Annex 1 countries). China, classified as a developing country under the Kyoto Protocol, was exempted from reduction targets. During the negotiations, China argued that as a developing country it must be allowed to continue to grow its economy without having to commit to legally binding emissions reduction. Moreover, Chinese negotiators pushed developed countries to provide funding and transfer of technology to the developing world. Since China had no commitments to deliver under the Kyoto Protocol, ratifying the international agreement entailed no actual economic costs (Heggelund et al., 2010). Apart from being the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, China is a key actor in the international climate change regime, given its status and influence in the Group of 77 (G-77), the largest intergovernmental organization of developing nations in the UN.

With China's increasing share in global emissions, international pressure also increased, urging China to take on concrete commitments as a member of the international climate change regime. At the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) meeting in 2009 in Copenhagen, the US committed to reaching a strong international agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which was set to end in 2012. The COP, which meets every year, is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC. It reviews the implementation of the UNFCCC and any other legal instruments. The vision of the US was for a deal that imposed obligations to all countries to act, especially emerging economies such as China, India, and Brazil. However, China refused to agree to a mandatory target for emission cuts during the COP15 negotiations. News reports highlighted then-Premier Wen Jiabao's resolve to keep China's action plan regardless of the results of the Copenhagen talks.

From being a target of criticism for blocking negotiations in 2009, China emerged as an important actor in achieving a positive outcome during the Paris COP21 in 2015. Moreover, the partnership between the US and China leading up to the COP21 was a complete turnaround from the difficult episode in Copenhagen. Thus, China's policy shift on its negotiating stance at the global climate change talks requires deeper examination to determine how domestic policy actors behaved using the bureaucratic politics concept. The main objective of this study is to determine the bargaining process among domestic actors in formulating China's post-Kyoto climate change policy.

This paper is divided into three parts. The succeeding section deals with China's stance on climate change in international negotiations from 2009 to 2015, followed by a discussion of its domestic policymaking process on climate change. Lastly, the analysis is centered on how bureaucratic maneuvering among ministries has shaped China's policies on climate change both at the domestic and international levels.

China at the international climate change negotiations

From its own point of view, China sees itself as a responsible member of the UNFCCC. It has ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 2002 and has actively participated in international climate negotiations. China has established national institutions, initiated mitigation programs, made progress in its GHG data reporting, and become a leading host of clean development mechanism projects (Schroder, 2016). In discussions under the UNFCCC, China has been an advocate of the "common but differentiated responsibilities" principle, which means that all parties to the Convention are responsible for contributing solutions to climate change, but the nature and extent of their responsibilities vary depending on their capacities. In the 1990s, China and other developing countries argued that it should not be subjected to binding emission cuts, unlike industrialized countries; thus, the Kyoto Protocol only imposed binding commitments on developed countries.

China's official position on climate change was shaped by the following justifications. First, other countries and international organizations should respect China's sovereignty regarding the full use of its own natural resources. Second, maintaining economic growth and stability were its top priorities. Hence, policymakers were seriously concerned that reducing carbon emissions would adversely affect economic growth. Third, Chinese officials strongly believed that industrialized countries should bear the responsibility for their historic emissions. Fourth, China assumed its role as the nominal leader of the developing world in the context of climate change negotiations (Harris & Yu, 2010).

Chinese negotiators stressed that China is still a developing country, and as such, it should be allowed to develop its economy without setting limits to its emissions. Moreover, negotiators argued that more ambitious targets from developing countries were contingent on additional funding and the transfer of technology from developed countries. The moral argument on equity was a core value in China's position on the international scene, which prompted Chinese negotiators to push for a climate change deal without taking on binding commitments (Heggelund et al., 2010).

After surpassing the US as the lead emitter of GHGs in 2006, China faced intense pressure from the international community to undertake absolute emissions reduction. At COP15, China and other leading emitters were criticized by the global media for failing to reach a more ambitious agreement. After two weeks of unsuccessful talks, China agreed to a system of voluntary pledges as the basis of a future climate change deal. President Obama met with a select group of heads of state to reach a compromise deal to sidestep problematic negotiations on legally binding emission targets. For the first time, major emitters from the developing world showed a willingness to contribute to the global mitigation effort without waiting for developed countries to fully implement their existing commitments under the Kyoto Protocol (Falkner, 2016).

In the succeeding COP meetings, China cooperated closely with other countries, particularly the US. In 2011, at COP17 in Durban, China's lead negotiator, Su Wei, told the media that China was willing to consider a legally binding instrument for the post-2020 climate agreement. At COP19 in Warsaw in 2013, parties were advised to submit intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) by 2015, thereby establishing a bottom-up approach that gave parties full discretion as to the scope, coverage, stringency, and conditions of their national contributions (Rajamani, 2016). In 2014, President Obama and President Xi issued a joint announcement on climate change, reaffirming the importance of bilateral cooperation and committing their countries to an ambitious 2015 agreement. The intention of the announcement was to inject momentum into the global climate negotiations and inspire other countries to submit equally ambitious actions by the first quarter of 2015.

Prior to the COP21 negotiations in Paris in 2015, China submitted its INDCs, which stated China's pledge to carbon emission reduction according to its national capabilities. As the world's largest emitter of GHGs and second-largest economy, China's INDCs had been much anticipated since it would determine the failure or success of the collective goal to keep global temperature rise in this century below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. China submitted its plan to reduce emissions per unit of gross domestic product (GDP) by 60 to 65 percent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. China earned praise from the media and senior UN officials for its pledges. President Obama and President Xi again issued a joint statement in September 2015 to stress their personal commitment to a successful Paris Agreement and reaffirm their goals of enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation on climate change. The Paris Agreement was hailed as a significant achievement, as it launched a new global cooperation framework on climate change to replace the Kyoto Protocol.

In the past, China used to be very skeptical of joining international regimes for fear that doing so would infringe on Chinese sovereignty. This mindset has changed gradually as China began promoting its image as a responsible power (Heggelund et al., 2010). Observers noted the shift in China's negotiating stance from opposing binding emission targets in Copenhagen to taking a leadership role in Paris. The COP15 in Copenhagen seemed to be a turning point in China's climate change policy at the international level. The international community noticed how quickly China could recalibrate its negotiating stance after the meeting in Copenhagen. Therefore, it is necessary to examine China's domestic policies and the policymaking process on climate change to understand its behavior on the international stage. The following section discusses the domestic factors and policy actors that have influenced China's foreign policy decisions on climate change.

The domestic front

Years before the Copenhagen meeting, China has started formulating policies related to climate change mitigation. In 2005, the Renewable Energy Law was passed to address the worsening air pollution in many Chinese cities and develop the renewable energy industry, given its high growth potential globally. Climate change as a public policy issue also gained prominence in the government agenda under the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010). In 2006, the government released its first National Assessment Report on Climate Change, citing that climate change posed a serious threat to the country. In 2007, the National Climate Change Coordinating Group was elevated to a higher level in the bureaucracy by transforming it into the National Climate Change, Energy Efficiency, and Emission Reduction Leading Small Group. A few months after COP15, top Chinese officials convened to discuss the prospects of low-carbon development. Therefore, China's stance against binding commitments at COP15 seemed to project a self-defeating behavior; since China's refusal to take on international commitments did not mean that it was not taking any action on climate change at the domestic level.

Aside from demanding equity in the implementation of the international climate regime, China's resistance to binding emission cuts was because sustaining economic growth remains a dominant national interest. Climate change in the domestic sphere was largely seen as an issue inextricably linked to energy and economy since cheap energy was an integral part of China's economic growth. Although there was a recognition among policymakers that China had to take action to mitigate the negative effects of climate change, the prevailing thought then was that cutting emissions could hurt the country's growth prospects. More specifically, Smith (2020) contends that China's political economy is fueled by three growth engines, namely, maximization of economic growth and national self-sufficiency, maximization of consumerism, and maximization of employment. On the last driver, he underscored that the persistence of 'zombie' state-owned enterprises in sectors such as steel, aluminum, coal, and construction is grounded in the Chinese Communist Party's mandate to represent the working class by keeping the workers employed.

Smith further elucidates on the environmental repercussions of China's aggressive actions:

> Builders and manufacturers have built shiny new cities and infrastructure at 'China speed', as *People's Daily* likes to brag. But in their haste to build and overbuild, they've wasted staggering quantities of natural resources and racked up the worst industrial health and safety record of any nation on earth, with more than 100,000 workplace deaths per year in recent decades. (Smith, 2020, p. vii)

It is thus imperative for the Chinese government to reconsider the current strategy of bolstering grand infrastructure projects while neglecting the adverse effects on its long-term environmental health.

Things started to change with the creation of the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015). While the 11th Five-Year Plan included a 20-percent reduction in energy intensity and other environmental goals as obligatory domestic goals, it was under the 12th Five-Year Plan that the government set a 17-percent decrease in carbon emissions per unit of GDP, along with energy intensity reduction targets. To achieve these targets, the State Council also launched the Working Plan for Greenhouse Gas Emissions Control. Other significant developments during this period include the selection of seven provinces for pilot carbon dioxide emissions trading projects in 2011, the promotion of low-carbon development at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the release of the first National Climate Change Adaptation Plan in 2013, and the publication of the National Plan on Climate Change (2014-2020) in 2014.

Reaching a political consensus to transition to a low carbon emissions development model was an important strategy in China's climate change mitigation. Although the paradigm shift might be perceived as primarily driven by international pressures at first, officials soon realized that the current growth path was no longer sustainable and that low-carbon green growth would serve the national interest in the long run. The 12th Five-Year Plan cited seven emerging strategic industries: environmental protection and energy efficiency, new energy, next-generation information technology, biotechnology, high-end manufacturing, clean energy vehicles, and high-tech materials. These industries were identified as the drivers of China's aspiration to become a world leader in green industries. In 2014, China invested some USD 83.3 billion in renewable energy, the largest investment made by any country in the world, which was more than double the amount the US invested in renewable energy that year. All these policy decisions allowed China to commit substantial amounts of emission cuts as part of its nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement.

More recently, the country welcomed its national emissions trading scheme (ETS) in 2017 to efficiently reduce carbon emissions by coal and gas-fired power plants (International Energy Agency, 2020). This was originally announced in 2011 and initially launched in 2013 across seven provinces and cities. It became fully operational in 2021 as firms deposited their emission permits with the government (Busch, 2022). Karplus (2021, p. 12) labels this scheme as a "transitional system that combines elements of enterprise-level targets, state control, and industrial policy with a market mechanism". Further, she lists four primary drivers of China's decision to adopt ETS, namely: (i) its cost-effectiveness as a mechanism in controlling CO_2 emissions by electric power and industrial sectors; (ii) capacity-building exercise for the government in the monitoring, reporting, and verification of emissions; (iii) revitalization of the country's CO_2 offset market which relied on the European Union's ETS; and (iv) promotion of accountability among firm managers for their respective CO_2 and greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2021, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment launched mandatory data reporting requirements for six additional sectors, namely, iron and steel, aluminium, cement, chemicals, papermaking, and civil aviation (Busch, 2022). These are projected to be part of China's ETS in 2025, along with the heavy industry and manufacturing industries. However, there have been doubts about the initiative's economic benefits as well as opposition from the cited sectors, hence adversely impacting the planned expansion of the country's ETS (Busch, 2022). Karplus et al. (2020) also posit that bigger, non-state firms tend to report non-compliance to China's industrial energy efficiency policies.

In discussing China's shift to low-carbon green growth, it is essential to note that this move did not happen overnight. It was a product of a long bargaining process among key policy actors in the bureaucracy. Since China is governed by just one party, policymaking is mostly limited to relevant ministries and other government agencies. In the next section, the policymaking process on climate change is examined through the lens of the bureaucratic politics concept.

Bureaucratic politics in China's climate change policy

As the policymaking process in the Chinese government became less personalized and more institutionalized because of the reforms in the 1980s, some experts began to adopt the bureaucratic politics approach. Allison and Halperin's bureaucratic politics model offers a perspective that can explain the decision making of the Chinese government about foreign policy issues. Studies suggested that policymaking in China is not only under the control of top leaders, but it also characterized by competition among various agencies and organizations in the bureaucracy (Lai & Kang, 2014). Allison and Halperin (1972) stressed that government policy is not a product of the decision of one actor; rather, policy is made by a group of large organizations and political actors who have conflicting opinions on what the government should do. Therefore, these actors compete in attempting to influence both the decisions and actions of government. The authors argued that government decisions can be understood because of bargaining among players in government. Moreover, they wrote that organizational interests weigh heavily among other interests of senior players. These organizational interests are often dominated by the desire of actors to maintain the autonomy of the organizations they represent (Allison and Halperin, 1972). The success of players depends on their bargaining advantages, which stem from control of implementation, control over information, persuasiveness with other players, and their ability to affect the objectives of other players in other issues (Allison and Halperin, 1972).

Until 1998, the China Meteorological Administration (CMA) was responsible for coordinating climate change policy. This agency was originally intended to provide meteorological forecast service. It was later made into an administrative body under the State Council as one of the lead agencies in the scientific discussion on climate change. Scientists have been involved in climate change talks starting from the early 1990s. By delegating the policy coordination to the CMA, it made the CMA the only key player in climate policy. Back then, there were no other agencies involved. The CMA represented China in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a UN body tasked to assess the science related to climate change. Qin Dahe, the former director of CMA, became the co-chair of the IPCC Working Group I. Several Chinese experts had been selected to contribute to the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC (Heggelund et al., 2010). At the time, the political interest in the topic was virtually nonexistent; hence, there was no bureaucratic turf to fight over (Conrad, 2010).

Starting 1998, the function of coordinating climate change efforts was transferred to the State Development Planning Commission, which was later renamed as the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) in March 2003. The NDRC is the most influential government agency on matters of economy, energy, and climate change. The transfer of responsibility from CMA to NDRC signified that climate change was no longer seen solely as a scientific issue but more in terms of a political and economic issue (Heggelund et al., 2010). As a high-level inter-ministerial committee, the NDRC heads the National Leading Group on Climate Change (NLGCC). The four vice-chairs of the NLGCC are from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), CMA, and Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST). Two of these leading political institutions,

the NDRC and MOST, have been known to compete for influence at the national level, while the MFA tried to consolidate its position, and CMA representatives focused mainly on the scientific debates at the IPCC (Schroder, 2016).

The NDRC sets the macroeconomic agenda and is a decisive actor on domestic issues. It studies and formulates five-year plans for economic and social development, and it guides the overall performance of the economy. Likewise, it coordinates policies on energy conservation and emission reduction. Since it is responsible for both economic and energy policies, the NDRC defines and sets the direction of climate policy. In June 2007, the NDRC issued the National Climate Change Program, which indicated that the Chinese government acknowledges the importance of addressing climate change by establishing institutions and mechanisms and adopting measures on GHG mitigation, adaptation, climate change science and technology, and public awareness (Tsang & Kolk, 2010). Despite the existence of the NDRC, policymaking involving climate change and energy policies remains highly fragmented, for no single institution has absolute authority to mediate the interests of relevant agencies. Consequently, policy articulation sometimes appears uncoordinated, such as the negotiating stance of the Chinese delegation at COP15 in Copenhagen (Ong, 2012).

As the most influential institutional player in foreign affairs at the ministerial level, the MFA has the primary role in the international political process on climate change. Its function is to implement foreign policies that have been approved by the Politburo Standing Committee by translating broad foreign policy goals into practical plans for implementation (Lai & Kang, 2014). It is a hardliner in its position that Chinese economic considerations and sovereignty should be upheld, and developed countries must be responsible for leading climate change initiatives and providing financial assistance and technology transfers to developing countries. Often, the position of the MFA is in line with that of the NDRC in terms of climate change for it prioritizes China's economic development, which is a core national interest (Heggelund et al., 2010).

When the climate change negotiations were formalized with the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992, the implications of climate change were framed as a potential threat to China's economy if emission reductions would be implemented. Thus, the strategy at the time was to prevent binding commitments at all costs. The MFA took on this difficult task of protecting the country's economic interests while actively participating in the climate talks. Fearing international isolation anew after the Tiananmen incident of 1989, China's leadership wanted to present itself as a responsible member of the international community (Conrad, 2010). Given China's expanding role in the international arena and its increasing involvement in several complex global issues, MFA had to rely on the expertise of other agencies. In doing so, it had to compete with other bureaucratic actors to influence the policymaking process (Lai & Kang, 2014).

The MOST is the ministry with extensive technical expertise on clean development mechanisms and issues of technology transfer, having established a research program on climate change in the 1990s. Its officials have traditionally been sympathetic to environmental concerns (Heggelund et al., 2010). It also sends representatives to the COP meetings. The MOST, together with the MEP, which was previously the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA), made efforts to gain more influence in climate change policy with contrasting results. The MEP was only granted full ministerial status in 2008 with few staff and a small operational budget. Its goal of championing environmental causes is often seen as less significant when pitted against the goals of the NDRC and MFA. Although the emergence of environmental agenda in domestic politics can be considered as a policy window that the MEP can maximize to push its organizational interests on climate change, it still lacks leverage vis-à-vis other key ministries.

Compared to MEP, the MOST has gained some latitude in its bid for influence. Since policymaking on climate change is hugely dependent on scientific data and the use of technology, the MOST was able to assert its relevance given its predominance on the scientific aspect of the issue. Many departments within the MOST have close links with research institutions involved in climate change policymaking. Its Office of Global Environmental Affairs coordinates various bilateral and multilateral research initiatives on climate change. The engagement of MOST in international research cooperation was an effective strategy in expanding its bureaucratic turf, as it gained control of important information that allowed it to challenge the NDRC in certain policy decisions (Conrad, 2010). MOST also provides policy inputs and advice to international climate change negotiations as another way to exert its influence in decision-making. Therefore, MOST has been successful in exerting its influence by using its expertise, information, and other resources to frame the climate change issue within the realm of science and technology. In the process, it was able to shift the political priorities of the Chinese leadership and increased its significance as a policy actor (Conrad, 2010).

As the competition for power and influence among ministries intensified, bargaining among them became essential. While CMA and MEP wielded influence on climate change policy in the earlier years of international negotiations, the NDRC and MOFA were able to seize control of the policymaking process by promoting a more conservative perspective that placed economic development above all other interests. This explained the hardline stance of China against binding commitments during initial negotiations of the post-Kyoto climate deal. This position, however, became untenable as China became the second-largest economy in the world and the highest producer of GHG. Mounting international pressure on China to act more responsibly by reducing its emissions proved to be difficult to ignore. Likewise, Chinese leadership had to re-evaluate its position as more research studies singled out China as a country most vulnerable to catastrophic climate events.

Thus, the Chinese leadership sought ways to mitigate carbon emissions while ensuring sustained economic growth. The shift to a low-carbon green growth strategy turned out to be a more feasible policy alternative as scientific data on climate change became available, pointing to the negative impacts of a business-as-usual scenario. Moreover, the aspiration of being a world leader in green industries was a strong impetus for the transition. The NDRC identified emerging strategic industries, all related to green technologies, given their high value-added potential, which could increase the competitiveness of the Chinese economy (Zhang, 2015). Soon enough the low-carbon development model gained traction as an ideal development path for China in the long term. From being a buzzword, low-carbon green growth came to be a formal strategy reflected in several official documents.

In the 18th Congress Report of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the term "ecological civilization" was added to the national development strategy together with economic, political, cultural, and social development. A guide was also issued to operationalize the concept. Moreover, green growth has been the central theme of other major documents: the 12th Five-Year Plan, the Working Plan for Greenhouse Gas Emissions Control in the 12th Five-Year Plan, China's Policies and Actions for Addressing Climate Change, the National Plan in Response to Climate Change 2013-2020, and the CCP Central Committee Resolution Concerning Some Major Issues in Comprehensively Deepening Reform (Zhang, 2015). These domestic policies enabled China to pledge more ambitious emission reduction targets as its nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement.

Concluding thoughts

The number of bureaucracies involved in climate change demonstrates that this issue is cross-cutting, and, as such, it entails a complex coordinating process. Given that climate change is closely linked to economic and energy policies, the NDRC has the primary role in policymaking. This topic is also a foreign policy issue; thus, the MFA is heavily involved in international climate change negotiations. The MOST and MEP, whose main interests include safeguarding environmental concerns, take a secondary role in the policymaking process. While this arrangement may be true in the early years of the post-Kyoto climate negotiations, the MOST, MEP, and the larger scientific community gained some influence in pursuing a more proactive climate policy domestically and internationally.

In the 1990s, climate change was perceived as an issue that affected China's sovereignty in domestic affairs, and mitigation programs were understood as a threat to China's economic growth. However, a paradigm shift started in the early 2000s as more scientific data became available pointing to the adverse impacts of climate change in the form of extreme weather events, which could weaken the economy and the stability of Chinese society at large. Furthermore, studies pointed out that delaying mitigation could be costlier. Thus, a political consensus was reached on pursuing a low-carbon development path. For Shu (2023), China's climate policies have undergone three main phases, specifically: (i) as a defender of development rights from 1988-2006; (ii) an active follower of global climate policy-related developments over the period 2007-2005; and (iii) a global leader from 2016 and beyond. The Chinese leadership was convinced that the existing industrialization model would be unsustainable.

Moreover, state planners decided to focus on green technologies to ensure the long-term viability of economic growth. Policies were soon drafted to lay the foundation of the low carbon green growth strategy. These policies placed China in an advantageous position to make more large-scale commitments in international climate change negotiations. Regarding policy effectiveness, Shu (2023) finds that the country's climate policies have positively impacted various issue areas such as carbon reduction, energy efficiency, technology innovation and economic development. Nevertheless, the Chinese government may still consider key policy options involving the implementation of a national climate law, enforcement of more market-based and voluntary instruments, incorporation of local targets into local climate plans, and greater citizen participation in the policy process (Shu, 2023).

In essence, this case illustrates that although China is ruled by one party, bargaining among relevant ministries and agencies remains a common practice in arriving at important policy decisions. Therefore, the saying that "where you stand depends on where you sit," which aptly encapsulates the main assumption of the bureaucratic politics model, also applies to Chinese policymaking and not just in most democratic states.

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