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Does State Violence Translate into a More Bellicose Foreign Behavior? Domestic Predictors of International Conflict-Propensity in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Anaïs Marin*

Abstract: *With the questioning of the democratic peace axiom according to which democracies do not go to war with one another, scholars in comparative politics started investigating whether authoritarian regimes are more prone to launch or escalate an international conflict. Empirical studies have shown that state violence is often reflected in more aggressive foreign policy behavior. "Rogueness," measured by the intensity of state violence (political repression, systematic torture), is usually correlated with a greater propensity to use force first in interstate disputes. Whereas Russia illustrates this "warmonger rogue" behavior, in other post-Soviet Eurasian countries the correlation is not fully verified, however. Building on empirical data on interstate conflict-onset, this paper demonstrates that violence-intensity at home does not necessarily translate into more bellicosity abroad. Belarus, Turkmenistan, and to some extent Kazakhstan are at the same time rogue countries—in the original sense of the term—and peaceful players ("peaceniks") in IR. Refining existing authoritarian regime typologies, the paper singles out which regime and leadership features are conducive to international conflict-propensity, or war avoidance, in the region. Findings are not fully conclusive, but they contribute to highlighting*

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the impact of underexplored domestic variables to explain variations in the conflict-propensity of transiting regimes.

Keywords: rogues, authoritarian regime-types, violence, conflict-propensity, foreign policy behavior, post-Soviet Eurasia.

Introduction

Intuitively, one would assume that dictators have a more hawkish foreign policy than democratic rulers. The 20th century bore many bloodthirsty autocrats who behaved like renegades in international affairs. While perpetrating mass killings at home, Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, Idi Amin Dada, Muammar Gaddafi, and Saddam Hussein, to mention but the most (in)famous ones, pursued a bellicose policy towards their neighbors. Closer to us chronologically, Vladimir Putin's regime, while backsliding into authoritarianism over the past decade, got Russia involved in two interstate armed conflicts: in 2008, when it launched a Blitzkrieg against Georgia to prevent its South Caucasian neighbor from forcefully regaining control of breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia; and since early 2014 in providing military support to separatists in Eastern Ukraine against the Western-backed government that emerged from the Euromaidan protests in Kiev. Whereas a number of domestic variables can explain the bellicosity of warmongers such as Putin's Russia, the same variables fail to explain why other states, such as Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, are paragons of "peaceful dictatorships." Throughout post-Soviet Eurasia, levels of *intrastate* violence, whether due to terrorism, ethnic conflicts, or political repressions, are particularly high. This does not systematically translate into a more conflict-prone or violent behavior in *interstate* relations however. Understanding why is the main ambition of this paper.

The study covers the period from 1992 to 2014 and includes the 12 countries of the ex-USSR commonly referred to as "post-

Soviet Eurasian" states.[1] The region is representative of the many paths regimes in transition from post-totalitarian rule can embark on. Our sample includes five cases from Central Asia, three from the South Caucasus, three Slavic countries, and Moldova—which is the most advanced in terms of democratic reforms. Like Ukraine and Georgia, which most typologies consider as hybrid regimes, Moldova aims at a rapprochement with the EU and is therefore eager to comply with Western human rights and democratic values. At the other extreme of the spectrum are personalist dictatorships (Belarus, Azerbaijan) and Central Asian neo-patrimonial regimes (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan) which are all more or less consolidated autocracies. Somewhere in between are competitive authoritarian regimes (Russia), as well as hybrid regimes still oscillating between illiberal democracy and the temptation of further autocratization (Kyrgyzstan, Armenia).

Taking *conflict-propensity*, which we deem to be illustrative of *violent* foreign policy behavior in IR, as our dependent variable, we analyze the impact of two governance variables that signal a regime's penchant for illegitimate or abusive violence in domestic affairs: *rogueness* (coercion against a regime's own population), and *authoritarianism*.

The objective is to test and possibly contest the hypothesis that high levels of state violence (rogueness) and non-democratic political authority necessarily translate into more aggressive foreign policy, that is, into a higher propensity to start an interstate conflict or to use force first in an existing dispute. Whereas scholarship on the foreign policy behavior of authoritarian regimes postulates the existence of such a connection (Wilkenfeld 1973; Russett and Oneal 2001; Caprioli and Trumbore 2003), our findings suggest otherwise. In post-Soviet Eurasia three anomalies—Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan—apparently contradict the assumption that a

[1] These are the fifteen independent republics that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union, minus the three Baltic States, which were incorporated into USSR after World War II and followed a liberal democratic course after recovering their sovereignty in 1991, joining NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004.

regime's violent behavior towards its own population translates into more bellicose foreign policy.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section offers a critical overview of the democratic peace debates and the "rogue states" literature, which have provided until now the main lenses through which to apprehend the relationship between coercive and aggressive state policies. It also presents the key contributions of academic scholarship on the foreign policy behavior of authoritarian regimes as well as the "dictatorial peace" hypothesis. The third section presents the paper's research design and empirical data: conflict-propensity, as measured by records of conflict-onset for the 12 countries of our sample between 1992 and 2010 (from the Correlates of War dataset), and the two sets of independent variables—the *intensity of domestic state violence*, measured by the Purdue Political Terror Scale (PTS); and *the level of authoritarian political authority*, as measured by the Polity IV dataset, and taking into account the distinctive features of post-Soviet Eurasian regime types and leadership style. Summing up the results, the fourth section discusses the findings and proposes a typology of conflict-prone regimes in post-Soviet Eurasia. It shows that governance variables fail to explain satisfactorily the observed variations in conflict-propensity, and argues that alternative variables might be more determining. As foreseen by the theoretical literature on the conflict-propensity of dictatorships, the relative (in)stability of each regime seems to also play a role: the more consolidated a regime—be it democratic or authoritarian—the more peaceful its foreign policy.

The "Dictatorial Peace" Hypothesis

While demonstrating, almost uncontestably, that "democracies do not engage one another in wars" and that "dyads consisting of two full democracies are more peaceful than all other pairs of regime types," the democratic peace hypothesis (Gieseler 2004) did not lead to establishing that all non-democracies are more prone to start a war. In fact, since the end of the Second World War no two personalist dictators or two military regimes have gone to war with

each other (Peceny et al. 2002). Can we then, as Mark Peceny and his colleagues have done, speak of a "dictatorial peace"? This paper argues that in post-Soviet Eurasia some authoritarian regimes are actually *less* conflict-prone than average. Although scholars have found "no unambiguous evidence of a dictatorial peace to match the robustness of the democratic peace" hypothesis (ibid.), this apparent oxymoron has some paradigmatic value.

Now considered almost as a scientific law in IR studies (Gieseler 2004), the democratic peace postulate extends the theory of war avoidance developed by Kant in his "Perpetual Peace" philosophical sketch (1795). Confirmed by extensive empirical evidence,[2] this law has stamped the lenses through which scholars analyze the foreign policy behavior of non-democratic countries as well.

Unfortunately, the democratic peace is limitative because it gives a black-or-white picture of political regimes (Rosato 2003), thus obscuring the hybrid nature of most non-democracies (Diamond 2002). Be it at home or on the diplomatic arena, not all dictators behave the same way. Single party regimes for example are less repressive and less conflict-prone than other dictatorships (Weeks 2012)—hence the hypothesis of a "dictatorial" (Peceny et al. 2002), "tyrannical" (Davenport 2007), or "authoritarian peace" (Ishiyama et al. 2008). On the other hand democratic leaders can choose to reverse the virtuous cycle of democratic peace and engage in vicious cycles of warfare (Russett and Oneal 2001), turning into "warlike democracies" (Risse-Kappen 1995), allegedly for the sake of advancing the democratic cause abroad.

Democratic peace theories fail to explain the subsequent anti-model of a rogue state which is as cautious as democratic countries are about initiating a militarized dispute (Ray 1995). Statistics on the war propensity of capitalist and socialist countries during the Cold War show that "while 'democratic' states may have rarely fought with each other, 'advanced socialist states' appear to have rarely

[2] In his analysis of all major international wars between 1816 and 1991, Rudy Rummel showed that none of the 350 dyads identified included a pair of two opposing democracies (Rummel 1997).

fought at all" (Oren and Hays 1997: 495). In other words, many of the "laws" identified by democratic peace theories eventually apply to the foreign policy behavior of non-democracies as well. Whether their relative conflict-proneness is indeed connected to domestic features of state governance (coercion intensity, regime type, leadership style, and the dictator's psychology) remains understudied, however.

Do All Rogues Behave Aggressively? State Violence and the First Use of Force in IR

The foreign policy of authoritarian regimes has often been apprehended through the misleading prism of the "rogue state" rhetoric. Yet state rogueness initially refers to a violent pattern of *domestic* political behavior, in other words to a regime's systematic use of political violence against its own population. This is measured against the yardstick of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Litwak 2000), which proclaims and protects the integrity, rights and freedoms of all human beings.

A semantic shift occurred, however, that led to qualifying some countries as "rogue" because of their anti-Western attitudes and notably their ambition to challenge the United States' hegemony in the post-Cold War, unipolar world order. First in the list were "renegade" international players seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (Nincic 2005). Yet the banalization of the "rogue state" narrative in American journalistic discourses about (against) Washington's remaining enemies after the demise of the Soviet Union—Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Libya, etc.—led to politicizing the notion further. The Pentagon came to use the "rogue" category for ostracizing international competitors and justifying *ex ante* the toppling of dictators abroad—including democratically-elected leaders—in regions where the US have strategic and economic interests. Under the Reagan administration the "academic" literature on rogue states subsequently developed an incestuous relationship with U.S. foreign policy decision-making circles (Oren and Hays 1997). In the 1990s the rogue state rhetoric turned into a propaganda tool in support of the "just war" concept,

Pax Americana interventions, and pro-democracy crusades against pariah regimes. Not only was "the rogue label … rendered analytically meaningless by the selective and inconsistent way in which it was applied to US opponents"—Cuba topping the list, whereas Syria was conveniently left off (Caprioli and Trumbore 2003: 383–84). It failed to account for the authentic measures of rogueness, that is to say when a highly coercive regime commits genocide, systematic torture, political repression, and other violations of human rights and civil freedoms.

This flaw was first noticed and theorized by feminist IR scholars Mary Caprioli and Peter Trumbore. They identified three patterns of domination characteristic of a rogue's domestic behavior which, they argue, reflect in its foreign policy behavior. Their Rogue State Index combines measures of domestic discrimination (gender inequality and ethnic discrimination) and state repression (as measured by the Purdue Political Terror Scale). According to them "first use of force" better characterizes foreign policy *behavior* than dispute initiation (conflict-onset). The latter is a more widespread unit for measuring a state's aggressiveness in IR, referring to the propensity to pick a fight, whereas the former measures a state's propensity to strike the first blow in an existing international dispute (Ibid.: 387). Their results show that rogue states are indeed more likely to use force first—at least this was the case during the timespan of their measurements (1980–92). Running their model, they find out that at the highest levels of domestic discrimination and repression, rogue states were more than eight times more likely to use force first in international disputes (Ibid.: 393). Yet in post-Soviet Eurasia highly repressive regimes, such as Belarus or Turkmenistan which match their definition of a rogue state, have never got involved in a violent armed conflict.

Rogue, Pariah… and Yet Peaceful

Studies on conflict propensity build on the hardly contestable postulate that domestic norms of political behavior are "mirrored" in a state's international conduct. Where scholarship on the foreign policy behavior of authoritarian states is mistaken, however, is when

it claims that this transference of norms "cannot be considered a selective process" (Caprioli and Trumbore 2003: 379). Three "anomalies" in our sample—"peacenik rogues" Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan—illustrate the case of dictatorships which *do* choose *not* to transfer their coercive ways (intense political violence) into an aggressive foreign policy (bellicosity). Whereas classical literature on authoritarianism argues that in sultanistic regimes the cult of the chief's personality serves as an ideology (Linz and Stepan 1996), in Turkmenistan for example it is not exclusive of it, and the idea of peace is actually a pillar value of state ideology (Anceschi 2008). When he proclaimed the country's "permanent neutrality," and upon joining the Non-Aligned Movement in 1995, then president of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov referred to his country's traditions to justify his intention of staying away from potentially conflictogenous alliances (Hiro 2009; Jeangène Vilmer 2010; Anceschi 2010).

In the case of Belarus the peace ideology is actually put forward to dissimulate the structural and material incapacity of the country to stand the consequences of a potential war *given the neighbors it has* (Russia on one side, NATO members on the other). This geopolitical factor cannot be deemed to be solely a control variable when analyzing conflict-propensity—or war avoidance, for that matter. Lukashenka is fighting hard to defend Belarus's sovereignty from Russian influence and appetites, and to make his own voice heard in world affairs, albeit with limited success. Peaceful relations with neighbors, EU ones included, require a diplomatic tact which he lacks, hence his pariah status. His "dictaplomatic" tactics have, however, been efficient so far when it comes to maintaining the status quo: securing Russia's material support and shielding his regime from the contagion of democracy as it is promoted by the West (Marin 2013). Lukashenka's oftentimes aggressive diplomatic moves—expelling Western diplomats, antagonizing neighboring Poland, criticizing Putin's foreign policy in Eurasia—fall short of provoking violent disputes, however: not a single border clash involving post-Soviet Belarus appears in the global records of militarized interstate disputes.

The following section presents in more detail the dataset and variables used for analyzing to what extent variations in the international conflict-propensity of post-Soviet Eurasian countries (our dependent variable) are correlated with internal levels of political violence and these countries' respective regime types (independent variables).

Research Design: Domestic Predictors of International Conflict-Propensity

The monadic linkage between internal political violence and international conflict-proneness is hard to model for at least two reasons. The first relates to data. Depending on the variables used for measuring violence, autocratic power-concentration and international aggressiveness, the search for connections between a regime's violent and/or authoritarian governance, and its bellicose foreign policy behavior, will bring about different results. The second concerns the coding methodology and the definition of appropriate control variables. This explains why scholarship on interstate dispute initiation has produced mixed findings so far.

Measuring Violence in Foreign Policy Behavior: The COW Dataset

The most widely accepted global dataset for measuring conflict-proneness is compiled by the investigators of the Correlates of War (COW) project. The COW database records the frequency of conflict-initiation and the violence intensity of all militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) that have occurred in the world since 1816. Violence-intensity is measured on a scale from level 1 (hostility without militarized action) to level 5 (war), itself disaggregated in a 21-entry repertoire of actions (Jones et al. 1996; Kenwick et al. 2013). MIDs are defined as "conflicts in which one or more states threaten, display or use force against one or more other states, explicitly targeted towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property or territory of another state." Disputes are composed of incidents that range in intensity from threats to use

force to actual combat—short of war[3] (Jones et al. 1996: 163). Each event is given a number under which the dispute "narrative" (a brief summary of key actors and actions in the conflict) is catalogued. For each MID the dataset indexes the countries involved ("participants") with coding rules (0/1) signaling which participant was the "originator" of the dispute.

Table 1 hereafter reproduces all the entries from the COW dataset on MIDs that concern post-Soviet Eurasian countries between 1992 and 2010.[4] The table clearly shows that during that period Russia is the country of our sample which initiated the most disputes (61)—hence its "warmonger" status in our typology—followed by "bellicists" Azerbaijan (15), Uzbekistan (12), and Armenia (10)—at a much lower level though.

[3] Instances of war (level 5 violence) are defined by the fatality level of the dispute, set at 1000 deaths in combat, with a minimum of 100 casualties for a state to be considered a war participant. In the COW dataset wars are recorded separately and in four separate subcategories (interstate war, intra-state (civil) war, extra-state (post-colonial) war, and war involving only non-state actors). Unfortunately this COW dataset covers wars only up until 2007.

[4] MIDB.csv file, recording MIDs at participant level (monadic, one record per dispute participant). Dataset v4.1 (last updated: 2010), Correlates of War project http://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/MIDs.

Table 1. Conflict-propensity, as measured by the number of violence-intense Military Interstate Disputes (MIDs), short of war, originated by each post-Soviet Eurasian country during the 1992-2010 period (in decreasing order of hostility level)

CATEGORY (author's typology)	WARMONGER	BELLICISTS			SEMI-WARRIORS				PEACENIKS			
Country abbreviation (COW country code)	**RUS (365)**	**UZB (704)**	**AZE (373)**	**ARM (371)**	**KYR (703)**	**TAJ (702)**	**GRG (372)**	**UKR (369)**	**MOL (359)**	**KZK (705)**	**BLR (370)**	**TKM (701)**
Number of MIDs, of which:	65	14	16	11	8	9	12	10	4	2	1	1
Originated by this country	61	12	15	10	8	8	11	9	4	2	1	1
Hostility level 3 & 4	48	12	10	9	7	7	6	4	2	2	1	1
Hostility level 3 & 4 MIDs originated by country, of which	**46**	**12**	**10**	**9**	**7**	**7**	**6**	**4**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**
Level 3 hostility MIDs, of which highest actions (by type)	28	6	4	0	4	5	2	3	1	1	1	1
7 (show of force)	15	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
8 (alert)	3	0	2	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
9 (nuclear alert)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10 (mobilization)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11 (fortify border)	5	5	0	0	3	2	1	1	1	1	0	1
12 (border violation)	5	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Level 4 hostility MIDs, of which highest actions (by type)	18	6	6	9	3	2	4	1	1	1	0	0
13 (blockade)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14 (occupation of territory)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15 (seizure)	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
16 (attack)	7	2	0	4	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
17 (clash)	7	3	5	5	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0
18 (declaration of war)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
19 (use CBR weapons)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Palmer et al. (2015) and author's calculations based on the dataset from Correlates of War project, Data on Military Interstate Disputes from 1816-2010 at the participant level (contains one record per militarized dispute participant), file MIDB_4.01.csv, www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/MIDs.

Most of their post-Soviet neighbors were more selective about getting involved in a MID (hence they fit in our "semi-warrior" category), or avoided them altogether, as did "peacenik" Belarus and Turkmenistan. This preliminary result poses a methodological challenge, namely that of defining and pondering the appropriate control variables. Whereas size and overall capability (including, of course, military capacity) arguably augment the conflict-propensity of a major military power such as Russia, these factors do not explain the relative bellicosity of a much smaller and poorer country such as Armenia, for example.

Independent Variable 1: "Rogueness," as Measured by the Political Terror Scale (PTS)

The Rogue State Index developed by Caprioli and Trumbore (2003) for measuring domestic state violence is based on an assessment of two important features of state violence—discrimination and repression. Yet relying on gender inequality as evidence of discrimination is not entirely relevant for evaluating state violence in post-Soviet contexts. Sticking with a narrower definition of "rogueness," our index compares levels of political repression as measured by the Purdue Political Terror Scale (PTS).

The Political Terror Scale (PTS) measures levels of political violence and terror that a country experiences in a particular year based on a 5-level "terror scale" originally developed by Freedom House. It is based on the assessment of violence along three dimensions: the scope of state violence, its intensity, and range (Wood and Gibney 2010: 373). The data used for compiling the PTS scores come from three different sources: the yearly country reports of Amnesty International, the U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, and Human Rights Watch's World Reports.

Table 2. Rogueness variable: PTS scores of post-Soviet Eurasian countries since 1992 (in descending order of the 1992-2014 average*)

PTS scores by rating source Country (abbrev.)	Amnesty International (2012)	State Department (2012)	Human Rights Watch (2013)	Average 2012-2013 (author's calculations)	Average 1992-2014 (author's calculations)	Conflict-propensity category (author's typology)
Russia (RUS)	4	4	3	3.66	3.7138	Warmonger
Uzbekistan (UZB)	3	3	4	3.33	3.1363	Belllicist
Ukraine (UKR)	3	3	3	3	3.0795	Semi-warrior
Tajikistan (TAJ)	3	3	3	3	2.8936	Semi-warrior
Azerbaijan (AZE)	3	3	3	3	2.7869	Bellicist
Belarus (BLR)	2	3	3	2.66	2.6558	Peacenik
Kazakhstan (KZK)	3	3	3	3	2.64	Peacenik
Turkmenistan (TKM)	3	3	3	3	2.6363	Peacenik
Kyrgyzstan (KYR)	3	3	3	3	2.58	Semi-warrior
Armenia (ARM)	2	3	2	2.33	2.4565	Bellicist
Moldova (MOL)	2	3	n/k	2.5	2.438	Peacenik
Georgia (GRG)	2	3	1	2	2.1477	Semi-warrior
		AVERAGE (post-Soviet Eurasian countries)			**2.7637**	

*the scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 5 the highest level of political repression recorded. *Source*: Purdue Political Terror Scale dataset, www.politicalterrorscale.org/Data/.

Based on this index, most post-Soviet Eurasian countries reach the 3rd level of the scale, which according to the PTS codebook corresponds to a level of state violence characterized by "(…) extensive political imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without trial, for political views is accepted."[6] Whereas the USSR was ranking between 2 and 3 in the 1980s, in the 2000s Russia has almost reached level 4, where "the practices of level 3 are expanded to larger numbers" and "murders, disappearance and torture is a part of life." In fact, in the year 2014, two countries from our sample scored 4 on the PTS scale: Russia and Ukraine. In the same category one finds Myanmar, Egypt, China, Brazil, and Bangladesh. The unusually high score for Ukraine probably results from the ongoing separatist conflict in Eastern Ukraine: an intrastate civil or ethnic conflict, and *a fortiori* an international armed conflict, are known to increase overall levels of state violence within a polity. Preferring to rely on a rating that is less affected by the current war Zeitgeist in the region, average data available until the previous years (2012 and 2013) are also indicated in the table. The main findings are that:

1) The majority of post-Soviet Eurasian countries have had a stable score 3 on the PTS scale throughout most of the post-independence period. This score points to the relative impreciseness of the PTS scale for capturing variations in the intensity of state violence throughout the region. In fact, other indexes would tend to highlight the superior intensity and more systematic character of state repression perpetrated, for example, by Turkmenistan. Belarus's relatively low score (2.65 on average) may also come as a surprise for experts familiar with the country's deplorable human rights record and the bad press it subsequently receives in U.S. reports.
2) Russia stands out as the most "political terror-prone" country of our sample, followed by Uzbekistan. These two countries are also the most conflict-prone according to the COW database.

[6] The interpretation for each of the 5 levels of political terror on the scale is detailed on the project's website, cf. www.politicalterrorscale.org/Data/Documentation.html.

3) Of the four countries with the lowest PTS score (below 2.5 on average)—Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan—three are situated in the EU's Eastern neighborhood, whereas the fourth one, Kyrgyzstan, was long considered a beacon of democratic reforms in Central Asia. Among them, COW data index only Moldova as a peaceful player in IR.

The correlation between violence intensity at home and a bellicose foreign policy is thus established only in the case of Russia, which appears as an ideal-typical "warmonger rogue." It seems to be inoperative in the case of Turkmenistan, a highly repressive country with a relatively peaceful track record in IR. Belarus arguably fits in this category of "peacenik rogue" countries as well, its relative low PTS score notwithstanding. Most other country cases are only partly illustrative of one or the other connection between domestic state violence and international conflict-propensity. This mixed finding encourages us to examine the explanatory potential of other governance features such as regime type.

Independent Variable 2: (Authoritarian) Regime Features, as Measured by Polity IV

Mainstream scholarship suspects that authoritarian leaders are more likely than democratic ones to involve their country in hazardous diplomatic adventures, to "resolve on war as on a pleasure party for the most trivial reasons," as Kant put it more than 200 years ago, because in such regimes "war does not require of the ruler, who is the proprietor [...] of the state, the least sacrifice." Whereas fighting a defensive war is a way for autocrats to consolidate their legitimacy at home by way of a "rally around the flag" effect, escalating a dispute into an armed conflict that they are not certain to win can incur potential damage in terms of legitimacy. In fact, authoritarian regimes do face audience costs as well (Fearon 1994; Frantz 2003), but the cost of (losing) a war is not the same depending on the type of authoritarian regime involved.

The Polity IV dataset,[7] a standard in academic research on political regimes—especially in IR studies—will thus be used for measuring the level ("intensity") of authoritarianism displayed by each of the 12 countries of our sample since they became independent in 1991. The Polity IV dataset is favored over alternative indices such as the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index because its timespan (from 1800 to 2015) is the only one that covers the whole transition period, whereas the EIU started rating regimes only from 2006 onwards.[8] The objective is to situate each regime on the Polity IV scale and examine whether the most authoritarian ones are also more conflict-prone than average, or, conversely, whether countries in which political authority is exerted more democratically are necessarily less prone to start or escalate a militarized interstate dispute (MID).

A major advantage of the Polity IV project is that it constantly monitors regime authority patterns and changes by capturing concomitantly qualities of democratic and autocratic authority in each state's governing institutions.[9] Political regimes are situated on a 21-point scale ranging from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy) (Marshall and Jaggers 2006). Polity IV labels as autocracies regimes scoring between -10 and -6 (the lower the score, the more institutionalized autocratic authority), whereas regimes scoring above +6 are considered as democratic (albeit imperfect ones on the lower part of the scale). In between these two major categories are mixed (hybrid) regime types scoring from -5 to +5.

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7 See the project's website for details: http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity project.html.

8 See the Economist's Intelligence Unit's webpage for the last yearly report (2015): www.eiu.com/democracy2015.

9 The Polity scheme consists of six component measures that record key qualities of executive recruitment (competitive, ie. democratic, or not), institutional constraints on executive authority, and openness of political competition (eg. where free and fair elections guarantee an open field for political participation, and thus a higher quality of democracy).

Table 3. Regime type variable: Polity IV scores of post-Soviet Eurasian countries since 1992 (in descending order of the 1992-2014 average)**

Year Country abbrev.	’92	’93	’94	’95	’96	’97	’98	’99	’00	’01	’02	’03	’04	’05	’06	’07	’08	’09	’10	’11	’12	’13	’14	Average 1992-2014 (author’s calculations)
UZB	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9
TKM	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-9	-8	-8	-8.91
AZE	1	-3	-3	-6	-6	-6	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-6.17
KZK	-3	-3	-3	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-5
BLR	7	7	7	0	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-7	-4.87
TAJ	-6	-6	-6	-6	-6	-5	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3.13
KYR	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	3	4	3	3	1	4	7	7	7	7	0.30
ARM	7	7	7	3	-6	-6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.21
RUS	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.34
GRG	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	5.56
UKR	6	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	4	6.30
MOL	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	7.95

**the scale ranges from –10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). *Source:* Center for Systemic Peace, Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSCR) *Polity IV project: regime authority characteristics and transitions datasets*, Annual Time Series 1800-2015 (Excel series file), last updated 2015, www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html (accessed 16 August 2016).

The figures above and the highlighted section of Table 4 (*infra*) show that according to Polity IV post-Soviet Eurasia comprises both consolidated authoritarian regimes (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and consolidating ones (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan), as well as three partially democratic regimes (Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova). The five other regimes of our sample stand in the hybrid zone of so-called "anocracies"—a term coined by Polity IV coders to characterize regimes featuring "inherent qualities of political instability and ineffectiveness, as well as an incoherent mix of democratic and autocratic traits and practices" (ibid.). Whereas Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan uncontestably belong to this category according to most observers, the average score over the 1992–2014 period for Belarus and Russia (-3.13 and +4.34 respectively) may appear as unexpectedly high.

In the case of Belarus, this may be due to the fact that up until Lukashenka's (first and only democratic) election as president in 1994, the regime was displaying clear features of democratic governance, and was hence rated +7 on the Polity IV. This positively affected the 23-year average, although in the following two decades of Lukashenka's reign the regime scored a stable -7.

Surprisingly enough, in the case of Russia the Polity IV yearly assessment recorded a progress towards democracy in 2000 (with the regime's score jumping from 3 in 1999 to 6 in the year of Vladimir Putin's first election as president), and it started taking stock of what many experts consider as an authoritarian backsliding of the Russian regime only in 2007, when Russia's score was retrograded to 4—still a positive score, and one which the regime has retained ever since. This illustrates one of the most decried shortcomings of the Polity project: assessments being based on formal (procedural) democracy criteria, mimicking pluralist elections and alternation of executive power is enough for a regime to score relatively well on the Polity IV scale, although power may in fact be transferred to a designated heir who hands it over back to the autocratic leader at the end of his term (as happened in Russia between 2008 and 2012 with the famous seat swap of the Putin-Medvedev tandem).

Alternative democracy indices, which take into account whether political rights and civil liberties are guaranteed (as does

the EIU's Democracy Index) come up with a radically different picture. The EIU, which scores democratic performance on a 0 to 10 scale (with a score of 10 points corresponding to "full democracy"), granted the Russian regime 5.02 points in the first Index it published in 2006. Russia's score degraded each of the following years and reached 3.39 in the 2014 edition of the EIU Democracy Index (EIU, 2015: 7). Russia then ranked *behind* Belarus (3.69 points) and only slightly above Kazakhstan (3.17 points)—countries which on the Polity IV scale have scored a stable -7 and -6 respectively over the past 15 years. In other words, such discrepancies in the assessment of the Russian regime's democratic track record point to the limits of quantitative measurements of a country's governance features. Qualitative comparative analysis might prove more satisfying for our purpose.

The academic scholarship has not produced a consensual classification of post-Soviet regimes, however. In fact, numerous and at times contradictory typologies have been sketched. Table 4 hereafter lists the most reputable ones.

Table 4. A selection of regime typologies (with illustrations from post-Soviet Eurasia)

Regime type	DEMOCRACY				NON-DEMOCRACY			
Authors								
Gandhi and Przeworski (2007)	Parliamentary democracy	Presidential democracy	Mixed type democracy		Bureaucracy (institutionalized)		Autocracy (personalized)	
Linz and Stepan (1996)					Totalitarian regime	Post-totalitarian	Authoritarian regime	Sultanistic regime (BLR, TKM)
Petersen (2013)	**DEMOCRACIES**		**HYBRID REGIMES**		**AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES**		**HEREDITARY REGIMES**	
	Liberal democracy	Democracy (MOL)	Illiberal democracy (KYR, UKR, GRG)	Competitive authoritarian regime (RUS)	General authoritarian regime (ARM, TAJ)	Personalistic autocracy (BLR, TKM)	Limited hereditary regime (AZE, KZK, UZB)	Absolute hereditary regime
Polity IV Project	Consolidated democracy (MOL)	(Semi-) democracy (UKR, GRG)	Failed democracy/ state (KYR)	Open anocracy (ARM, RUS)	Closed anocracy (TAJ)	Authoritarian regime (BLR, KZK)	Consolidated autocracy (AZE)	Hereditary monarchy (TKM, UZB)
Guliyev (2011)					Electoral personalist (Putin)	Closed personalist (Niyazov)	Hegemonic personalist (Aliyev dynasty, Karimov, Rahmon, Lukashenka, Akayev 1995-2005)	
Freedom House	**FREE**		**PARTLY FREE**		**NOT FREE**			
	Consolidated democracy	Semi-consolidated democracy	Transitional government (GRG, MOL)	Hybrid regime (UKR)	Semi-consolidated authoritarian regime (ARM, KYR, RUS)		Consolidated authoritarian regime (AZE, BLR, KZK, TAJ, TKM, UZB)	
Ishiyama (2002) Central Asian neo-patrimonial regimes					Plebiscitary one-party system (UZB)	Competitive one-party system (KYR, KZK)	Military oligarchy (TAJ)	Personal dictatorship (TKM)
Slater (2003), Weeks (2012)					Civilian audience bureaucracy (“machine”)	Personalist autocrat with civilian audience (“boss”)	Non-personalist regime with military audience (“junta”)	Personalist autocrat with military audience (“strongman”)

Most scholars consider Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova (and, until recently, Kyrgyzstan) as "semi-democracies" or "hybrid" (transitional) regimes, and all other post-Soviet Eurasian regimes as outright authoritarian. Within this category, however, regimes can be classified according to various criteria, leading some to qualify for example Armenia as an "open anocracy" and Tajikistan as a "closed" one (Polity IV), Azerbaijan as an "absolute hereditary regime" (Petersen 2013), Putin's regime as "electoral personalist" and Niyazov's as "closed personalist" (Guliyev 2011) or "sultanistic" (Anceschi 2010). Other Central Asian regimes are often thought to form a specific category ("neo-patrimonial" regimes), with either personalist or one-party system features, the latter being subdivided into "plebiscitary" rule, as in Uzbekistan, or "competitive" rule, as in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Ishiyama 2002). Although these categories, as we'll show in the discussion section of this paper, are useful for comparing authoritarian leaders' respective foreign policy behavior, the absence of a consensual typology of authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet Eurasia limits the explanatory potential of the regime type variable. In particular, applying Barbara Geddes' famous typology of authoritarian regimes—which distinguishes personalist regimes (dictatorships), military regimes (juntas) and single-party regimes[10] (Geddes 1999a)—to post-Soviet countries carries with it the risk of three pitfalls.

First, all the countries of our sample come from the same Soviet matrix, which after the death of Stalin moved from a totalitarian to a post-totalitarian single party regime. The domination of the Communist Party was a structural feature which still affected state governance in the early 1990s, even after the party

[10] Geddes identified three standard categories of authoritarian regimes: *personalist regimes* (dictatorships) are those where "access to political office and the fruits of office are held by an individual leader." In contrast, *military regimes* (of which Latin American *juntas* were an archetype) are those where "a group of officers decides who rules and influences policy." Finally, in *single-party regimes* such as the People's Republic of China "access to political office and policy control [are] dominated by one party"—although Geddes admits that one finds in this category cases when "other parties may legally exist and compete in elections" (Geddes 1999b: 4)—but political life remains dominated by a bureaucratic machine.

was outlawed in most republics. Several acting presidents in the region used to hold high Party positions back in the Soviet times (Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, Emomali Rakhmon in Tajikistan). Oftentimes taking Putin's "United Russia" as a model, most leaders established a dominant party to support the ongoing personalization of power. Yet and second, determining the influence of these bureaucratic "machines" on foreign policy decisionmaking is difficult because most authoritarian regimes in ex-USSR also happen to be ruled by ideal-typical personalist leaders (dictators). Third, whereas no post-Soviet regime would qualify as a "military regime" (junta), the resilience of state police in these countries, where the ex-KGB and its successor avatars strongly affect domestic politics, is a factor which surely impacts on foreign policy decision-making processes too.

Towards a Typology of Conflict-Propensity in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Pursuant of the COW definition of a war (level 5 violence intensity MID), only two full-fledged interstate wars have taken place so far in post-Soviet Eurasia—the 1992–94 Azerbaijan–Armenia war (over Nagorno-Karabakh, itself a subnational actor in a MID coded as *intrastate* conflict within Azerbaijan); and the Russia–Georgia "five-day war" of August 2008, which the COW's War database has not recorded yet (only version 4.0 exists for that dataset, which indexes interstate wars up until 2007). Yet plenty of lower intensity disputes and incidents appear in the other, MID dataset of the COW project, that inform about the propensity with which post-Soviet Eurasian countries launched MIDs *short of war*. Our overview of these 150 or so MIDs in the 1992–2010 period allows us to highlight which countries displayed a greater propensity for conflict-onset. The hostility level of each MID is also taken into account for sketching a "ranking" by level of bellicosity in the disputes each of the 12 countries in our sample initiated (cf. Table 1 above). From this follows a four-tier typology tentatively classifying post-Soviet Eurasian regimes by conflict-proneness.

- **The warmonger (Russia)**

Since 1992 Russia originated no less than 61 MIDs, out of which 46 involved actions of a hostility level 3 or 4 (cf. Table 1 above). Looking in more detail at the conflict narrative for each dispute or incident, one sees that Russia initiated conflicts mostly with its neighbors, including democracies (Norway, Japan). Its most frequent repertoire of hostile action was "show of force" (hostility level 3), whereas conflict-escalation to level 4 hostility actions resulted mostly in "attacks" and "clashes"—although the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (which has not been recorded yet in the COW database) added a case of territory "seizure" to the inventory of level 4 intensity MIDs initiated by Russia.

The interpretation of MID data concerning Russia can be biased unless one controls for the impact of factors which strongly affect its relative conflict-propensity, such as the country's size relative to its neighbors', as well as its military capability. The largest country in the world, Russia is six times the size of the second largest in our sample (Kazakhstan). With nearly 144 million inhabitants it is 3 times more populated than Ukraine, 5 times more than Uzbekistan, and 8 times more than Kazakhstan. Vis-à-vis other post-Soviet republics the ratio is 15 to 1 (with Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan) and above (around 30 to 1 for most others, and up to 50 to 1 relative to Armenia). Its territory, ex-superpower status and military capacity make it a usual suspect of conflict-initiation. The number of contiguous neighbors (ie. international borders) is another variable which scholars have shown is impacting positively on conflict-onset (Vasquez 1995; Oneal and Russett 1997), because borders are often the cause and the site of MIDs. Russia has 14 international land borders, while other post-Soviet countries have between 2 (Moldova) and maximum 7 (Ukraine).

- **The bellicists**

Further down in our index is a peloton of three "more than average" bellicose countries: Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Each one

originated between 10 and 15 MIDs (short of war) during the 1992–2010 period, while the average in post-Soviet Eurasia was below 9.

For Uzbekistan, "fortifying border" was the most frequent level 3 hostility action deployed during these disputes. This should come as no surprise given that most MIDs with Uzbekistani participation concerned the protection of borders against Taleban incursions from neighboring Afghanistan and Tajikistan, as well as—so argues Tashkent—Kyrgyzstan. Macroeconomic fundamentals explain why Uzbekistan is a relatively low-key bellicose regime. Although official figures regarding Uzbekistan's military spending are lacking, due to the country's limited economic capacities it is suspected to be much lower than that of Armenia and Azerbaijan for example, whose military expenditure accounted for over 4 percent of their respective GDP throughout the 2000s.

Not surprisingly, these two post-Soviet countries which fought an interstate war (level 5 MID) in the 1990s appear in our category of bellicose countries. The tense post-war context in bilateral relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is reflected in the high share of "clashes" among the highest actions performed during their militarized interstate disputes since the war formally ended in 1994. Whereas Azerbaijan originated quantitatively more MIDs (15) than Armenia (10) did, the hostility level of Armenia-initiated MIDs was on average much higher, with 9 level 4 actions during the covered period (broken down in 4 "attacks" and 5 "clashes"). Frozen after the 1988–94 war, their conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh actually evolved into a permanent proxy war of attrition, albeit a low-intensity one, with regular skirmishes occasionally escalating again into a more violent MID, as happened in April 2016.

- **The semi-warriors (moderately conflict-prone players)**

This category comprises moderately conflict-prone countries which initiated "only" 4 to 7 level-3-or-4-intensity MIDs since 1992. Topping the list is Georgia, followed by Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In absolute terms, the first two have initiated more MIDs (11 and 9 respectively) than the two Central Asian republics (8 each);

yet the hostility level of their actions was on average lower. Like Uzbekistan and due to comparable geopolitical constraints, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were mainly concerned with border fortification (fending off their countries against the contagion and incursions of Islamic terrorism), which is considered by COW coders as "displaying use of force" (level 3 violence intensity).

- **The peaceniks**

In this category are countries which originated no more than 2 MIDs of intensity level 3 or 4, and not a single war, throughout the post-independence era: Moldova, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan (each of the last two initiated only one level-3 intensity MID during the 22 year period under analysis). The striking feature of this low-bellicosity category is its heterogeneity. The only thing peacenik regimes have in common, apart from a shared Soviet legacy, is the fact that they are all landlocked. Yet this fate is shared by all three other Central Asian countries and Armenia, which all belong to more aggressive categories of IR players. To make sense of this variety, we shall now discuss in more detail the explanatory potential of our two main independent variables: rogueness and authority features.

Findings: Correlations between Governance Features and International Conflict-Propensity

Domestic politics and institutions inevitably affect a country's foreign policy preferences, whatever the regime type. Archetypical governance features common to most post-Soviet Eurasian regimes—coercion used against their own population (rogueness) and autocratic leadership style—are not always reflected in a more aggressive or violent foreign policy behavior, however.

Testing the Rogueness Hypothesis: No Universal Connection between Levels of State Coercion at Home and International Conflict-Propensity

Scoring the highest on the PTS scale (level 4), Russia is also the unrivaled champion in terms of foreign policy aggressiveness in post-Soviet Eurasia: having initiated 46 level 3 or 4 intensity MIDs between 1992 and 2010, it accounted for 43 percent of such MIDs initiated in the region. Moreover Russia has fought two wars (level 5 violence intensity MIDs) since its independence, although in both cases its responsibility in triggering the armed conflict is a matter of controversy: OSCE reports admitted that Georgia bore part of the responsibility for the escalation of the South Ossetian conflict into an interstate war in August 2008. As for the proxy war with Ukraine that erupted in spring 2014 in Donbass, Moscow denies any military involvement in what it claims is an intrastate conflict (civil war) opposing Luhansk and Donetsk separatists to official Kiev—in spite of the accumulating evidence of Russian participation in combat on Eastern Ukrainian territory.

The hypothesized correlation between a high PTS score and conflict-prone behavior seems to be confirmed also with the case of Uzbekistan, which tops the category of bellicose countries in our typology, while ranking high (second to Russia) on the Purdue Political Terror Scale too. No significant and positive correlation between state rogueness (intense state violence domestically) and international conflict-proneness (propensity to start or escalate a MID) can be claimed in other cases, however. The two other bellicose countries from our sample (Azerbaijan and Armenia) scored on average below 3 on the PTS scale throughout the analyzed period.

On the other hand, only Moldova confirms the hypothesis that a state which is *less* coercive towards its own population is also less conflict-prone in IR: in spite of severe separatist dynamics (Transnistria, Gagauzia), with a 2.4 score on the PTS scale Moldova ranks among the least coercive countries of our sample—second only to Georgia. Conversely, the alleged correlation is confirmed by the case of Belarus, which belongs to the same "peacenik" category as Moldova. Lukashenka's regime is by many standards a very

repressive one—even though the level of political violence it perpetrated since 1994 is, quite surprisingly, coded below 3 on the PTS scale (2.65 on average). Belarus originated only one “show of force” action since 1992 (in the form of military exercises targeting Lithuania, in 2001). This could lead us to call into question the accuracy of our violence measurement instruments. Not only does the intensity of state violence recorded by the PTS appear as underestimated in the case of Belarus and Turkmenistan (which scored an average 2.63 on the PTS scale over the 1992-2014 period). Both cases also reveal the analytical weakness of the MID-initiation (conflict-onset) variable: short of *militarized* disputes, Belarus initiated numerous low intensity conflicts with most of its neighbors (notably Poland and Russia), most of them resulting from Lukashenka’s eccentric diplomacy (Marin 2013). The COW dataset does not allow for capturing these instances of “verbal only violence” in a state’s foreign policy behavior. As for the Turkmen regime, the fact that it is among the most closed ones on earth implies that COW coders might have missed some instances of MIDs which the Turkmen authorities formally denied.[11] In fact, in the 2010s—a recent period for which no COW data is available yet—local observers reported numerous clashes at the Turkmen-Afghan border, and the ongoing fortification of the Turkmen-Iranian border.

Yet another possible explanation for Turkmenistan’s apparent peacefulness in IR in the two decades following the demise of the USSR can be sought in the political culture of the Turkmen regime. In order to consolidate Turkmenistan’s independence from Russia and other great powers involved in the new “Great Game” in Central

[11] This caveat was raised by an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper, who contested Turkmenistan’s labeling as a “peacenik” in IR. Turkmenistan being surrounded by unstable countries like Afghanistan, or similarly closed regimes like Uzbekistan and Iran, (s)he argued, information about the MIDs the regime got involved in have rarely made the international headlines. Unless reported by coders overviewing its neighbors’ own border disputes (including of non-contiguous neighbor Azerbaijan over the delimitation of the Caspian Sea), Turkmenistan-initiated MIDs might indeed have slipped past the attention of COW coders.

Asia, late president Saparmurat Niyazov designed the concept of "Positive Neutrality," which the UN General Assembly recognized on 12 December 1995. Upon granting Turkmenistan's neutrality constitutional status and a visual identity (in 1997 two olive branches were added to the national flag), Turkmenbashi evoked "the *centuries-old peaceful traditions* of the Turkmen people" (Jeangène Vilmer 2010: 183; *emphasis added*). In Belarus, President Lukashenka oftentimes made similar claims that peaceful neighborhood relations were deeply rooted in Belarusians' mentality—even though in his case as in Niyazov's, emphasizing his country's neutrality was instrumental first and foremost to authoritarian regime-consolidation.

As for Kazakhstan, which also belongs to the "peacenik" category according to our typology, one explanation for the relatively low conflict-propensity of the Nazarbayev regime is, apart from its diplomatic strategy of "balancing" between foreign partners to secure the influx of Western investments into the hydrocarbons sector, the fact that Kazakhstan signed border treaties with its five neighbors early in the 1990s (Hiro 2009: 251). These confidence-building measures contributed to building good neighborhood relations, a feature which is absent, for example, from Uzbekistan's own multi-vector foreign policy (Anceschi 2010).

In the case of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, both of which scored below 2.5 on the Political Terror Scale on average throughout the analyzed period, the correlation between moderate coercive policies at home and limited conflict-propensity abroad is partly confirmed. Ukraine for its part ranked relatively high on the PTS scale throughout the 1990s and 2000s, a rather violent domestic posture which—if the PTS score is considered reliable—is *not* reflected in its foreign policy behavior: having initiated only 4 MIDs of level 3 or 4 violence intensity according to COW data, Ukraine is actually the *least* conflict-prone player in our "semi-warrior" category.

Summing up, it appears that there is no clear correlation between violence intensity at home and abroad, except in the cases of Russia (an ideal-typical "warmonger rogue") and Moldova (a "peacenik" player in IR which also ranks low on the PTS scale). Yet if one takes the *regional* average PTS score of post-Soviet Eurasian

countries (2.76 according to our calculations for the 1992–2014 period) as a reference point, it appears that none of the five countries scoring *above* this average (Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan) is a peacenik player in IR. Conversely, out of the seven countries ranking *below* this regional rogueness average, four are peaceniks in our typology (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Moldova).

Pursuing our search for the most pertinent domestic factors affecting conflict-proneness in IR, we shall now test our second set of independent variables: authoritarian features of governance and regime (sub)type.

Regime Type Hypothesis: Infrastructural Institutions Matter

The testing of our second hypothesis led to rather inconclusive findings too. The theoretical assumption that the more authoritarian a regime is, the more aggressively it behaves in IR, is not validated empirically—save for the cases of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Whereas Polity IV and other democracy ratings consider both of them to be authoritarian regimes, they also top the bellicists' category in our own typology, having initiated 12 and 10 level-3-or-4 MIDs respectively between 1992 and 2010 (cf. Table 1 *supra*).

Conversely, Moldova tops the sample in terms of democratic governance, with an average 7.95 score on the Polity IV scale since the country gained independence from the USSR. Moldova could thus confirm the hypothesis that democratic governance carries with it a preference of the regime for conflict-avoidance in IR. Whereas Moldova earned the reputation in the West of being a benchmark of successful democratization and has been rated as "democratic" (≥ 7 points on the Polity IV scale) since 1993, the three other "peaceniks" are considered to be (consolidated) authoritarian regimes. Kazakhstan's -5 average score on the Polity IV scale should not, for that matter, hide the fact that Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has ruled the country since 1989 and was re-elected with almost 98 percent of the vote in 2015, has a deplorable human rights track record, in particular for cracking down on political opponents. Yet Kazakhstan, which has the second highest GDP/capita in post-

Soviet Eurasia, also performed quite well in terms of economic liberalization and good governance—factors that positively affect a country's "political authority" rating on the Polity IV scale.

The two countries in our sample that combine features of consolidated authoritarianism with the lowest conflict-propensity, Turkmenistan and Belarus, are oftentimes considered to be "sultanistic" regimes (Ishiyama 2002). Theoretical literature and contemporary studies on sultanism—a type of rule arising "whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely discretionary instruments of the master," according to Max Weber's definition—do not correlate extreme neo-patrimonial features with any particular foreign policy behavior, however (Chehabi & Linz 1998; Eke & Kuzio 2000). In trying to make sense of the Belarusian and Turkmen anomalies, there is one common feature in their governance style which might explain their peaceful propensities in IR, one which is also closely connected with the psychology of their leaders. Dictators who feel they must systematically weaken the military in order to construct a "coup-proof" regime tend to limit the Army's capability, with the side-effect of diminishing their country's capacity to fight an international conflict (Quinlivan 1999). In fact, already back in the Cold War times scholars identified that some non-democratic regimes had "peaceful dispositions" by necessity, because the more often they used the Army for domestic purposes (policing society, as the Belarusian and Turkmen regimes[12] are known to do), the less capable they were of waging war (Andreski 1980).

Whereas the analysis of quantitative data from the Polity IV data reveals a mixed picture, more convincing explanations of the observed variations in conflict-propensity can be found by scrutinizing the different *types* of authoritarian regime involved.

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12 Following the 25 November 2002 failed coup attempt against President Niyazov, the Turkmen regime stepped up repression against the opposition (over 1000 persons were detained). On 16 December dozens of special forces officers raided the Uzbek embassy in Ashgabat searching for the alleged mastermind of the coup, former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov. This obvious violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations was not recorded in the COW's MID dataset.

Discussion

As mentioned above, Barbara Geddes' typology of authoritarian regimes has been criticized on several grounds. Firstly, experts on post-Soviet regimes argued that Geddes' categories are too wide to represent the variety of ruling patterns in the region (Levitsky & Way 2010). Some suggested breaking down the category of single-party machines, for example into a) regimes in which the party's domination tolerates no pluralism and is not contested freely in elections (plebiscitary one-party systems, such as Uzbekistan); and b) regimes where minimal electoral institutions qualify them as "competitive" one-party systems, such as Kazakhstan in the 2000s (Ishiyama 2002). By doing so, one could argue that the elements of competitiveness in the Kazakhstani regime make Nazarbayev more accountable towards a winning coalition that is comparatively larger than the one Karimov is facing in Uzbekistan—a factor which is believed by IR theorists to constrain dictators and to discourage them from making adventurist foreign policy decisions (Frantz 2003; Weeks 2008).

Disaggregating the "junta" category into two sub-types according to similar elite-constraint levels, a military regime where the leader is constrained by the elite can appear to operate as an oligarchy (a "military machine", as does Tajikistan according to John Ishiyama), which is arguably *less* conflict-prone than, for example, an unconstrained personalist leader building his authority on a military audience (Slater 2003), as does Putin in Russia. Whereas power-concentration gives autocrats wider latitude in foreign policy matters—freer of elite constraints, they are in theory more prone to launch or escalate an international conflict (Weeks 2012: 335)—in bureaucratic/oligarchic systems a group of high-ranking officials or military officers can refuse to enforce the leader's adventurous foreign policy decisions (Geddes et al. 2014).

Secondly, Geddes' typology tends to overestimate the number and autonomy of personalist leaders (dictators). This, in turn, over-determines the conflict-propensity traditionally ascribed to personalist regimes.

Scholarship on personalist regimes argues that dictators are particularly conflict-prone because they face fewer institutional constraints than other authoritarian regimes do (Reiter and Stam 2003; Frantz 2003, 2007). Believed to be less accountable to their audience, they do not fear domestic dissent or sanction from their winning coalition when they perform badly in the foreign policy field: this makes them less selective about initiating a conflict (Weeks 2008). Dictators having a greater say than military or single-party leaders in the selection of their advisory group, they would be more likely to be misinformed by loyal experts and thus to commit foreign policy errors (Frantz and Ezrow 2009, 2011). The foreign policy behavior of Putin's regime—a personalist one by many standards—seems to confirm most of these theoretical assumptions. However, several other personalist leaders in post-Soviet Eurasia are much more peaceful. The reason for this divergence can be found in the *institutional* features of authoritarian rule in the region.

No personalist autocrat, even one enjoying the widest network of allegiances, can rule all alone: he has to rely on some infrastructure—a dominant party (that is, a bureaucratic organization) or the coercive forces (the army and/or the state police) for implementing his decisions (Lai & Slater 2006), *a fortiori* for starting a war (Frantz 2007). Using taxonomies that distinguish institutionalized regimes (bureaucracies) from personalized ones (autocracies), scholarship on the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes has suggested focusing on whether power is incarnated in a machine (the archetype being the People's Republic of China), or concentrated in the hands of a single leader, as it is in most dictatorships (Gandhi and Przeworski 1997). Brian Lai and Dan Slater (2006) argued that such approaches still focus too much on "despotic power" however, that is to say on *who* makes decisions and how (personalized vs. collective procedures), at the expense of what they call *infrastructural power* available for the regime to effectively enforce decisions.

Towards a New Classification of Authoritarian Regimes

Having observed the gradual personalization of power in once single-party dominated Malaysia, Dan Slater (2003) designed a typology that distinguishes authoritarian regimes depending on these two variables: the type of *despotic power* (who decides? individual/autocratic vs. collective/oligarchic decision-making procedures); and the type of "audience" or *infrastructural power* involved at the implementation stage (who executes? party-based institutions or military-based ones). He labeled the subsequent four ideal-types of authoritarian regimes as follows: *Machines* (party-collective—that is, decision-making is collegial, and the state institution enforcing them is a civilian bureaucracy); *Bossism* (party-individual); *Junta* (military-collective); and *Strongman* (military-individual) (Slater 2003; Lai & Slater 2006; Weeks 2012). The nine authoritarian regimes of our sample appear to fit quite nicely in this typology, which in turn can help us explain variations in conflict-propensity.

Figure 1. Tentative typology of post-Soviet Eurasian authoritarian regimes based on Dan Slater's four-tier typology by leadership/audience type (2003)

Personalist leadership (dictator)

	STRONGMAN Russia, *Azerbaijan**	**WARMONGER**	**PEACENIK**	**BOSS** Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan	
Military audience					**Civilian audience**
	JUNTA Tajikistan	**SEMI-WARRIOR**	**BELLICIST**	**MACHINE** Armenia, Uzbekistan, *Kyrgyzstan**	

Non-personalist leadership (bureaucracy)

* Regimes which fit in the regime category but not in the conflict-proneness category: Azerbaijan (strongman regime) is a bellicist, not a warmonger; and Kyrgyzstan (machine type regime) is a peacenik, not a bellicist (cf. Table 1).

NB: Moldova (peacenik), Georgia and Ukraine (semi-warriors) do not appear on the figure because they are not authoritarian regimes.

Contemporary Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan[13] qualify as ideal-typical "machines" (non-personalist leadership/civilian institutional power base); Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan fit in the category of "boss"-led regimes (personalist leadership/civilian institutions), which also happen to behave as "peaceniks" in IR according to our typology. Tajikistan, where as a result of civil war state institutions are dominated by the military and the leadership is elite-constrained (non-personalist), can be considered a "junta" type of authoritarian regime. Not surprisingly, such a regime is relatively conflict-prone ("semi-warrior" in our typology). Lastly, Putin's Russia arguably fits in Slater's "strongman" regime category since it combines a personalist type of leadership with a military type of infrastructural power base, embodied by the *siloviki* (a Russian term designating influential officials from the "power structures"—the army, the interior ministry, the state police, etc.). To some extent, Azerbaijan, whose late president Heydar Aliyev (1993–2003) headed the KGB of Azerbaijan SSR from 1967 until 1987, qualified as a strongman type of regime as well. His son Ilham, who took over as president in 2003, is more business-oriented; yet, against the background of Azerbaijan's protracted conflict with Armenia, his autocratic rule might still be partly constrained by the institutional power of the military and/or former KGB.

By refocusing attention on institutions, and especially infrastructural institutions as opposed to despotic ones, Slater's typology is pertinent for analyzing variations in conflict propensity *among* authoritarian regimes (Lai and Slater 2006: 116). It is also more accurate for situating hybrid regimes (Wahman et al. 2013; Petersen 2013) and thus for comparing foreign policy behaviors in post-Soviet Eurasia, where hybridity is increasingly the norm (Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010).

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13 In spite of Islam Karimov's longevity as president (27 years), the Uzbekistani regime does not have as strong personalist features as other Central Asian authoritarian regimes do (Anceschi 2010: 147). In fact, the structural influence of clans on politics turns the regime into an oligarchic (civilian machine) type of regime.

Leadership Style: Strongmen Pick More Fights, Bosses are Generally More Peaceful

Even more than regime type, leadership style is a governance feature which seems to affect a state's conflict-propensity. In the course of the 2000s Putin's Russia became an archetypical "strongman" regime, irrespective of the fact that the presidential office was held for four years by Dmitry Medvedev, who—in contrast to Putin—does not have a military or KGB background. In fact, in Slater's definition, the strongman doesn't have to be a military man himself: suffice it for him to exert a personalist rule while also relying on the military (or the *siloviki*, in a post-Soviet context) or being dependent on a military-dominated winning coalition. The well-documented influence of the *siloviki* in Putin's Russia justified the strongman regime labeling. IR scholars have also demonstrated that the prior military background of a leader is a life experience with direct relevance for how leaders evaluate the utility of using military force first. In fact, the leaders most likely to initiate militarized interstate disputes and wars are those with prior military service but no combat experience (Horowitz and Stam 2014)—a profile which matches that of Vladimir Putin perfectly. Putin's KGB background and his "strongman" leadership style could thus explain Russia's warmonger behavior in IR, and in particular the regime's proneness to start or escalate wars in recent years.

Overall, scholarship on comparative authoritarian regimes has shown that strongmen are more likely to use external force than bosses, and as prompt as juntas to escalate a conflict (Chyzh et al. 2011). Launching a diversionary war to produce a "rally under the flag" effect is, in fact, a frequent way for these regimes to seek to bolster their legitimacy (Pickering and Kisangani 2010; Chyzh et al. 2011; Kanat 2014). Having come to power in part thanks to the second Chechen war in 1999 (an intrastate conflict), Putin has sought to consolidate his rule by restoring Russians' feeling of "greatness," which mainly comes from the fact that the country is feared by its neighbors. Occasional military campaigns that result in the *de facto* seizure of adjacent territories—in Georgia in August

2008, and in Ukraine since February 2014—are a key ingredient of this "intermestic" strategy.

Our findings verify another statistical law identified by the scholarship: those regimes feeling greater insecurity in their leadership tenure, or which have been subject to a recent revolution, are, as a rule, more belligerent internationally, especially in times of economic hardship (Chyzh et al. 2011). This situation is arguably the background of the conflict opposing Russia and Ukraine since early 2014: while the former was shaken in 2011–2012 by mass popular protests against fraudulent elections (which made the Kremlin fear the contagion of a "color revolution" in Russia proper), the latter experienced two revolutions (the Orange Revolution in 2004, and Euromaidan in 2013) in less than a decade.

At the opposite end of the international conflict-propensity spectrum, Figure 1 shows that three of the four "peacenik" regimes in our sample are ruled by a personalist leader of a civilian machine (a "boss"-type of regime, in Slater's typology): Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. This would seem to confirm the theoretical assumption that leaders building their authority on a *civilian* audience (the bureaucracy, rather than the military) display the same war-avoiding features as single party regimes do. Jessica Weeks, for example, demonstrated that non-personalist regimes with powerful elite audiences or party-based authority are no more belligerent overall than democracies (Weeks 2012). In our sample, however, ideal-typical "machines"—a category that comprises two bellicists (Uzbekistan and Armenia)—are, in fact, *more* conflict-prone than "bosses."

Consolidated Regimes are More Peaceful

Whereas regime type alone fails to fully explain variations in conflict-proneness, scholarship on transition countries has evidenced that *regime change* does. Revolutions in particular weaken institutions and frequently result in power being taken over by a personalist leader (Sharp 2005). Scholarship on regime change has shown that revolutions which result in personalist dictatorships are significantly more likely to lead to international conflict than

revolutions that culminate in other forms of government (Colgan and Weeks 2015). This could explain the moderate conflict-propensity of "semi-warrior" Georgia, whose post-Rose Revolution president, Mikheil Saakashvili (2004–2013) has often been accused of both autocratic drift and foreign policy adventurism.

Transition in general breeds instability, which is proven to be a strong predictor of conflict behavior. Times of transition are particularly conflictogenous, whereas *consolidated* authoritarian regimes which never fell for the sirens of reforms are usually more peaceful in IR. This correlation was previously established for the period 1816–2000: Correlates of War data suggest that limited democracies have been more aggressive than other regime types, including dictatorships (Daxecker 2007). This trend led some scholars to argue that democratization is, in fact, a destabilizing process (Mansfield and Snyder 1995): "while full democratization might advance the cause of peace, limited democratization might advance the cause of war" (Baliga et al. 2011: 458).

States having undergone only *partial* democratic transitions are highly likely to initiate militarized disputes to mobilize support and preserve incumbency (Mansfield and Snyder 2002). Limited democracies are therefore more aggressive than other regime types, and not only during periods when the political regime is changing. In particular, a dyad of limited democracies is more likely to be involved in a MID than any other dyad (Baliga et al. 2011). The inconclusive attempts at democratizing Russia in the 1990s and the reverse wave of autocratization which triggered a wave of popular discontent in 2011–2012 could thus also explain Russia's warmonger attitudes: after all, compared with *consolidated* authoritarian regimes such as Turkmenistan, Russia is still "only" a *consolidating* autocracy.

With the exception of Uzbekistan, all the *consolidated* authoritarian regimes of our sample are, in fact, relatively peaceful (Gavrilis 2015). On the other hand Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, all of which pledged to conduct liberal reforms at some point over the past two decades, proved to be more conflict-prone than consolidated authoritarian regimes (Belarus, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan). Moldova for its part appears as an

exception, since it has remained peaceful in IR in spite of the "adverse" conditions of its regime transiting towards democracy. In its case democratic consolidation and peacenik foreign policy behavior might have actually nurtured one another.

Conclusion

Building on our comparative review of COW data on post-Soviet Eurasian states' conflict-onset propensity, we proposed classifying post-Soviet Eurasian countries into four categories: "warmongers," "bellicists," "semi-warriors" (moderately conflict-prone players), and "peaceniks" in IR. While this typology may have analytical value for future comparative research, our study could not identify which domestic governance variables have the most impact on the conflict-proneness of the twelve countries of our sample.

Theoretical scholarship does not provide a unanimous interpretation of variations in conflict-propensity. Our analysis of post-Soviet Eurasian countries found no *systematic* correlation between the violence intensity of a regime's coercion towards its own population ("rogueness," as measured by the Purdue Political Terror Scale) and its aggressiveness in world affairs. The propensity of rogue states to initiate or escalate interstate disputes does not follow any specific rule: verified for Russia (an ideal-typical warmonger rogue), it is not validated empirically in the case of Belarus (a repressive regime with no bellicose intentions whatsoever).

Quantitative data on political authority (Polity IV dataset) led to similarly mitigated results, although some interesting correlations have been identified by looking more closely at the *infrastructural* power base (military or civilian audience) of various authoritarian regimes in the region. In combining our typology with the four-tier typology of authoritarian regimes proposed by Dan Slater (2003) and developed by other scholars (Lai & Slater 2006; Weeks 2008, 2014), we actually highlighted why a strongman regime such as Putin's Russia (and, to a lesser extent, Aliyev's Azerbaijan) is much more conflict-prone than "boss"-type of regimes whose *civilian* audience might actually constrain dictators to opt for war-

avoidance. This illustrates that not all personalist autocrats in post-Soviet Eurasia are prone to start a MID: in fact, only those whose regime audience is composed mainly of *siloviki* are, whereas "bosses" building their authority on a bureaucratic infrastructure (civilian power), as do Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan and Lukashenka in Belarus, are much more peaceful in IR.

Notwithstanding the striking parallels between many regimes of our sample with respect to rogueness, autocratic leadership style, and conflict-propensity (all things relative, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan all appear as more bellicose *and* less democratic than average in the region, whereas Moldova clearly displays opposite features), a universal generalization is not claimed due to the highly contextual nature of the phenomena. Our findings confirm some correlations identified by the academic literature—notably, that *transiting* regimes are more conflict-prone than consolidated ones—and provide additional possible explanations for the observed variations across post-Soviet Eurasia.

In particular, anomalies in our sample ("peacenik rogues," such as Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan) highlight that a country's political culture and its leader's psychology are factors that might have quite a determining impact on their war avoidance strategies. While the scholarship on conflict-initiation tends to underestimate the role of political culture, we argue that even regimes which have no concern whatsoever for human rights at home can, *in the name of state values and national traditions*, refrain from initiating or escalating a MID. Belarus (Marin 2013), Turkmenistan (Pomfret 2008), and to some extent Kazakhstan (Lee 2010; Laruelle 2015) thus fit in our "peacenik rogue" category.

Further, insights from political psychology (Malici 2007) could also inform comparative analyses of relative bellicosity in world affairs. Methods used for comparing the psychology of authoritarian leaders (Zuckerman and Kuhlman 2000) and their "operational code" in IR (Malici and Malici 2005) could, in fact, help disambiguate the variations in the international conflict-propensity of post-Soviet autocrats, and substantiate our claim that some of them validate the "dictatorial peace" hypothesis coined by Mark Peceny and his colleagues (Peceny et al. 2002).

Yet Belarus, for example, is representative of dictatorships which opt for peaceful conflict-resolution because they have no sustainable alternative at hand. For lack of natural resources (notably oil and gas, which abound in most other post-Soviet authoritarian regimes) Belarus can count only on its balancing act diplomacy. Objective geopolitical constraints teach such countries pragmatism: war avoidance at all costs is a rational way to shield their regimes against undermining from abroad, be it through Western democracy-promotion or Russian pressure for economic liberalization.

The contiguous diffusion of authoritarianism from Russia to its neighbors is another factor to be reckoned with (Khamzayeva 2012). In supporting rogue and authoritarian regimes in its near abroad, Russia ultimately contributes to the overall escalation of conflict-propensity *among* its allies (Gorenburg 2014). In Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, Russia also plays a destabilizing role by hampering the advancement of democracy so as to obstruct these countries' rapprochement with Euro-Atlantic structures (Cameron and Orenstein 2012). Even though this spoiling strategy can at times backfire, as it did in Ukraine and Georgia (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015), overall it increases the risk of side-lining pro-democratic forces and discarding peaceful conflict-resolution options in the region. For that reason, there are grounds for predicting that "democratic peace" will remain absent from post-Soviet Eurasia for many years to come, while "dictatorial peace" will subsist only for as long as ideal-typical authoritarian "bosses," such as Alyaksandr Lukashenka, remain in office.

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