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“The Far Abroad: The Arms Trade and Russian Influence in Southeast Asia”

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Russia has not traditionally been a major power in the Southeast Asia region. In the pre-Soviet era, relations between Russia and Southeast Asian countries were minimal. During the Cold War, substantive Russian relations were largely limited to its Vietnamese, Lao and (after the fall of the Khmer Rouge) Cambodian clients, while the ASEAN states positioned themselves as opponents of the Soviets, siding with the United States and China. In the 1990's, Russia was too weak in military, economic and diplomatic terms to play a role outside of its immediate neighbourhood. In the 21st century, however, Russia has worked to establish and deepen ties in the region, which Putin and other senior government figures have identified as a crucial area of interest for Russia. Despite somewhat modest success in deepening general relations, one area of major growth is arms sales. Russia has gained a significant and expanding share in the regional arms market, having exported significant quantities of arms to six of the ten ASEAN countries. Thus far, the expansion of arms exports has been the most successful element of Russia's strategy to expand its presence in Southeast Asia.

This study will examine the determinants of both the supply of and demand for Russian arms in Southeast Asia, arguing that political, and more specifically symbolic factors, rather than economic or security factors, are key. However, in contrast with robust constructivist views, it will be further argued that the structure of the international system, defined by relative power, plays the fundamental role. The theoretical framework for the study rests on three premises.

1. The key factor determining the actions of states is their relative power position within a broader international structure defined by the number and strength of Great Powers.

2. States will, in the long term and for the most part, aspire to a degree of autonomy and influence commensurate with this position.

3. The autonomy and influence that states aspire to has both practical and symbolic aspects. Aspirations to symbolic autonomy are determined in their degree of ambition by objective power, but derive their specific content and mode of expression from a given contingent cultural and political context.

In the context of Russian arms transfers to Southeast Asia, it will be argued that the “symbolic obeisance” implied by arms imports is the key factor. This symbolic factor generates the value to Russia of arms exports as an affirmation of its Great Power status, while Russia’s position as a “spoiler” in a fundamentally bipolar Southeast Asia security environment, along with Russia’s ideological commitment to principles of multipolarity and non-interference, mean that Russia is a preferred partner for countries that place a high value on their absolute sovereignty, non-alignment and refusal of hierarchy. Finally, it will be argued that the tendency of states to adopt such strong sovereigntist positions is not random, but is largely determined by the objective material factor of relative power.

After a brief literature review, the second section of this study develops a theoretical framework for the following sections. In this section, a “neoclassical realist” framework largely based on the work of Kenneth Waltz and Gideon Rose is developed. It is argued that Waltz’s structural realism, although a necessary foundation for a theoretically based account of foreign policies, does not generate predictions specific enough to provide a rounded and satisfying explanation of the actions of particular countries. For this, a less austere neoclassical realism,

allowing for the importance of identities, ideologies and domestic political struggles is necessary. This framework is then interpreted as a natural extension of Waltz's structural realism, and defended against accusations of insufficient theoretical rigour. In this section, it is also claimed that arms purchases, especially of advanced arms, are not governed only by consideration of value for money principles. Advanced weapons have significant symbolic value, and create an important relationship, both in practical and symbolic terms, between the purchaser and the supplier.

In the third section, an account of the diplomatic and security culture of the ASEAN countries is developed, with a particular focus on the anti-hierarchical and nationalistic elements of "the ASEAN way". It is argued that the ideology and governing principles of ASEAN reflect primarily the policy preferences of Indonesia and Malaysia, but also that Vietnam and Myanmar have arrived at similar principles independently. An account of the dominant strain of Russian foreign policy thinking is also developed, which emphasizes the key importance of a "multi-vector" Russian foreign policy within the context of a "multi-polar" world system in Russian thought. It is further argued that this state-oriented nationalism, which seeks an established position for Russia as a Great Power in the current world order, must be firmly distinguished from a more thorough revisionism that would seek to overturn the current world order entirely. The conclusion of this section is that arms transfers are an ideal field of cooperation between Russian and the ASEAN countries, as these transactions buttress Russia's claim to be a pole of the multipolar world order, while allowing ASEAN states to avoid the subordination that would be implied by excessive reliance on American or Chinese weapons.

The fourth section tests the claims of the second and third section empirically by examining arms transfers from Russia to the ASEAN countries from 2000 to the present. In this section it is demonstrated that, as predicted by neoclassical realism, weaker states in Southeast Asia “bandwagon” by buying Chinese or American arms, whereas stronger states symbolically “balance”, partially by buying proportionally more Russian arms. Evidence is also produced to support the claim that Russia’s interest in selling arms in Southeast Asia cannot be explained solely by economic or strategic motives, and therefore the identity and ideological factors discussed in the second section must be included in a full account. A similar argument is made for the demand for Russian arms by ASEAN states.

Finally, the fifth section looks at the two cases of Vietnam and Thailand. Vietnam, because of its firm policy of neutrality and its stable consensus-based politics, is seen as an ideal field for the extension of Russian influence in Southeast Asia. Thailand, in contrast, is considered as an example of the importance of factional struggles in determining foreign policy during periods of transition. Thaksin Shinawatra is seen to be a figure who has attempted to pull his country closer to “the ASEAN way” of foreign policy as detailed in the second section, but faced opposition from entrenched interests in favour of more accommodationist policies toward the United States. Taken together, the two case studies demonstrate that the predominance of longer term “regime identity” factors, or shorter term factional and political factors, in determining a country’s arms purchases, are not determined by any general pattern, but rather by the particular configuration of domestic power and style of politics in each country. However, as the case of Thailand will demonstrate, structural imperatives tend to

assert themselves over the longer term, eventually stabilizing both the longer term and shorter term domestic intervening variables along lines dictated by structural constraints.

Literature Review

The topic of Russian arms transfers to Southeast Asia has thus far been neglected in the academic literature. Notwithstanding this lacuna, there are two groups of academic literature bearing on the topic. The first group is general surveys of Russian relations with ASEAN and the ASEAN countries; the second is works addressing Russian arms exports, some of which have sections devoted specifically to Southeast Asia. A typical example of the first group is Anton Tsvetov's article "After Crimea: Southeast Asia in Russia's foreign policy narrative".¹ Tsvetov argues that Russia's "Asian pivot" is a secondary element in its foreign policy, and relations with Southeast Asia are a secondary element in the Asian pivot. Tsvetov concludes, "The main value of Southeast Asia for Moscow lies in its image-building strategy, with the West as the primary audience."² Tsvetov argues that relations with the West remain the chief concern of Russian foreign policy, and Russian attention is further drawn away from Southeast Asia by its involvement in Syria's civil war and its attempts to build the Eurasian Economic Union.³ Nevertheless, involvement in Southeast Asia serves a useful purpose in the "information warfare" between Russia and the West. Western narratives portray Russia as fundamentally weak and dependent on the West.⁴ Building stronger relations with Southeast Asian states assists Russia in presenting an alternative narrative according to which Russia is a strong nation

¹ Tsvetov, Anton (2016) "After Crimea: Southeast Asia in Russia's foreign policy narrative" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 38(1).

² Ibid, 55.

³ Ibid, 57.

⁴ Ibid, 60.

with a genuinely “multivector” foreign policy, neither reliant on the West nor forced into excessive reliance on China in response to Western hostility.

Other surveys come to similar conclusions. Elena Martynova also notes the relatively peripheral status of Southeast Asia to Russia, given that Russia's most vital interest in Asia is the development of Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East, a goal which is best served through a primary focus on Northeast rather than Southeast Asia.⁵ Martynova stresses Russia's status as a relatively new power in the region, which has both advantages and disadvantages for Russia. Russia has not had time to build extensive informal ties to the region, which makes it difficult for private Russian businesses to operate effectively there. On the positive side, Russia tends to be seen as more non-threatening than both China and the United States.⁶ On the whole, Martynova argues that Russia is making genuine advances in Southeast Asia, but at a pace slower than its potential,⁷ and in a limited way given Russia's perception in the region as China's subordinate ally.⁸

An article by Paradorn Rangsimaporn examines “Russian aspirations to be a great power and to be *perceived* as such.”⁹ Again, it covers much of the same history as the articles by Tsvetov and Martynova. Rangsimaporn, however, goes further than Tsvetov, and directly contradicts Martynova, by arguing that Russia has successfully positioned itself as an independent power in the region, although a minor one in comparison to China and the United

⁵ Martynova, Elena S. (2014) "Strengthening of cooperation between Russia and ASEAN: Rhetoric or Reality?" *Asian Politics and Policy* Vol. 6(3), 398.

⁶ *Ibid*, 405.

⁷ *Ibid*, 406.

⁸ *Ibid*, 405.

⁹ Rangsimaporn, Paradorn (2009) “Russia’s Search for Influence in Southeast Asia” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49(5), 788.

States. Rangsimaporn places great emphasis on Russia's success in fostering bilateral relations in the area, and argues that Russia's desire to play the role of a Great Power is matched by the desire of ASEAN states to counter possible unilateral dominance by China or the United States.¹⁰ Supporting this contention with several specific examples of cooperation, he also quotes former ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo Severino, who spoke of ASEAN's "omni-enmeshment" strategy, which involves ensuring the involvement of all the major powers of Asia in the ASEAN region, to guard against any one power gaining excessive influence.¹¹ According to Rangsimaporn, not only is Russia not perceived to be a subordinate ally of China in the region, but it is seen as an independent power capable of helping to check the potential overbearing power of China and the United States.

The second group of relevant work is general treatments of Russian arms exports that treat Southeast Asia in particular. A key work in this group is an article by Stephen Blank and Edward Levitzky, which argues that Russian arms transfers should be seen first and foremost as a tool for Russia to "maintain and expand its status as a world power."¹² Blank and Levitzky concede that economic considerations are the most important in the case of many weapons exporters, such as European countries, Israel and South Korea, but argue that Russia's arms transfers should be seen in a more political light. They argue that weapons exports serve six primary political goals: supporting Russia's image as a global power, maintaining an independent foreign policy, expanding influence in the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia,

¹⁰ Ibid, 789.

¹¹ Ibid, 793.

¹² Blank, Stephen & Levitzky, Edward (2015) "Geostrategic aims of the Russian arms trade in East Asia and the Middle East" *Defence Studies*, Vol. 15(1), 63.

obtaining resource extraction rights, initiating and strengthening defense relations and securing military basing rights.¹³

Although neglected in the academic literature, the expansion of Russian arms exports to Southeast Asia has been noted in several journalistic sources. An article in *ASEAN Today* notes this expansion, attributing it to a Russian desire to improve its political standing in the region.¹⁴ The article focuses on a recent example from the Philippines, where an order for 26 000 American weapons was rejected by the US Congress on human right grounds. Russia responded by donating rifles, ammunition and trucks. This example demonstrates a major advantage to Southeast Asian states of ordering weapons from Russia, since Russia does not consider human rights concerns when approving weapons transfers. This difference also presents an advantage to Russia, in that it can gain an increased share of the market by selling to countries that are either already under, or are threatened by the possibility of, American arms embargoes. The article also claims that Russia uses weapons transfers as a tool to encourage broader trade relations, to bolster its claim to superpower status, and to indirectly check Chinese influence by strengthening China's potential opponents.

In an earlier article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Ben Otto looks more closely at both the scale of Russia's progress as an arms supplier and the political context of Russia's arms deliveries.¹⁵ Otto notes that, while increasing its arms exports to Southeast Asia, Russia has also showed a considerably increased level of activity in the region, participating in the 2014 and

¹³ Ibid, 64.

¹⁴ "Putin uses arms sales to ASEAN to increase Russian standing in Southeast Asia" *ASEAN Today*, March 14, 2018.

¹⁵ Otto, Ben "The Russians are Coming...to Southeast Asia" *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 2016.

2016 Indonesia-led Komodo military exercises, finalizing a Eurasian Economic Union-Vietnam free trade agreement, pursuing joint oil ventures with Indonesia and Singapore, and returning the the Cam Ranh naval base in Vietnam, which was a major base for the Soviet fleet during the Cold War. Otto quotes Matthew Sussex, a Russia specialist at Australian National University, “You’re starting to see not just trade deals but also military security participation and presence, and the multilateral engagement too. What you’re seeing now is evidence that Russia is serious.”

Angaindrankumar Gnanasagaran gives further examples of the connection between Russian arms exports and Russia’s attempts to increase its military and trade ties with the region.¹⁶ His article notes that the recent transfer of arms to the Philippines coincided with three naval visits to the country in 2017, and that the arms were donated free of charge, demonstrating Russia’s willingness to provide arms on unprofitable terms to make political inroads and increase its market share. Gnanasagaran also observes that Russia’s arms exports have the potential to have negative as well as positive political repercussions, as exports to countries with claims in the South China Sea have the potential to lead to friction with China. An article in *Asia Times* also comments on China’s potential reaction, while noting that China has so far not reacted strongly, a fact that the article attributes to China’s clear military superiority to the countries of Southeast Asia, a superiority that is not likely to be nullified by Russian arms transfers in the foreseeable future.¹⁷

¹⁶ Gnanasagaran, Angaindrankumar “Arms trade fuels Russia’s inroads into Southeast Asia” *The ASEAN Post*, February 19, 2018.

¹⁷ “Russia’s arms sales weaken China in the Indo-Pacific area” *Asia Times*, August 8, 2017.

Overall, despite lacking academic works exclusively dedicated to the topic of Russian arms sales to Southeast Asia, the literature provides a number of important insights into the topic. It is agreed in the literature that Southeast Asia is not a primary foreign policy interest of Russia, and that a great part of Russia's desire to be involved in the region is based on considerations of prestige. It is also agreed that, while Russia has been successful in gaining admission to all the important regional organizations, it has a poor record of positive engagement with those organizations. Rather, Russia's focus in the region has been on bilateral relations. The literature has also identified the important question of whether Russia has succeeded in establishing itself as an independent power in the region, or has merely been successful in some specific areas of economic cooperation, while remaining a subordinate ally of China in political matters. The journalistic sources and the article by Blank and Levitzky have drawn attention to the important role that arms sales play, not only as economic exchanges, but also as instruments of influence-building in the region.

However, despite these strong points, there are important weaknesses in the literature. Russia's desire to "be and be seen as" a great power, and the desire of ASEAN states to balance the larger powers against each other, are assumed, and referred to as explanations for the behaviour of Russia and the ASEAN countries. However, the origins and precise nature of these factors are not explored or explained. No attempt is made to explain why the ASEAN nations tend to balance against the excessive influence of any one foreign power, rather than accepting a Chinese or American sphere of influence, or why Russia works to establish its position as a great power, even when the actions necessary to this goal do not serve a purpose in advancing Russia's economic or core security interests. Additionally, all the studies considered here are

descriptive studies. Although the examples they discuss are often convincing in establishing their arguments, the arguments would benefit from a more thorough empirical grounding. Finally, not much attention is given to the differences within the ASEAN states. Although the central importance of Vietnam in Russia's Southeast Asia relations is often noted, and specific countries are mentioned in passing as having engaged in more or less thorough cooperation with Russia, there is little attention given to why different countries respond to Russian initiatives differently.

Theoretical Foundations

The starting point for the neoclassical realist framework of this study is the structural realism of Kenneth Waltz. Waltz's "theory of international politics" is based on a clear distinction between individual units (states), and the system of which they are parts. Although the system is composed of its units, it is defined by its structure, which is "the system-wide component that makes it possible to think of the system as a whole."¹⁸

For Waltz, ignoring the structure of international politics results in an inability to identify the constraints binding individual states. The individual characteristics of each state will determine what that state's leaders want to do, but the structure of the international system will tend to compel them to act in ways that may be contrary to their desires. The primary sign of the influence of systemic causes, according to Waltz, is the tendency of very different states to act in similar ways.¹⁹ In a competitive international system, states will tend to imitate

¹⁸ Waltz, Kenneth *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1979), 79.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 88.

previously successful behaviour and avoid unsuccessful behaviour, while states that make multiple or major mistakes may fail to survive.²⁰ Furthermore, requiring the cooperation of other states, states will be "socialized" into observing norms of diplomatic and foreign policy behaviour, as "refusal to play the political game may risk one's own destruction."²¹

The structure of the international system is characterized by only one permanent characteristic, anarchy, or the absence of higher authority. Because of this lack of authority, the possibility of resort to force is a permanent feature of international politics.²² Given that every state, whatever else it desires, can be assumed to desire its own survival, states are compelled to monitor each other's relative gains, as even developments that benefit two states mutually could, by benefiting one state more than the other, generate an increased threat to the comparatively disadvantaged party.²³ The result is the "balance of power", a balance that emerges spontaneously from the self-interested action of states, rather than from a conscious plan to generate such a balance. Waltz summarizes, "Balance of power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive."²⁴

Given the permanent nature of the international system's anarchic character, it remains for the theory to account for change in the international system. According to Waltz, the specific shape of the structure of the international system is determined by the relative power,

²⁰ Ibid, 77.

²¹ Ibid, 128.

²² Ibid, 102.

²³ Ibid, 105.

²⁴ Ibid, 121.

or capabilities, of its most important units (states). Just as economic markets are defined as monopolistic, oligopolistic or competitive on the basis of the number and relative strength of the firms in the market, configurations of the international system are defined as unipolar, bipolar or multipolar on the basis of the number and relative strength of the Great Powers.²⁵ Great Powers are identified by their possession of a balanced range of capabilities, including size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence.²⁶ States which possess a large endowment of all these qualities relative to other states are Great Powers, and the system is defined by the number and relative strength of the great powers, along with the anarchy of the system's structure.

Despite its strengths, Waltz's structural realism suffers two major drawbacks as a tool for explaining international events. The first difficulty is practical. A "theory of international politics" that so thoroughly excludes the characteristics of and relationships between states seems to have a limited range of explanatory capacity. While this is more a description of the scope of the theory rather than a criticism of it, it is likely that many of the events and outcomes of interest in international relations will require a less austere explanatory framework. Most notably, identity factors, as well as the importance of norms in guiding action, are likely to be significant. The way that influential parties within a state define that state's identity is likely to inform the objectives that the state will pursue.²⁷ Just as Waltz pointed to the tendency of different states to act in similar ways as an example of the importance of

²⁵ Ibid, 98-99.

²⁶ Ibid, 131.

²⁷ Katzenstein, Peter J. "Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security" in *Culture of National Security* ed. Katzenstein, Peter J. (New York: Columbia UP, 1996)

structure, the tendency of the same state to behave in similar ways despite structural changes is evidence of the importance of norms. Alastair Johnston has argued that this is the case in much of the history of a China, where a "hard realpolitik" tradition endured through various changes in the structural context.²⁸ Johnston also demonstrates that, under Mao Zedong, who drew heavily on the classical Chinese "hard realpolitik" tradition in formulating his own view on national security, China was significantly more likely to be involved in foreign crises and to resort to force to resolve those crises than were other major powers of the time.²⁹ Although Waltz ignores the objectives of individual states (except survival), with the aim of distinguishing between the states and the structure of the system, it is likely necessary, as Waltz himself recognized, to take account of these objectives when developing detailed accounts of state behaviour.

A second difficulty faced by Waltz's theory is theoretical. Even once the international structure is clearly distinguished from the states composing it, it is not clear that the structure can be adequately defined on the sole assumption that states seek survival. Waltz notes that the "death rate" of states is very low.³⁰ Since this is so, it is not clear that a structure that influences states by means of their will to survive will be binding in most cases. Given that security in terms of bare survival is so plentiful, there seems to be little that a structure relying on the desire for survival for its influence will force a state to do. If this is so, war, or even political competition between states, will usually need to be explained by reference to non-structural factors, such as a temporary state of technology that significantly favours attack over

²⁸ Johnston, Alastair Iain "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China" in *Culture of National Security*, 260.

²⁹ Ibid, 252.

³⁰ Waltz, 95.

defense, domestic political factors, or security dilemmas. However, as Gideon Rose notes, a theory that assumes "that states are driven by a quest for security only then to argue that on security-related questions states suffer from false consciousness most of the time," is not a satisfying theory.³¹ Given the frequency of conflict and competition in history on the one hand, and the infrequency of states being eliminated as political entities on the other, a more convincing account of the way structure influences state behaviour is required.

The "neoclassical realism" advocated by Gideon Rose contains useful resources for responding to these two difficulties. By assuming that states seek not only to ensure their survival, but to maximize their influence and autonomy, the theory provides a more convincing account of the way that the structure influences states.³² Whatever goals a state happens to pursue, it will have a better chance of achieving those goals if it has more ability to control its external environment. An under-ambitious state that passively accepts a smaller amount of influence than its material capacities could support will find itself constricted, giving it a motive to become more assertive. An over-ambitious state that strives to achieve more influence than its material capacities can support will be chastened by failure, and by the hostility that its overreaching engenders in other states. As a result, states will, in general and over the long term, aspire to a degree of influence commensurate with their material capacities. One specific advantage of this account is that it improves on Waltz's explanation of why some states "balance" against superior power, while others "bandwagon" with it. Waltz notes that weak states often "bandwagon" because they have little other choice.³³ They accommodate other

³¹ Rose, Gideon (1998) "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy" *World Politics* Vol. 51(1), 151.

³² *Ibid*, 152.

³³ Waltz, 113.

states in the face of overwhelming power. However, on the assumption that states seek survival, it is not clear why more powerful (but still weaker than the most powerful state in the system) states tend to balance rather than bandwagoning. It seems certain that the risk to the survival of the state from being defeated in competition or war is greater than the risk of outright elimination by an unsatisfied hegemon. However, if it is assumed that states seek to maximize their autonomy and influence, it seems reasonable that weaker states would trade a limitation of their autonomy for security and protection, while more powerful states would be more likely to gamble on their ability to provide security for themselves.

Rose's neoclassical realism also provides a framework for integrating factors of identity, norms and domestic politics into accounts of foreign policy. Although, as a form of realism, neoclassical realism takes the structure of the international system as the primary independent variable in determining a state's foreign policy, it recognizes that this structure, while binding, often does not compel specific policy choices.³⁴ Structure, rather than guiding policy toward a specific decision, limits the "menu" of viable options faced by decision-makers. Furthermore, there are two intervening variables translating structural constraints into specific policy. First is the perceptions of the decision-makers themselves.³⁵ These perceptions can include norms and identities, as discussed above, and also purely personal preferences, opinions and biases. Second is the strength of the state apparatus and its relation to the surrounding society.³⁶ Depending on the domestic political context, the ability of decision-makers to enact policies will be limited by some combination of constituency groups within the state structure itself (which

³⁴ Rose, 147.

³⁵ Ibid, 157.

³⁶ Ibid, 161.

could include the military leadership, a permanent bureaucracy, etc.) and the consent of the broader society. Even in non-democratic societies, the public is likely to have some ability to undercut and limit the effectiveness of policies they disapprove of. One instance when this second intervening variable may be particularly important is when a "maverick" leader attempts to redirect the state's foreign policy in a direction contrary to the general consensus, and encounters resistance in doing so. As will be discussed later, examples can be found in the recent history of Southeast Asia's arms procurement.

One interpretation of neoclassical realism is that it is a "theory of mistakes". Given that states sometimes act contrary to what the international structure would push them to do, domestic factors are introduced into the explanation to show how a state's foreign policy was diverted from its "natural course".³⁷ Although this is one possible use of the neoclassical realist framework, it should not be seen as defining the theory as a whole. As Rose notes, any plausible account of the pressures of the international structure will show that these pressures only encourage general lines of policy. A great degree of flexibility remains for states to select specific policy lines from the "menu" that the international structure presents to them. Because choices within the limits of the "menu" are not determined by the structure, a range of foreign policies can be expected from similarly situated states not only in the short term, but in the long term as well. This distinction addresses a seeming difficulty identified by Adam Quinn. It seems that, if neoclassical realism is a theory of mistakes, it adds little to Waltz's structural realism. It serves only to explain specific deviations that the structure will tend to eliminate

³⁷ Juneau, Thomas *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2015), 19.

over the long term in any case. On the other hand, if "intervening variables" can divert foreign policy over the long term without being "punished" and brought into line by the international structure, it seems that the theory is no longer realist.³⁸ This apparent dilemma rests on a failure to grasp the distinction between intervening variables that serve to translate general structural pressures into specific policy outcomes, and intervening variables that resist the effects of structure directly. If neoclassical realism is sound, cases of the second type will tend to be disciplined by structural pressures over the long term, but this is no reason to minimize the long-term explanatory importance of intervening variables in cases of the first type.

A second difficulty raised by Quinn is more substantive. Quinn notes that, by introducing the two "intervening variables" of decision-makers' perceptions and the relations within the state structure and between the state structure and broader society, without defining general laws of what is to be expected from these intervening variables and why, neoclassical realism risks becoming a "grab bag" allowing for appeal to a potentially unlimited number of explanatory factors.³⁹ The resulting theory is likely to have exactly the lack of theoretical precision and predictive power that motivated Waltz to formulate his more austere theory in the first place. This criticism is clearly justified to an extent. An appeal to perceptions, norms and identities as explanatory factors will clearly result in a large number of case-specific variables, resulting in a paucity of generalizable conclusions. For this reason, neoclassical realism should not be seen as a theory competing with or replacing structural realism, but rather as a framework for applying structural realism to generate theoretically-informed

³⁸ Quinn, Adam (2013) "Kenneth Waltz, Adam Smith and the Limits of Science: Hard choices for neoclassical realism" *International Politics* Vol. 50(2), 160.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 164.

descriptions. As Rose argues, it is likely impossible to create a generalizable and predictive "theory of foreign policy" to complement Waltz's "theory of international politics".

Nevertheless, it remains desirable to have a framework for the study of foreign policy that maintains its theoretical moorings.⁴⁰ What such a framework loses in theoretical rigour it will gain in descriptive power and specificity.

Having chosen a general framework for study, it remains to ask how arms transfers fit into this framework. Viewed from an economic point of view, the arms market is far from perfectly competitive. The sector is characterized by significant learning economies (the ability of producers with more experience to produce more efficiently) and economies of scale.⁴¹ Especially in the market for high-tech arms, such as advanced naval craft or jet aircraft, the market has pronounced oligopolistic characteristics.⁴² The oligopolistic nature of the market opens opportunities for "strategic behaviour" on the part of suppliers. This strategic behaviour can be economic, and focused on profit maximization, but it can also be political, using arms transfers as a tool of influence over weaker states. The potential for politically-motivated strategic behaviour will be especially great for major producers such as Russia or the United States. Unlike "second-tier" producers, who are heavily dependent on exports to maintain the economic viability of their arms industries, and are therefore much more constrained to fill as many orders as possible, "first-tier producers" can draw on their high domestic demand, as well

⁴⁰ Rose, 168.

⁴¹ Anderton, Charles H. "Economics of Arms Trade" in *Handbook of Defense Economics, Vol. 1*, ed. Hartley, Keith & Sandler, Todd (New York: Elsevier, 1995), 541.

⁴² Ibid, 542.

as their intrinsic attractiveness as advanced suppliers, to maintain their industry while they engage in politically-motivated actions that are sub-optimal in economic terms.⁴³

The potential of arms transfers to function as tools of influence is increased by considerations of path dependency. Due to the demands of training, interoperability, maintenance and the need for spare parts, it is much more economical for buyers to buy from one supplier, and to continue to do so over time. While the structural constraints on buyers strongly motivate them to diversify their suppliers, and to be willing to switch suppliers should their current supplier attempt to use arms transfers as a tool of influence, economic constraints will limit their ability to do so.⁴⁴

It is unlikely, however, that arms sales, on the one side, and acquisitions, on the other, will be guided solely by economic and strategic considerations. In addition to their practical use, arms have important symbolic value. A modern and well-equipped military serves as a symbol and authentication of the state's status as a full, independent member of the world community.⁴⁵ Eyre and Suchman, studying weapons acquisitions in post-colonial states, have found that membership in a larger number of international institutions, and therefore a greater degree of exposure to and socialization into international norms and expectations regarding statehood, is positively correlated with acquisitions of advanced weapons systems.⁴⁶ Given the symbolic importance of arms, it is plausible that symbolic factors will play a role as well in

⁴³ Krause, Keith *Arms and the State: Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992), 32.

⁴⁴ Anderton, 541.

⁴⁵ Eyre, Dana P. & Suchman, Mark C. "Status, Norms and the Proliferation of Conventional Weapons: An Institutional Theory Approach" in *Culture of National Security*, 79, 86.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 107.

choices of suppliers. More specifically, states whose identity is bound up with a strong sense of independence will be likely to make procurement decisions that provide symbolic support to that independence.

A final consideration that has elements of both structure and symbolism is international hierarchy. Hierarchy has structural elements, since weaker states are more likely to submit to hierarchical relations, but also has a symbolic component, since, within the limited range of options presented by the international system, states with identities strongly tied up with maximalist notions of independence are likely to resist hierarchy more than others.

Furthermore, when given the choice to enter a hierarchical relationship with one of two or more Great Powers, identity is likely to influence the choice of preferred superior. While the fact of hierarchical relations was noted by Waltz,⁴⁷ realist theory has tended to focus more on the balancing performed by the Great Powers than the hierarchical relations between Great Powers and their subordinates. One promising attempt to fill this theoretical gap is that of David Lake. Lake argues that hierarchical relations between states constitute a social contract between the two parties.⁴⁸ Although this contract is, in most cases, not a formal transfer of legal sovereignty, it constitutes an implicit promise to exchange de facto limited sovereignty for the subordinate for the protection and assistance of the superior.⁴⁹ The fact that such an arrangement is based on mutual agreement does not mean that the benefits are necessarily fairly distributed, or that the arrangement is ideal, especially from the point of view of the

⁴⁷ Waltz, 96.

⁴⁸ Lake, David *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009), 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

subordinate. However, it must be preferable to the available alternatives, or the parties will have no motive to enter the arrangement.⁵⁰

One important obligation frequently undertaken by subordinates is the responsibility to perform "symbolic obeisance" to the superior.⁵¹ Symbolic obeisance is a costly action which shows support for the superior, but is not necessarily of great practical benefit. Lake gives the example of American clients that have joined "coalitions of the willing", and sometimes suffered as a result, for example in the terrorist attacks against Spain in response to its participation in the Iraq War. It seems plausible that acquiring arms from the superior could be a form of symbolic obeisance. Given the path dependency created by foreign arms procurement, as discussed earlier, it is likely that establishing such relations could be a way of demonstrating acceptance of a superior's authority. Vucetic and Tago have found that, controlling for variables capturing state power, regime type and geographical factors, there is a positive correlation between a state's degree of subordination to American hierarchy and its likelihood of acquiring American jet fighters.⁵² It seems that acceptance of the superior's weapons is often an aspect of acceptance of the superior's authority more generally.

In conclusion, factors both at the level of the international system and at the level of the domestic intervening variables appear to be important in guiding a state's procurement decisions. If neoclassical realism is correct, a state's ambition, over the long term, will be broadly determined by its relative power. One important aspect of a state's ambition, especially

⁵⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁵¹ Ibid, 165.

⁵² Vucetic, Srdjan & Tago, Atsushi (2015) "Why Buy American? The International Politics of Fighter Jet Transfers" *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 48(1), pp. 101-124.

in the case of small states, is its willingness to accept hierarchical relationships with more powerful states. However, in the present context, structural considerations are not sufficient to explain the way that more independent-minded states demonstrate their rejection of hierarchy. To explain the specific choices of states as to how they symbolically express their attitude to hierarchy, it is necessary to introduce factors relating to identity, as well as, in some cases, the way that different actors in the state apparatus and society form and contest these identities. The intervening variables of neoclassical realism, therefore, will be needed to translate structural constraints into specific state actions.

Contexts of Ideology and Identity: ASEAN and Russia

As relatively young states in their current forms, the identities of both Russia and the ASEAN states have been fundamentally shaped by their recent histories. In the case of the ASEAN states, the formative historical experiences are each country's respective transition from colonialism to independence, and the Cold War context of these transitions. Looking first at decolonization, the experience of colonialism had been particularly disorienting for several of the countries of Southeast Asia. In Malaysia and Indonesia, political colonization had been accompanied by economic marginalization in favour of ethnically Chinese immigrants. In Malaysia, the British administration had followed an intentional policy of separating political power, which rested with the traditional Malay rulers, from economic power, which passed largely to immigrants from India and China, particularly the latter.⁵³ As a result, "From the start,

⁵³ Weiss, Meredith L. "Contesting Race and Nation: Malay Dominance and Multiracial Coalitions in Malaysia" in *Nations under Siege: Globalization and Nationalism in Asia* ed. Starrs, Roy (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

Malay nationalism, which formed the basis of Malayan nationalism, was aimed not so much at the British as at local Chinese.”⁵⁴ In Indonesia, although the process was less intentional from the perspective of the colonial authorities, a similar concentration of economic power in the hands of ethnic Chinese occurred.⁵⁵ The result was that in both Malaysia and Indonesia, colonial rule was experienced not only as political disempowerment, but also as economic dispossession and loss of status, giving a particularly aggressive quality to the nationalism of these two countries, while also ensuring that their nationalism would not take a narrowly anti-Western form, but would be equally hostile to Chinese influence.

The particular experiences of Malaysia and Indonesia are especially relevant, since these two countries were the primary driving force behind the formation of ASEAN. Another key factor in determining the shape of ASEAN was the wide diversity of its members. Originally founded in 1967 with five members (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand), the organization from its inception contained a variety of political systems, cultures, ethnicities and economic orientations.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the economic connections among the members were weak. As a result, ASEAN is more a “mutual sovereignty reinforcement coalition” than an integrationist body like the EU.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 206.

⁵⁵ Turner, Sarah & Seymour, Richard “Ethnic Chinese and the Indonesian Crisis: The Emergence of a New Ethnic Identity?” in *Nations under Siege: Globalization and Nationalism in Asia*

⁵⁶ Goh, Evelyn “Southeast Asia’s Evolving Security Relations and Strategies” in *The Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia* ed. Pekkanen, Saadia M., Ravenhill, John & Foot, Rosemary (Toronto: Oxford UP, 2014), 463-64.

Rather than an alliance founded on common institutions and values, ASEAN began primarily as an organization to guarantee a truce between Malaysia and Indonesia.⁵⁷ The result of this truce was an understanding which largely affirmed the positions of a strongly anti-colonial Indonesia, while somewhat softening Indonesia's absolutist opposition to the presence of foreign militaries in the region. Despite this concession to the more pro-Western leanings of the Philippines and Singapore in particular, the final agreed text emphasized the theoretically temporary nature of any foreign bases and the full independence of ASEAN members, even those with foreign bases on their territory.⁵⁸

In the following decade, ASEAN's strong emphasis on the independence of its members was joined by an explicit policy of neutrality between the two sides of the Cold War. The "Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality", although originally a Malaysian suggestion, again came to primarily reflect Indonesian preferences.⁵⁹ Malaysia's original proposal, to have a neutrality guaranteed by the great powers, met opposition from three sides. The Philippines and Singapore desired to maintain their defense ties with the United States, while Indonesia opposed the subordination implied in inviting the Great Powers to guarantee Southeast Asia's neutrality, and Thailand opposed the involvement of China, which it distrusted.⁶⁰ The final acceptance of a neutrality policy without a Great Power guarantee represented a further step toward a maximalist interpretation of ASEAN's dedication to autonomy and neutrality.

⁵⁷ Roberts, Christopher P. "State weakness and political values: ramifications for the ASEAN Community" in *ASEAN and the Institutionalization of East Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 464.

⁵⁸ Haacke, Jurgen *ASEAN's Diplomatic and Security Culture: Origins, Development and Prospects* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 44.

⁵⁹ Goh, 464.

⁶⁰ Haacke, 56.

The emphasis on sovereign autonomy in ASEAN's initial formation, as well as the neutralism of ZOPFAN, were codified in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. This document is the clearest expression of the "ASEAN Way" of international relations.⁶¹ The "ASEAN Way" is based on the six principles of mutual respect for sovereignty, the right of every state to carry on its "national existence" without external interference, non-interference in each others' internal affairs, peaceful resolution of disputes, renunciation of the threat or use of force and effective cooperation among states. The influence of the strong anti-colonialism particularly associated with Indonesia is clear in the emphasis on non-interference and sovereignty, as well as in the implied equality of all states. These emphases have been further reinforced in the practical implementation of the ASEAN Way. As an organization, ASEAN fosters an environment in which states are careful not only to respect each other's autonomy in practical terms, but also to offer symbolic respect to each other through a strict code of diplomatic etiquette. For example, the ASEAN Way generally involves an avoidance of controversial issues, as discussing such issues may lead to disputes in which the disputant states will fail to demonstrate the expected respect for each other.⁶² ASEAN additionally emphasizes the equality of all states by requiring states wishing to participate in broader ASEAN-led forums, such as the East Asian Summit, to agree to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and to participate on an equal basis with even the smallest members.⁶³ The ASEAN Way is intended to generate an atmosphere of mutual respect and equality among states of all sizes, joined not by

⁶¹ Kivimaki, Timo (2011) "East Asian relative peace and the ASEAN Way" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* Vol. 11(1), 63.

⁶² Ibid, 65.

⁶³ Kraft, Herman Joseph S. "Driving East Asian regionalism: The reconstruction of ASEAN's identity" in *ASEAN and the Institutionalization of East Asia*, 65.

any ambitious integrationist project, but rather by an agreement to reinforce each other's independence from colonial hegemons and Great Power blocs.

As noted above, the ASEAN Way reflects most strongly the strong anti-colonialism and neutralism of Indonesia. However, despite formal agreement to the treaty, some of the original members of ASEAN demonstrated a less consistent dedication to its declared principles. As noted above, Singapore and the Philippines showed great reluctance to disavow their close Western ties. Thailand and Malaysia fell in the middle, more open to Western influence and military cooperation than Indonesia, but more dedicated to the ASEAN Way than Singapore and the Philippines. This pattern of varying degrees of dedication to the ASEAN Way continued as ASEAN expanded. Myanmar, although not an ASEAN member, had enshrined a commitment to independence and neutrality in its 1974 constitution, a commitment that was repeated in the revised constitution of 2008.⁶⁴ Vietnam, which had a strong anti-colonial tradition in its history of war against France and the United States, adopted an explicit neutrality policy in the early 1990's.⁶⁵ On the other extreme, Brunei, a former British protectorate, maintained close military ties to the United Kingdom. As will be seen, this varied pattern of adherence to sovereigntist and neutralist principles is strongly reflected in the pattern of purchases of Russian arms.

For Russia, the decisive experience in forming its current identity was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition to a capitalist economy. Although this transition was initially

⁶⁴ Myoe, Maung Aung (2016) "Myanmar's foreign policy under the USDP government: continuities and changes" *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* Vol. 35(1), 127, 128.

⁶⁵ Le, Hong Hiep (2013) "Vietnam's hedging strategy against China since normalization" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 35(3), 342.

accompanied by strong pro-Western leanings in foreign policy, the original “Atlanticist” approach to foreign policy fell out of favour very early, with most Russian foreign policy elites arguing in favour of a more assertive approach by the mid-1990’s.⁶⁶ Beginning the 1990’s with an idealistic belief that, regardless of the realities of current power, the United States would continue to consult Russia as an equal in the management of European and world affairs, Russian elites were gradually alienated by the unexpectedly small scale of American economic assistance and the continued existence and expansion of NATO, as well as Western criticism of the Russian campaign in Chechnya and disregard of Russian views on the situation in the former Yugoslavia.⁶⁷ By the turn of the 21st century, the previously dominant Atlanticist position had been reduced to a dissenting view with few remaining adherents. Furthermore, those who continued to argue for Atlanticist positions were compelled to more explicitly recognize that an Atlanticist Russia could not remain a Great Power. For example, one of the most prominent late representatives of Atlanticism, Dmitri Trenin, explicitly argued that Russia should seek full integration with the West not because it could maintain its status in such an arrangement, but because it no longer had sufficient strength to maintain itself as an independent power.⁶⁸ By the turn of the millennium, it had become clear on all sides that Russia would have to choose between an Atlanticist orientation and its Great Power aspirations, and few among the Russian elite were willing to abandon the latter for the sake of the former.

⁶⁶ Mankoff, Jeffrey *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 11.

⁶⁷ Katz, Mark N. (2006) “Primakov redux? Putin’s pursuit of “multipolarism” in Asia” *Demokratizatsiya* Vol. 14(1), 145.

⁶⁸ Trenin, Dmitri *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the border between geopolitics and globalization* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 11, 307.

The new foreign policy consensus was most visibly embodied in Yevgeny Primakov, who served as both foreign minister and prime minister in the late 1990's. Faced with the "unipolar" aspirations of the United States and its allies, Primakov argued for a "multivector" Russian foreign policy, with the aim of promoting a "multipolar" world order.⁶⁹ In this approach, Russia would assert itself as a Great Power not by leading a cohesive bloc, as in Soviet times, but rather by fostering friendly relations with a large variety of partners, especially those concerned to assert their independence of American hegemony. Primakov's goal was to establish Russia as a leader and coordinator of a coalition of states joined not by any specific common agenda, but rather in mutual defense of their right to pursue their individual paths of economic and social development without outside interference.⁷⁰ Despite the somewhat combative tone of Primakov's "multipolarism", it did not represent a fundamentally anti-American or anti-Western stance. Rather, for Russia, the goal was to maintain complete independence in its conduct of domestic affairs, as well as a special position of influence in the post-Soviet region, and the right to be consulted on matters of global concern.⁷¹ Primakov argued, "Those who favored rapprochement with the civilized West at any cost proceeded from the assumption that in the circumstances the only alternative was to slide toward confrontation. That was not so. When I took office at the Foreign Ministry I was confident that Russia could and should actively seek an equal partnership with everyone, look for and find areas of common interest, and work them [sic] with the others. And when interests don't coincide (and experience teaches they

⁶⁹ Katz, 144.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 145.

⁷¹ Mankoff, 9-10.

won't always), we should try to find solutions that will neither sacrifice Russia's vital national interests nor lead to confrontation."⁷² Despite his assertive approach, Primakov was realistic about the limits of Russia's capacity, and aimed only to achieve an independent and influential role for Russia in a world order in which the Western powers would remain the most powerful pole, rather than attempting to overturn that world order entirely.

It has often been argued that, instead of maintaining Primakov's approach, Russia has in recent years moved toward a policy of aggressive confrontation with the United States, with the goal of "overthrowing the global order". For example, Toni Mileski cites Putin's references to Russia as a "Eurasian" state, particularly in the context of the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union, as evidence of an ambition to construct a new cohesive bloc apart from the Western-led "liberal order", and equates Vladislav Surkov's influential notion of "sovereign democracy", which is in fact a notion defending the "right of the particular", completely consistent with Primakov's firm, but non-aggressive, defense of Russia's domestic independence, with a more universal rejection of the West and its values.⁷³ According to this argument, Russia, no longer content to seek its independence in domestic affairs and a "seat at the table" in global affairs, has adopted a more offensive stance, seeking to replace the "liberal international order" with a "Eurasian" alternative.

The critical weakness in the claim that Russian foreign policy is primarily motivated by an anti-Western "Eurasianism", which posits a fixed and permanent hostility between Russia

⁷² Primakov, Yevgeny *Russian Crossroads: Toward the New Millenium* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 126-127.

⁷³ Mileski, Toni (2015) "Identifying the New Eurasian orientation in modern Russian geopolitical thought" *Eastern Journal of European Studies* Vol. 6(2), 181-182.

and the West, is that Russia's behaviour in the Putin years has not been consistently anti-Western. Although Putin began his first term in office by abrogating the 1995 Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement, which had limited arms and nuclear exports to Iran, and signed a "Friendship Treaty" with China, he did not engage in any directly anti-Western actions or rhetoric. As Katz notes, "Putin, like Primakov, sought not so much to oppose Washington than [sic] to force it to respect Russian interests."⁷⁴ After September 11, Russia and the United States found a significant amount of common ground on counter-terrorism, and began to explore the possibility of an "energy partnership". Discussion in Russia became optimistic that, in the new environment, Russia and the United States would be able to cooperate broadly on regional and global issues.⁷⁵ Russia's response to the "reset" of the Obama years was similarly open, and renewed ties initially resulted in a significant measure of cooperation. Drawing on the example of the "reset", Mankoff notes, "To the extent that the West has been willing to take Russian preferences into consideration, Moscow has been less inclined to seek limits on Western influence."⁷⁶ Although the attempts at rapprochement in the post-911 era and during the Obama-era "reset" both eventually failed, this was a result of specific disputes rather than immovable anti-Westernism among Russia's elites. The Bush era rapprochement ended because of American criticism of Russia's internal politics, disputes over American missile defense, NATO expansion and anti-Russian "colour revolutions" in neighbouring states, which many in Russia saw as the result of American meddling.⁷⁷ Obama's "reset" largely failed

⁷⁴ Katz, 146.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Mankoff, 24.

⁷⁷ Gvosdev, Nikolas K. & Marsh, Christopher *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors and Sectors* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2014), 89-90.

because of renewed American criticism of Russian internal politics and disputes over the Western campaign in Libya.⁷⁸ The purpose of recalling these developments is not to take a position on the rights and wrongs of the disputes, but rather to note that Russia has acted consistently in pursuit of its interests of preserving its absolute internal sovereignty, claiming a position as one of the Great Powers with a right to be consulted on major world affairs, and holding a special position as the local Great Power in the post-Soviet space. Relations with the United States and Western countries have improved and deteriorated as Russia's decision makers saw these interests being respected or not. The anti-Western tone Russia has often taken, especially in recent years, is a result of disputes over identifiable interests, not a permanent anti-Western quality in Russian foreign policy.

In regard to the question of Russian arms exports to Southeast Asia, it will be argued that there is an alignment of interests in this area between Russia and the states of Southeast Asia. For Russia, weapons exports carry great prestige value, both because they affirm Russia's status as a centre of scientific and technological development, and because of the ongoing hierarchical relationship created by the importation of advanced weapons, as discussed earlier. For the Southeast Asian states most dedicated to the ASEAN Way, Russia is a preferred partner. Given their limited capacity to produce advanced arms domestically, these states face an uncomfortable situation as the requirement to import weapons compels them to accept a somewhat subordinate status relative to an arms exporter. However, given Russia's strong defense of the principle of the absolute internal sovereignty of states, the discomfort involved

⁷⁸ Ibid, 94.

in subordination is minimized. This is true in practical terms, since Russia does not use the cancellation of weapons exports as a means of protest against a state's internal policies, and in symbolic terms, since subordination is accepted, but to a state whose own identity is closely tied up with the principle of respecting internal sovereignty. Furthermore, unlike China, Russia is not a potential regional hegemon in Southeast Asia, which further bolsters its credentials as an arms exporter to states in the region concerned to forcefully assert their autonomy. It will be argued that it is this alignment of political interests, rather than any practical strategic or economic factors, that most fully explains Russia's success as an arms exporter in Southeast Asia.

Patterns of Russian Arms Exports: An Empirical Investigation

The previous section developed an account of Russian arms exports to Southeast Asia according to which these exports assist both sides in achieving essentially symbolic goals. In Russia's case, the goal in question is to affirm its position as one of the independent Great Power poles of a multipolar world order. For ASEAN states, it is to declare their independence by importing arms from a state professing dedication to the principles of sovereign statehood, and to avoid patterns of military purchases that could be interpreted as "symbolic obeisance" to either the United States or China. This section will examine the historical record of the 21st century to determine the closeness of the fit between this account and the recent history of the Russian-ASEAN arms trade. The year 2000 is chosen because it is after the major disruptions of the collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of the Russian Federation, as well as the Asian and Russian financial crises of the late 1990's. The more stable years since that time display longer-term trends more clearly. Another advantage of this starting point is that it coincides

with the year of Vladimir Putin's first election as President. To the extent that Putin as an individual plays a role in Russia's foreign policy behaviour, it is reasonable to study his time in the offices of President and Prime Minister as a discrete period.

In examining the historical data, the account suggested here will be compared to two possible alternative accounts. One is a strict "rational actor" model, which would seek the reasons for import and export decisions in their direct economic or strategic consequences. According to this view, the primary motive of an exporting state will be to earn hard currency and achieve economies of scale to help offset the costs of research and development, thus maintaining the domestic arms industry. The primary motive of importers will be to attain maximum value for money. To the extent that importers pay attention to the dependence created by their arms purchases, this dependence will be seen from a narrowly security-focused point of view. On this account, symbolic factors and affirmations of identity will, at most, have very minor impacts on the margins, perhaps as a "tie-breaker" in cases where there is no clear practical advantage to decide a question. The second alternative account considered here is a robust constructivist approach. The symbolism and identity factors, on this account, will play a genuinely independent role in determining foreign policy behaviour, including decisions regarding arms transfers. Against both alternatives, it will be argued here, in accordance with the neoclassical realist model outlined earlier, that structure, determined primarily by relative power, plays the primary role. However, the two intervening variables of individual decision-makers' perceptions and the relation of decision makers to the state apparatus and larger society play genuine, but subordinate, roles in determining state behaviour.

Looking at the side of the supplier, the argument must take a primarily narrative, and somewhat anecdotal form. This is due to the imperfections of data regarding the specific terms of the relevant arms trades. Although the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) tracks the terms of payment for arms deals when possible, and some agreements are reported in journalistic sources, the relevant information is often not available. However, based on what is available, some clear patterns emerge.

Firstly, Russian arms deals in Southeast Asia have often occurred with the strong involvement at the highest levels of the Russian government. For example, Putin attended the signing of a \$1 billion arms deal with Indonesia in 2007.⁷⁹ The political subtext of the agreement was made explicit in a joint statement of Presidents Putin and Yudhoyono, “The two presidents strongly believe that international and regional conflicts...should be settled by peaceful means. The use of force is admissible as the last resort and only in accordance with the United Nations charter.” Given that Putin and Yudhoyono announced that, in their meeting, they had discussed Iraq, Iran and North Korea, it was clear that the statement was intended as a criticism of the Bush administration. More recently, Defence Minister Shoigu traveled to Myanmar to announce the sale of six Su-30 jets.⁸⁰ Arms negotiations with Thailand in recent years have involved in multiple direct meetings between General Prayuth Chan-ocha and Dmitri Medvedev, in both Thailand and Russia.⁸¹ These and similar examples clearly show that Russia treats arms deals in Southeast Asia as matters of political importance meriting the involvement

⁷⁹ Finn, Peter “Russia, Indonesia Set \$1 Billion Arms Deal” *Washington Post*, September 7, 2007.

⁸⁰ Yeo, Mike “Russia’s Flanker jet sales prosper with Myanmar buy” *Defense News*, January 23, 2018.

⁸¹ “U.S. restrictions on arms sales mean Thai military needs to shop elsewhere” *The Japan Times*, February 21, 2016.

of the highest levels of the administration, rather than a routine commercial matter to be left to the government bodies directly concerned.

In addition to being directly negotiated by figures in high positions in the Russian government, arms deals with Southeast Asia often occur as components of larger packages of trade and military cooperation. The negotiations between Medvedev and Chan-ocha referred to above have covered not only arms sales, but also a further 25 separate agreements on various matters. Russia's recent deal with Myanmar for the sale of Su-30 jets was accompanied by an agreement to allow Russian naval vessels to make use of Myanmar's ports,⁸² while a recent donation of rifles, ammunition and military trucks to the Philippines was accompanied by three separate visits by Russian destroyers.⁸³ Similarly, in the context of rapidly expanding arms exports to Indonesia, Russia participated in the Indonesia-led Komodo exercises in 2014 and 2016.⁸⁴

A final indication of the political, rather than purely economic, importance of these exports to Russia, is Russia's acceptance of non-commercial terms of sale. Recent arms negotiations with Thailand have explored the possibility of barter arrangements for the exchange of Thai food products as partial payment for arms imports.⁸⁵ Russia's most recent agreement with Indonesia, a \$1.14 billion deal for Su-35 jets, includes \$570 million of barter, a large part of which is composed on Indonesia palm oil.⁸⁶ SIPRI's trade register, which gives

⁸² Shlapentokh, Dmitry V. "Russian pragmatism on display in South East Asia" *The Interpreter*, March 16, 2018.

⁸³ Gnanasagaran, 2018.

⁸⁴ Otto, 2016.

⁸⁵ Fedorov, Gleb "Thailand, Russia exploring 'arms for food' agreement" *Russia Beyond* February 11, 2016.

⁸⁶ "Indonesia to buy \$1.14 billion worth of Russian jets" *Reuters* August 22, 2017.

payment information for 11 Indonesian orders for Russian arms in the 21st century, reports that barter arrangements were part of the terms of payment for 4 of these orders.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Russia has also often offered loans to assist ASEAN countries in making purchases of Russian arms, and tolerated late repayment of these loans.⁸⁸ Although the export of arms to Southeast Asia is profitable for Russia, the economic rewards that it has gained from its substantial commitment to diplomatic engagement and its acceptance of disadvantageous terms of payment do not seem sufficient to justify the effort, while Russia's packaging of arms deals together with arrangements for military cooperation, access rights, and broader political agreements strongly suggests an important political motive for these transfers.

This can be seen more clearly by comparing Russia's behaviour in Southeast Asia to its behaviour in other regions. For example, although there is a reasonably large potential market for arms in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Russia has made some military sales in the region, high officials from the Presidential administration and Foreign and Defense Ministries have not prioritized engagement with the continent.⁸⁹ Instead, relations with the continent have mostly been left to Russian companies with interests there.⁹⁰ South Korea, due to its importance for the economy of the Russian Far East, is much more of a key area of interest for Russia. Russia has also made some arms sales there. However, relations with the country, while prioritized, have mostly been handled by the Minister for the Development of the Russian Far East.⁹¹ Nor is

⁸⁷ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2018) "Trade Registers"

⁸⁸ Rangsimaporn, 800.

⁸⁹ Gvosdev & Marsh, 370.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 371.

⁹¹ Rinna, Anthony V. "Here is Why South Korea May Be Turning to Russia" *The National Interest*, February 6, 2018.

the extent of Russia's efforts to increase its arms exports to Southeast Asia explained by the volume of business available there. Although it is growing, the arms market in Southeast Asia is not particularly large. In the 2000-2016 period, Southeast Asia only accounted for 10% of Russia's arms exports.⁹² By contrast, India and China together account for more than 50% of Russian arms exports in the same period.⁹³ Even Algeria, a much smaller customer than India and China, accounted for about 8% of Russia's arms exports in 2015,⁹⁴ almost as much as the total of the ASEAN countries combined. Accounting for only a small fraction of Russia's total trade and a larger, but still minor, portion of its arms exports, too distant from Russia to be of critical security or strategic importance, and requiring a substantial investment of time and resources to achieve gains, the ASEAN countries are of interest to Russia primarily as a source of prestige and affirmation of its Great Power status, rather than as a focus of the kinds of economic or strategic concerns emphasized by pure "rational actor" models.

While Russia's regime identity leads it to seek a maximalist extension of its influence and prestige, however, the realities of relative power are a significant constraint for Russia, which have a visible impact on Russia's behaviour in the region. For the purposes of this study, power will be measured in two ways. The first, focusing primarily on military power, is the Correlates of War Project's Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC).⁹⁵ This index measures a state's actual and potential military power by generating a composite score based

⁹² Connolly, Richard & Sendstad, Cecilie (March 2017) *Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia* (Chatham House: The Royal Institute of International Affairs-Research Paper), 11.

⁹³ Bitzinger, Richard A. *Russian Arms Transfers and Asian Military Modernisation: Policy Report December 2015* (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, 2015), 4.

⁹⁴ Pami, Aalto & Forsberg, Tuomas (2016) "The structuration of Russia's geo-economy under economic sanctions" *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 14(2), pp. 221-237.

⁹⁵ The Correlates of War Project (2018) "National Material Capabilities (v5.0)"

on a state's total population, urban population, energy consumption, iron and steel production, number of military personnel, and military expenditure, expressing the final value as a number between 0 and 1 representing a state's portion of the world total. Economic power is measured both in absolute and per capita terms. This is because a state with a larger economy will, all else being equal, be more economically powerful, as it has a higher absolute amount of capital available for investment, and is a larger trade market for other countries. However, wealth per capita is also significant, as given two economies of equal absolute size, the wealthier per capita economy will have less of its wealth "tied down" in providing for the basic needs of the country's people, and can therefore be used in ways that do more to build the country's economic power. Relying on World Bank data,⁹⁶ this study will measure power through the use of total GDP (in constant 2010 USD) and GDP per capita at Purchasing Power Parity (in constant 2011 international dollars).

In the most recent year for which data is available (2012), Russia's CINC score, at 0.04, is far lower than that of China (0.22), the United States (0.14), and even India (0.08). Similarly, Russia's average total GDP from 2000 to 2016 was \$1.41 trillion, compared to India (\$1.48 trillion), China (\$5.33 trillion) and the United States (\$14.77 trillion). Russia ranks better (2nd of the four countries) in average per capita GDP from 2000 to 2016 (\$20,233), significantly higher than that of China (\$8,331) and India (\$3,985). Nevertheless, given its low material capabilities and small economy in comparison with the other three countries, it is clear that Russia is incapable of competing with them directly for influence in Southeast Asia.

⁹⁶ World Bank (2018) "World Bank Open Data"

It is in this context of relative weakness that arms exports become such a central element of influence. Russia can increase its influence in ASEAN states through increased arms exports without directly acting against any of the major powers in the area. The pattern of Russian influence-building in Southeast Asia is therefore opportunistic rather than systematic. Russia cannot offer itself as the leader of an alternative regional order, or aggressively move to displace the United States or China from their positions at the top of the region's economic and security hierarchies. Russian actions in the region reflect an awareness of this relative weakness. Despite Russia's involvement in various joint exercises in the South China Sea, it has scrupulously avoided taking a firm position on the dispute there.⁹⁷ This caution has also occasionally influenced Russia's conduct of bilateral relations as well. For example, Russia canceled a nuclear energy agreement with Myanmar in 2010 in part due to international pressures relating to the human rights situation in the country.⁹⁸ Russia has been, however, more firm in defense of its central interest in providing arms exports to the region, and has ignored repeated Chinese complaints about Russian arms sales to Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam.⁹⁹ Russian behaviour in Southeast Asia has been cautious and relatively non-confrontational, reflecting Russian weakness relative to China and the United States. Russia has, on the other hand, firmly defended its interests in arms trading, even at the risk of worsening its relations with China, which are key for Russia in other respects. This maximalism in pursuing the options available to it reflects the importance of Great Power status and its

⁹⁷ Kanaev, Evgeny "The South China Sea Issue: A View from Russia" in *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects* ed. Sumsky, Victor, Hong, Mark & Lugg, Amy (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2012), 105.

⁹⁸ Tun, Taung "Myanmar-Russia Relations in a Changing World: Growing Ties based on Strategic Partnership and Economic Prospects" in *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects*.

⁹⁹ Gvosdev & Marsh, 138.

symbolic trappings in Russian regime identity. Russian policy choices reflect both the role of structure as the independent variable determining foreign policy, and the role of regime identity as an intervening variable guiding the Russian choice of the maximalist option on the “menu” presented to it by its structural constraints.

On the demand side, explanations of the choice of Russian military equipment often focus on the kinds of economic and strategic considerations emphasized by strict rational actor models. One commonly cited factor is the low cost of Russian arms in comparison to American and other Western alternatives.¹⁰⁰ A strategic factor often mentioned is Russia’s policy of non-interference in the domestic policies of other nations, with the result that Russia can generally be relied on not to limit exports or impose embargoes in response to, for example, human rights concerns. By contrast, imports from the United States and other Western nations often come with conditions on their use. A recent example in Southeast Asia is the Russian donation of small arms, ammunition and military trucks to the Philippines referred to above. The Philippines had originally ordered the equipment from the United States, but Congress refused to approve the sale in response to human rights concerns surrounding the drug war under the Duterte administration.¹⁰¹ According to this argument, Russian arms are preferred because of their objective advantages in terms of costs and reliability of supply.

While these sorts of rational actor explanations are clearly part of a full account of the appeal of Russian arms, it will be argued here that they are insufficient to explain the way that appeal differs in various countries. To the extent that Russian arms present good value for

¹⁰⁰ Gnanasagaran.

¹⁰¹ *ASEAN Today*, 2018 “Putin uses arms sales...”

money, this is a reason for all countries to prefer them equally. On the other hand, to the extent that Russian arms are “inferior goods”, chosen by states that cannot afford better, but more expensive, alternatives, it would be expected that poorer states would be more likely to buy Russian arms, but that states at similar economic levels would prefer them more or less equally. If large differences in the demand for Russian arms are found between economically similar states, or if richer states buy more Russian arms than poorer states, it will be clear that other factors are at play. Similarly, in regard to considerations of weapons embargoes, it would be expected that states that have been embargoed in the past, or that have particular grounds to fear embargoes in the future, will demand more Russian arms than other states. However, if states that are similar in these respects vary widely in their demand, it will again be likely that other factors are at play.

The table below displays the percent of each ASEAN state’s arms imports accounted for by Russia, the United States and China. Percentages are based on SIPRI’s “trend indicator values” over the period 2000-2017.¹⁰² Trend indicator values are expressions of the value of arms transfers based on estimates of the production costs of the equipment involved. Given the widely varying terms of purchase for arms, from hard currency market payment, to barter, to donation, trend indicator values, based on production costs, offer a more consistent method of comparing the scale of arms transfers than do simple contract terms, which in any case are often not available. The table is arranged in descending order based on the percentage of Russian arms imports.

¹⁰² Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2018) “Importer/Exporter TIV Tables”

Table 1 - % Share of Arms Imports from Russia, China and the United States in ASEAN

State	Imports of Russian Arms (%)	Imports of American Arms (%)	Imports of Chinese Arms (%)
Vietnam	87	1	0
Myanmar	44	0	44
Laos	44	0	28
Malaysia	28	3	0.1
Indonesia	17	11	5
Thailand	1	23	12
Cambodia	0	0	45
Philippines	0	39	0
Singapore	0	56	0
Brunei	0	18	0

Source: SIPRI

It is immediately apparent that the rational actor explanations detailed above perform very poorly in explaining the differences between ASEAN countries. There are vast differences in the imports of different countries, despite the presumably equal value for money of Russian arms to each country. There is little relation between economic level and Russian arms imports, as would be expected if Russian arms are “inferior goods” appealing most strongly to poorer countries. Malaysia, with an average 2000-2016 GDP per capita PPP of \$20,426, and Indonesia, at \$7,955, are major importers, while the Philippines, at \$5,393, and Cambodia, at \$2,348, do not import Russian arms at all.¹⁰³ Strategic considerations relating to arms embargoes seem to have greater explanatory power, as the only recently discontinued American embargo on Vietnam may partially explain why it imports vastly more Russian arms than other ASEAN states. However, fear of embargoes seems to explain relatively little in the case of the other ASEAN states. Malaysia, which has never been threatened with American embargoes, is one of

¹⁰³ GDP per capita PPP based on World Bank (2018) “World Bank Open Data”.

the major importers of Russian arms, while Cambodia, with a very mixed history of diplomatic relations with the United States and its allies, does not import Russian arms at all. The example of Cambodia in particular raises a major theoretical difficulty for explanations of the appeal of Russian arms exports relying primarily on strategic considerations. These considerations, in many cases, give import countries a reason not to import arms from the United States or its allies, but they give these countries no particular reason to choose Russian arms, as opposed to Chinese, Brazilian or Israeli arms, as a substitute.

A much more powerful explanation of the differences between the ASEAN states appeals primarily to considerations of hierarchy. States accepting high levels of American or Chinese hierarchy will tend to perform “symbolic obeisance” by importing large amounts of American or Chinese arms, while states concerned to strongly assert their independence import larger quantities of Russian arms. In Southeast Asia, American hierarchy is primarily military, while Chinese hierarchy is largely economic. For this reason, the table below measures American hierarchy by considering whether the state in question has strong defense relations with the United States, “strong” relations being defined by the state having the status of a “major non-NATO ally” to the United States (Philippines, Thailand) or having long-term military basing arrangements with either the United States (Philippines, Singapore), or with the United States’ close ally Britain (Brunei). Chinese hierarchy is measured by the share of China in a country’s foreign trade, as well as China’s net foreign direct investment in the country as a percentage of the total. Information on Chinese trade and investment is drawn from the

ASEANstats database, and reflects the average trade value for the years 2004-2016, and the average investment value for 2010-2016.¹⁰⁴

Table 2 – Measures of American and Chinese Hierarchy

State	Strong American Defense Relations?	Bilateral Chinese Trade (%)	Chinese Foreign Direct Investment Inflow (%)
Vietnam	No	18.06	4.81
Myanmar	No	25.18	25.23
Laos	No	16.31	50.41
Malaysia	No	12.86	2.86
Indonesia	No	12.36	2.88
Thailand	Yes	12.54	4.43
Cambodia	No	17.64	25.01
Philippines	Yes	11.05	0.43
Singapore	Yes	11.06	6.77
Brunei	Yes	4.23	Less than 0.01

Source: ASEANstats

Comparing tables 1 and 2 reveals a very strong relationship between these measures of hierarchy and the arms import decisions of ASEAN states. The four states having strong American defense relations are also the top four importers of American arms, while the major importers of Chinese arms, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos are also the top 3 destinations, in percentage terms, for Chinese foreign direct investment. All three also have substantial trade with China, although in this case, the relationship is not so close. Vietnam's percentage trade with China is greater than that of Laos and Cambodia, but Vietnam does not import Chinese arms. However, there are good theoretical grounds for seeing FDI as a better measure of economic hierarchy than trade, since FDI, resulting in direct ownership of assets in the

¹⁰⁴ ASEANstats (2017) "ASEANstats Database"

destination country, is generally more tightly regulated than trade. Shares of foreign investment, therefore, show a government's preferences more clearly than does trade, which is, in most cases, less controlled by the government and therefore more determined by the preferences of individuals and firms.

Although the correspondence between American and Chinese hierarchy and the import of American and Chinese arms is very clear, the relation between these hierarchies and Russian arms exports is, at first glance, much more doubtful. Although the biggest importer of Russian arms, Vietnam, is a strong neutralist state with low levels of Chinese and American hierarchy, the next two biggest importers, Laos and Myanmar, show substantial levels of Chinese hierarchy. This could be taken to suggest that, instead of acting as an alternative to both American and Chinese hierarchy, Russia acts in this region more as a mere ally of China. However, it is significant to note that Chinese economic hierarchy in Southeast Asia is a relatively recent phenomenon. For this reason, some amount of "lag" is expected before patterns of Russian arms exports to these countries reflect this new situation. Indeed, this is what is found in the data. When the 2000-2017 period is divided into two halves (2000-2008 and 2009-2017), it is seen that Russian arms exports to Laos dropped from 87% in the first period to 16% in the second, while exports to Myanmar dropped in percentage terms from 65% to 33%. The relatively high Russian arms exports to Laos and Myanmar over the 2000-2017 period, therefore, do not contradict the account pursued here, but demonstrate that the effects of growing hierarchy are not immediate. Furthermore, as these effects have become apparent, they have been stronger in Laos, where Chinese FDI is higher than in Myanmar.

A second objection to the argument that the importation of Russian arms function as a symbolic rejection of hierarchy would be the claim that the tendency of Russian exports to vary inversely with American and Chinese exports is a simple mathematical relationship. Since the cumulative percentage of all arms imports for a given country must be 100%, it is, on this line of reasoning, only natural that Russian imports rise as Chinese and American imports fall. It could be argued in this vein that imports of American and Chinese arms are reflections of hierarchy, but imports of Russian arms are simply a default alternative without symbolic value. However, this argument ignores the great diversification of the ASEAN arms market. Adding together the values for Russian, Chinese, and American imports in Table 1 shows that many of the ASEAN countries import the comfortable majority of their arms from countries other than the three considered here. Malaysia (69%), Indonesia (72%), Thailand (64%), Cambodia (55%), the Philippines (61%) and Brunei (82%), all import the majority of their arms from countries other than Russia, China and the United States. There is no strong pattern discernible in the diversification of imports of different countries. Highly diversified countries include Chinese clients (Cambodia), American clients (Brunei) and neutralists (Indonesia), and the same is true for countries with more concentrated patterns of arms importing (as the examples of Laos, Singapore and Vietnam show). In this context, there is no a priori reason to suspect that lower imports from China or the United States will be compensated by higher imports from Russia rather than another supplier.

A “strong constructivist” account would emphasize the importance of these hierarchies as expressions of socially constructed identities, demonstrating the importance of ideological choices in determining a state’s foreign policy behaviour. A neoclassical realist account, on the

other hand, while recognizing the importance of identities and domestic politics in reducing general structural pressures to specific foreign policy outcomes, will insist that the international structure, defined by relative power, will play the primary and most fundamental causal role. It would therefore be predicted that the strongest states, most inclined to assert their autonomy and influence, will be the most inclined to symbolically assert their independence by importing Russian arms. To test this hypothesis, the table below compares the ratio of Russian imports to American and Chinese imports in a country to the country's average Component Index of National Capability score, as well as the country's total GDP and GDP per capita PPP.

State	Ratio of Russian arms to American/Chinese arms	CINC score	GDP (constant billion 2010 USD)	GDP per capita PPP (constant 2011 international dollars)
Vietnam	87	0.0082	106.1	4,051
Malaysia	9.03	0.0045	241.6	20,426
Laos	1.57	0.00048	6.58	3,946
Indonesia	1.06	0.014	702.7	7,955
Myanmar	1	0.0061	42.2	3,159
Thailand	0.03	0.0079	315.20	12,573
Singapore	0	0.0028	210.10	66,848
Philippines	0	0.0054	188.8	5,393
Cambodia	0	0.0016	10.40	2,348
Brunei	0	0.00015	13.43	81,090

Sources: SIPRI, Correlates of War Project, World Bank

The correspondence between CINC scores and Russian arms imports is relatively strong. With the exception of Laos, which, as explained earlier, is a special case, all the states that import as great a quantity or more of Russian arms in comparison to American and Chinese arms are the strong states in ASEAN, when measured by CINC scores, whereas the states that import few or no Russian arms are generally the weaker states in the region. Although weaker,

the relationship between Russian arms imports and economic power also seems to be fairly strong. The states that import few or no Russian arms are generally very small economies (Brunei, Singapore), economies with low per capita GDP (Philippines) or both (Cambodia). However, this relationship is weaker than the relationship between CINC scores and arms imports, as Vietnam is relatively weak in economic terms, but is the biggest importer of Russian arms. Adoption of identities emphasizing sovereignty and neutrality, and importing of Russian arms to express this identity, seems to be more closely related to actual and potential military power than economic power.

The major exception to these generalizations is Thailand. Thailand is one of the strongest states in ASEAN both militarily and economically, but has historically accepted a high degree of American hierarchy, and has thus far imported very few Russian arms. Thailand, therefore, is the most powerful counterexample to the argument pursued here. However, it will be argued below that Thailand's anomalous status is the result of a delayed adjustment to the new realities of the post-Cold War world, and will likely not be permanent. Indeed, there is evidence that Thailand has already made a decisive turn in the direction of a more sovereigntist and neutralist identity more in keeping with its relative power in the Southeast Asian system.

Case Studies: Vietnam and Thailand

Vietnam

Vietnam is of interest here as Russia's greatest success in building its arms exports and using them to secure wider influence. Russia has been greatly assisted in its relations with Vietnam by the history of close Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation during the Cold War. During the

later Cold War, Vietnam was highly isolated, being sanctioned by the ASEAN countries, China and the United States in response to its occupation of Cambodia, and suffering from a prolonged economic crisis.¹⁰⁵ The Soviet Union was Vietnam's only major trading and aid partner, and the primary foreign destination for Vietnamese students. In these circumstances, the Soviet Union achieved a fairly positive image in Vietnam, along with the connections provided by Vietnamese government elites who had studied there. These assets survived the collapse of the Soviet Union to be inherited by its Russian successor.

In the 1990's however, these assets of personal connections and good will could not be capitalized on due to Russia's almost complete withdrawal from Southeast Asia in that decade. At the same time, Vietnam's internal weaknesses forced it to withdraw from Cambodia and pursue normalized relations with the United and China, while joining ASEAN.¹⁰⁶ Vietnam's adoption of more friendly policies, however, did not represent a shift to a simple policy of bandwagoning. Vietnam's more cooperative attitude was carefully qualified by a strong commitment to its continued autonomy. Upon joining ASEAN in 1994, internal documents in the Vietnam referred to a new policy, not of accommodation, but of "cooperating while struggling."¹⁰⁷ In 2003, a Communist Party of Vietnam document, "Strategy of Fatherland Defence in a New Situation", distinguished between "objects of cooperation" and "objects of struggle", which referred not to a distinction between friendly and enemy countries, but to

¹⁰⁵ Bukh, Alexander (2016) "Russia's Image and Soft Power Resources in Southeast Asia: Perceptions among Young Elites in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 38(3), 451.

¹⁰⁶ Le, 339.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 343.

different issue areas in relations with a single country.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, Vietnam adopted a policy of explicit neutrality, declaring in the 7th Congress of the Communist Party Vietnam's goal "to be friends with all countries in the world community."¹⁰⁹ In improving relations with the United States and China and joining ASEAN, Vietnam did not accept a subordinate status, but rather enthusiastically adopted a maximalist interpretation of the ASEAN Way, emphasizing its commitments to complete sovereignty, neutrality and non-alignment.

When, in the early 21st century, Russia was ready to return to more active engagement with Southeast Asia, Vietnam represented the ideal regional partner, being joined to Russia both by still-remembered historical situations and by the ideological commonalities between the ASEAN Way and the Russian pursuit of multipolarity. Vietnam and Russia signed a "Strategic Partnership" agreement in 2001, the first agreement of this kind for Vietnam.¹¹⁰ The early 21st century also saw the founding of an Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, which meets annually, as well as arrangements for Russian training of Vietnamese military and political personnel.¹¹¹ The partnership was eventually upgraded to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership",¹¹² and the first free trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and a foreign state was signed with

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 342.

¹¹⁰ Gvosdev & Marsh, 149.

¹¹¹ Mazyrin, Vladimir "Russia and Vietnam" Building a Strategic Partnership" in *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects*, 175.

¹¹² Martynova, 405.

Vietnam.¹¹³ Altogether, more than 50 interstate agreements have been signed between Russia and Vietnam since 1991.¹¹⁴

The close relationship between Vietnam and Russia, facilitated in part by substantial continuing arms sales, has created the occasion for Russia to demonstrate its independence as an actor in the Southeast Asian region. Although Russia generally supports China in multilateral forums, and is careful to avoid direct confrontation with either China or the United States, Russia has proven willing to risk limited confrontation with China in building its influence in the region, especially in cooperation with Vietnam. It has already been noted above that Russia has ignored Chinese protests against arms exports to Vietnam. Another significant development relates to joint Russian-Vietnamese oil exploration. Oil exploration has been a major area of cooperation between the two countries, including in areas within China's "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea. Earlier this year, China protested this activity. Dmitri Peskov responded in vague terms, noting that Rosneft had acted independently in arranging the contracts, but had followed all the proper procedures in obtaining a license.¹¹⁵ Having made this noncommittal response, the Russian government did nothing to halt Rosneft's operations, which commenced soon after.¹¹⁶ This series of events underlines that Russia's relative closeness to China can actually be an advantage to smaller ASEAN states looking to assert their independence. Oil drilling in disputed waters is an important affirmation for Vietnam of its right to the waters in question. Doing so alone, or in partnership with a more hostile country such as the United

¹¹³ Tsvetov, 65.

¹¹⁴ Mazyrin, 175.

¹¹⁵ Trickett, Nicholas "Working with Vietnam, Russia's Rosneft Draws China's Ire" *The Diplomat* May 19, 2018.

¹¹⁶ Trickett, Nicholas "Comment: Russia's oil giant Rosneft just crossed one of China's red lines in Vietnam" *BNE Intellinews* June 5, 2018.

States, would likely draw a more determined reaction from China. However, given Russia's close ties with China in other areas, China seems content to simply go through the motions of protesting Rosneft's oil drilling, not wanting to upset cooperation with Russia in other areas.

Thailand

As noted previously, Thailand is an outlier in ASEAN, as a relatively powerful state that nevertheless has historically favoured the kind of bandwagoning more often associated with Thailand's smaller and weaker neighbours. This foreign policy orientation has deep roots in Thailand's history. During the period of European colonization, Thailand was the only nation in Southeast Asia that successfully maintained its independence. It did so by "bending with the wind", largely acquiescing in the demands of the European powers, primarily the British and French. This acquiescence, along with the usefulness of Thailand as a buffer zone between French Indochina and British Burma, allowed Thailand to maintain its independence.¹¹⁷ During the Cold War, this inclination to accommodate superior power to secure protection was reinforced by a long-running communist insurgency in northern Thailand, supported by China. Thailand's weakness relative to first the colonial powers and later China compelled the country's elites to adopt an accommodationist posture to survive the intense security threats Thailand faced.

With the end of the Cold War, Thailand did not fundamentally change its foreign policy orientation. Although Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, elected in 1988, showed some inclination to push Thailand toward playing a more independent and assertive role in the

¹¹⁷ Chachavalpongpan, Pavin *Reinventing Thailand: Thaksin and His Foreign Policy* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 35.

region, launching the “Indochina initiative” to conciliate Vietnam, he was overthrown in a military coup in 1991.¹¹⁸ From 1993, the Democrats held power in Thailand, with short interruptions, for the rest of the 20th century.¹¹⁹ The Democrats worked to reduce the role of the Thai military in politics, but otherwise followed relatively conventional foreign and domestic policies.

Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister from 2001 to 2006, launched a strong attack on both the domestic and foreign components of the traditional consensus. The tone of Thaksin’s attack reflected a strong populist nationalism. He criticized Thailand’s governing classes for failing to improve living standards outside of the wealthy areas of Bangkok and the South, and for failing to properly assert Thailand’s importance and interests on the world stage.¹²⁰ As part of his campaign to increase Thailand’s international contacts, he worked to develop a productive relationship with Russia, travelling to Russia to meet with President Putin and Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov in 2002.¹²¹ As part of a general package of measures to grow relations with Russia, Thaksin pushed for Thailand to buy Russian Su-30MK fighter jets, but met resistance from the Air Force Commander in Chief, who preferred to select American F-16s.¹²² This dispute was not resolved when Thaksin was overthrown in a military coup in 2006. The caretaker military government that replaced him eventually rejected both the Russian and American options, choosing JAS-39 Gripen jets from Sweden.

¹¹⁸ Ganesan, Narayanan (2004) “Thaksin and the Politics of Domestic and Regional Consolidation in Thailand” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* Vol. 26(1), 27-28.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 28.

¹²⁰ Chachavalpongpun, 30.

¹²¹ Koldunova, Ekaterina & Rangsimaporn, Paradorn “Russia-Thailand Relations: Historical Background and Contemporary Developments” in *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects*.

¹²² *Ibid*, 166.

Despite the overthrow of Thaksin, his movement remained strong, given its overwhelming popularity in the Thai countryside. Thaksin's allies have won every free election in Thailand since his overthrow, leading them to regain power in 2008 and from 2011-14. Both episodes of power for Thaksin's allies have seen orders for Russian military equipment, with orders placed in 2008 and 2014.¹²³ The Democrats, however, who regained power from 2009-11, did not place any orders for Russian military equipment.

From 2006 to 2014, then, Russian military imports followed political trends, being favoured when Thaksin's sovereigntist allies were in power, and disfavoured under their accommodationist Democrat opponents. The 2014 coup which overthrew Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, however, marked a turning point. The military by this point had lost patience with its former Democrat allies, and pursued direct rule under General Prayuth Chan-ocha rather than turning over power to the Democrats as in the past. Furthermore, while working vigorously to uproot the influence of the Shinawatra family and their allies, the military has attempted to co-opt their support by mimicking many of their policies.¹²⁴ This domestic shift has been matched by a significant shift in foreign policy orientation as well, as the military has rejected American criticism of its rule and focused on establishing wider contacts beyond traditional allies. In 2015, Gen. Chan-ocha expressed this new orientation, praising Russia and obliquely criticizing the United States by stating, "Friends prove their worth when one is in trouble. Friends will help and understand."¹²⁵ The condemnation of America's interference in

¹²³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2018) "Trade Registers"

¹²⁴ Villadiego, Laura "What the Thai Army took from Thaksin Shinawatra's Playbook" *This Week in Asia* May 26, 2018.

¹²⁵ Chachavalpongpan, Pavin "Thailand plays the Russia card" *The Japan Times* 22 April, 2015.

internal affairs, and the praise of Russia for its lack of interference, were clear. As noted earlier, this foreign policy turn generated a series of meetings between the two countries to arrange arms trades, which have resulted in one contract so far (in 2017).¹²⁶

There is every reason to believe that Thailand's sovereigntist turn is a long-term phenomenon. Although foreign policy orientations followed political vicissitudes from 2006 to 2014, there is no longer a constituency for the accommodationism of the Democrats. It is still likely that Thaksin's allies would win any free election, and the military, despite trying to keep them from power, has largely adopted their policies, both in domestic and foreign affairs. Whether or not there are free elections, then, it seems that Thailand will be more suspicious of its traditional alliances than it has been in the past, and will also be friendlier to Russia, both in general and in terms of openness to Russian arms imports. It seems that Thailand has experienced a belated adjustment to the new international structure of the post-Cold War period, and will be more likely in the future to buy Russian arms as an expression of its increased sense of autonomy and resistance to hierarchy.

Conclusion

Overall, then, the data on Russian arms transfers to Southeast Asia seems generally consistent with the neoclassical realist account developed earlier. The most powerful states tend to be more recent to hierarchy, and tend to express this resistance by importing more Russian arms. Additionally, there are reasons to believe that exceptions to the rule, such as Laos and Thailand, can be explained as cases of delayed adjustment that are in the process of

¹²⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2018) "Trade Registers"

coming to conform to the general pattern. However, as Waltz feared, it is possible that the introduction of unit-level intervening variables limits the generalizability of the results found here. The general finding of this study, that more powerful states are more resistant to hierarchy, and express that resistance symbolically as well as practically, could, on a robust constructivist telling, reflect a Southeast Asian “cultural realism” rather than the trans-cultural effect of the international structure.

Nor can this concern be addressed simply by performing a large-N study of Russian arms exports around the world, or of any other particular state action which can plausibly be presented as a manifestation of symbolic acceptance of or resistance to hierarchy. Rather, given the importance of intervening variables, it is to be expected that attitudes to hierarchy will be expressed differently in different contexts. As Rose conceded, the richer explanatory resources provided by neoclassical realism come at the cost of a loss in theoretical exactitude.

This difficulty can be partially mitigated by the pursuit of more focused case studies in particular contexts. For example, promising areas for research could include expressions of rhetorical support for Arab nationalism in the Middle East, or degrees of active adherence to the Non-Aligned Movement by countries in similar strategic positions during the Cold War. To the extent that the broad framework pursued in this study can be adapted to provide satisfactory accounts of various different expressions of symbolic independence, it gains in credibility. While such support by cumulative successes of application does not meet the strictest standards of verification, they tend to build confidence in the fruitfulness of this account in generating theoretically-grounded descriptions of the symbolic behaviour of states.

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