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Roundtable Review 15-45

Joseph Torigian. *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles in the Soviet Union and China after Stalin and Mao*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022. ISBN978-0-300-25423-5 (hardcover, \$35.16).

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 Introduction by Dorothy J. Solinger, University of California, Irvine, Emerita

This is an extremely important book, which has received much attention—in journals, in speaking invitations for the author, and in the fellowships he has been awarded.¹ Its significance lies in the author’s argument that, unlike almost all previous scholarship on the subject of political succession in authoritarian and Communist regimes, it is not economic/material interests, policy differences, or rules and institutions that determine leadership turnover after the death of a dictator.² Critically, it is personal interactions among top Party personnel that shape what he terms “post-cult-of-personality power struggles” (2). He also departs from the dominant understandings in the literature in that he finds that there was both no “selectorate” (a “formally defined group” which “has a say in who leads,” [5]) that engages in vote-seeking in the choice of the successor ruler as many have argued; nor was collective leadership practiced by the deceased leader’s successor, who, in all four of Torigian’s cases, governed according to their own views and whims, much like the strongmen they had replaced.

In the four cases of succession that he investigated (two in the Soviet Union, two in China), Torigian found that what transpired was a battle based on “personal interactions” (14), which, in turn, derived from contending individuals’ “prestige, historical antagonisms, back-handed political maneuvering and a substantial role for specialists in violence [but not coups]” (2) and “perceived contributions to the revolution” (16). In distinction from the views of previous scholars, Torigian discovered that reputation grounded in historical animosities and “potentially compromising material” in the hands of one or another politician was decisive (15). In short, the book fundamentally overturns existing understandings of how Communist polities operate.

The book has a number of strengths. Perhaps most notable is the author’s impressive plumbing of an enormous set of historical documents of many types, most of which have only recently become available: personal diaries, notes from party meetings, speeches, communiques, official collections of party documents, the works of prominent leaders, transcripts of party plena, interviews, memoirs, the work of Party historians, sundry consequential circulars and speeches that issued from or were presented at major Party meetings, as well as various internal publications. As one reviewer expressed it, the book is “based on extraordinary research in both Chinese and Russian archives, documents, memoirs, and scholarly studies, as well as the Western academic literature.”³ In addition, it engages with comparative politics writings on authoritarian and Communist rule. In drawing on this vast range of qualitative information, Torigian expresses doubts about the value of statistical and game-theoretic, universalistic approaches which increasingly appear in the literature in political science.

The other chief outstanding feature of the study is its authoritative, persuasive presentation of an entirely new systematic model of political elite warfare in four key episodes (which he labels the “authority model,” in distinction from what he terms “the economic model,” in use by previous scholars (5). These four episodes

¹ Joseph Torigian is a Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, a Global Fellow in the Wilson Center’s History and Public Policy Program, and a Center Associate of the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. Previously, he was a Visiting Fellow at the China in the World Program at Australian National University, a Stanton Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, Postdoctoral Fellow at Princeton-Harvard’s China and the World Program, a Postdoctoral (and Predoctoral) Fellow at Stanford’s Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), a Predoctoral Fellow at George Washington University’s Institute for Security and Conflict Studies, an IREX scholar affiliated with the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, and a Fulbright Scholar at Fudan University in Shanghai.

² Often cited examples of the previous scholarship are Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator’s Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011) and Valerie Bunce, “Leadership Succession and Policy Innovation in the Soviet Republics,” *Comparative Politics* 11:4 (1979): 379-401.

³ Thomas P. Bernstein, review of Torigian, *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles in the Soviet Union and China after Stalin and Mao*, *The China Journal* 90 (2023): 183.

are the defeat of State Security Chief Lavrentiy Beria in 1952 after General Party Secretary Joseph Stalin's passing, and the 1957 success of 1st Secretary of the Community Party Nikita Khrushchev in the Soviet Union; and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping's victory after the death of Mao Zedong in 1978, and his successful removal of Mao's chosen heir, chairman of the Communist Party, Hua Guofeng, in 1981.

The only weakness may be Torigian's possibly excessive emphasis on the irrelevance of policy differences among the political elite in all these instances of conflict. It is generally held—and not effectively challenged in the book—that there were indeed critical variances between the views of the two sets of contenders at the time of the death of Mao: those of the radical “Gang of Four” (whose members tactically and disingenuously toned down their extreme rhetoric in the last few years of Mao's life). This has been indisputably documented in the work of many others.⁴ Overall, however, the book is eminently clear and coherent and the main argument is aptly referenced and confirmed as each incident unfolds.

As alluded to above, Torigian's alternate explanation and model contravene earlier research in several ways. Most elemental is his convincing disposal of the views that patronage, policy and material interests, and rules and institutions (i.e., his “economic model”) decide the origins and outcomes of battles among the top elite. That argument is found in the work of Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, and others.⁵ As Torigian puts it: the outcomes of contention were “not so much victories of ‘reformers’ over ‘conservatives’ or ‘radicals’ but a settling of scores” (2). Ezra Vogel's tome on the political history of Deng Xiaoping also emphasizes Deng's dominant role in the famous shift in policy that attended (but was not necessarily entirely authored by) the rise of that leader.⁶

In their work on China, Alice Miller, Susan Shirk, and Elizabeth Economy argue that collective leadership marked the tenure of Deng Xiaoping. Jessica L.P. Weeks makes the same argument for the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev.⁷ Torigian finds that in fact these two leaders dominated the decisional arena. Further, where others place great weight on the importance of rules and institutions, Torigian does concede that institutions and rules do exist, but he shows that institutions are easily manipulated or set aside, and that the weak formal and informal rules in these systems are often vague or too ambiguous to govern behavior.⁸

⁴ Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972–1976* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007) and Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) are two prominent examples.

⁵ Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook*; Carl Minzner, *End of an Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ronald Wintrobe, *The Political Economy of Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Elizabeth Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶ Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁷ Alice Miller, “The PLA in the Party Leadership Decisionmaking System,” in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, ed. Philip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015): 58-83; Susan L. Shirk, “The Return to Personalistic Rule,” *Journal of Democracy* 29:2 (2018): 22-36; on China, see Economy, *The Third Revolution*; for the Soviet Union, see Jessica L.P. Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 40; and Bunce, “Leadership Succession.”

⁸ Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen A. Thelen, eds., *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Another innovation in Torigian's perspective is that it is not, as Victor Shih and others have contended, elite networks and lasting factions that people the elite, but rather an amorphous and changing set of individuals, each with his own scores to settle.⁹ Nor, Torigian asserts, is there a discrete, delimited body, the "selectorate," whose constituents vote or otherwise confer among themselves in order to choose their next ruler. What he sees, alternatively, is a conglomeration of individuals, all acting on their respective grudges left over from past conflicts, and on their awareness of whatever historical contributions their colleagues may have or have not have made.¹⁰

The three reviewers, Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Chris Miller, and Brian D. Taylor, are all quite positive in their appraisals. First of all, they uniformly express high praise for the prodigious, deep research that comprises the study; Chestnut Greitens characterizes the book as "a masterclass in archival research as detective work," which has yielded, as Taylor put it, "a wealth of new evidence." A second feature of all three reviews is that each one takes special note of Torigian's emphasis on personalities and relationships in the governance of political succession, and of his minimization of the part played by institutions or rules.

And third, all three reviewers draw attention to the study's focus on the centrality of "specialists in violence" (i.e., the military and security officials, [2]), and, in particular, in the criticality of a contender's possession of their loyalty and of his ability to wield control over them. The reviewers concur in appreciating Torigian's demonstration that institutions, rules, policy and ideology, and interests are not what drive politics in authoritarian, Communist regimes (as so much of the comparative political science scholarship on such systems stresses) but instead that it is the intrigue and threats of violence that mark interactions, as Torigian's thorough research has demonstrated. Miller notes the book's "counterintuitive intervention" which [forces] a reconsideration of "assumptions about the operation of high politics at points of political stress."

There are a few caveats among the reviewers' comments. Chestnut Greitens, a political scientist, suggests that further comparative work be done on the "violence specialists" in order to theorize more systemically than Torigian has done on autocratic political systems. She finds no generalizable theory of power transitions, and comments on "our limited ability to predict outcomes," an insight that the book encourages. Taylor, who is an authority on Russian politics, found a few lacunae in Torigian's arguments and he also questions one of Torigian's two models. And Miller, whose fields are Russian politics and history, proposes using a spectrum for recourse to violence and level of institutionalization as opposed to setting up a binary categorization for the presence versus absence of these factors.

In his response, Torigian expresses his gratitude that the reviewers agree with his core conclusions, and that their analyses generally accept that the main takeaway of the book is "the Chinese Communist Party's inability to achieve real institutionalization." He also drew from their reviews that the two countries had *both* strongman leaders *and* party systems, with the party being sacrosanct for all the politicians involved. In sum, the remarks help Torigian to home in on some of his chief, underlying concerns, such as the nature of politics, how a Communist Party actually works, and with what its elite concerns itself. The reviews in addition led him to think that he could have spent more words on factions and their absence in these parties.

⁹ Victor C. Shih, *Factions and Finance in China: Elite Conflict and Inflation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley, CA: University Press, 1993); Mary Gallagher and Jonathan K. Hanson, "Authoritarian Survival, Resilience and the Selectorate Theory," in *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe*, ed. Martin K. Dimitrov (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 185-204; and Philip G. Roeder, *Red Sunset: The Failure of Soviet Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Finally, Torigian rejects the claim of Taylor's that his framework resembles that employed by Robert Conquest,¹¹ in that he, unlike Conquest, does not find that struggles are constant and ongoing.

Contributors:

Joseph Torigian is a Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, an Assistant Professor at the School of International Service at American University in Washington, a Global Fellow in the Wilson Center's History and Public Policy Program, and a Center Associate of the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. His first book, *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles in the Soviet Union and China after Stalin and Mao*, was published by Yale University Press in 2022, and he has a forthcoming biography on Xi Jinping's father with Stanford University Press. He studies Chinese and Russian politics and foreign policy.

Dorothy J. Solinger is Professor Emerita, Political Science, University of California, Irvine. Her seven single-authored books include *Poverty and Pacification* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China* (University of California Press, 1999; winner of the 2001 Joseph R. Levenson prize of the Association for Asian Studies) and *States' Gains, Labor's Losses* (Cornell University Press, 2009), a comparative study of China, France and Mexico that was named a *Choice Magazine* Outstanding Academic Title in 2010. She has also edited or co-edited six books.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens is Associate Professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas-Austin, where she directs UT's Asia Policy Program. Her work focuses on security, East Asia, and authoritarian politics and foreign policy. In 2023–2024, she is on leave as Visiting Associate Professor of Research in Indo-Pacific Security at the US Army War College.

Chris Miller is Associate Professor of International History at the Fletcher School at Tufts University and author of four books on Russian and international history, most recently *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology* (Scribner, 2022).

Brian D. Taylor is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University. Taylor is the author of three books: *The Code of Putinism* (Oxford University Press, 2018); *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Taylor compares Torigian's model to those of Robert Conquest and Carl A. Linden. Robert Conquest, *Power and Policy in the USSR* (New York: St. Martin's, 1961); Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership 1957–1964* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

Joseph Torigian's book, *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles in the Soviet Union and China after Stalin and Mao*, offers a novel and important take on succession politics and power struggles inside two of the world's most powerful and historically consequential Leninist authoritarian regimes. Torigian argues, first and foremost, that elite politics in the Soviet Union and China were "a politics of personal prestige, historical antagonisms, backhanded political maneuvering, and a substantial role for specialists in violence," and that, therefore, the trajectory of these great powers was shaped more by personal score-settling and jockeying for personal power than by institutional rules (2). It would be an analytical mistake and a misinterpretation of history, Torigian argues, to see either policy differences or institutional rules as the key principles that governed political transitions in these political systems; rather, in a context of weak institutionalization, personal power struggles remained paramount. He refers to this as a "knife fight with weird rules" (4).

In terms of its historical sourcing and evidence, Torigian's work is a masterclass in archival research as detective work. His ability to piece together a unique set of sources, and to draw them into analytical conversation and historical narrative, are formidable. In particular, his account of how Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping used what appeared to be an ideological disagreement (Hua's "two whatevers," which are often read as a statement of blind loyalty to Maoism, vs. Deng's "practice as the sole criterion of truth"¹) to discredit and sideline Premier Hua Guofeng, helps to demonstrate that Deng did not truly reverse the personalization of power that had occurred under party leader Mao Zedong, and to contextualize and provide a baseline for Chinese elite politics today, under Xi Jinping, China's current party leader. In places, the book would have benefitted from one or two layers more of contextualization, especially to appeal to and explain key historical developments to a readership which may not already be deeply knowledgeable and immersed in the personalities of Chinese elite politics during the early years of the People's Republic.

One of the strengths of Torigian's work is that it highlights the drawbacks of over-emphasizing regime subtype in the study of comparative authoritarianism. While that categorization has produced knowledge of some valuable cross-national empirical regularities in the global and comparative study of authoritarian rule,² Torigian shows in deep qualitative detail both that personalism and single-party rule are not mutually exclusive categories, and that this fact matters for our understanding of policymaking within non-democratic political systems. To this end, his work, while deeply historical and qualitative, fits well with a broader recent conversation in political science on how to measure and conceptualize variations in the degree of personalism over time and across leaders inside non-democratic (as well as democratic) political systems.³

Torigian's book also highlights the importance of contestation among political elites over the loyalty of, and control over, a regime's "specialists in violence." His accounts reinforce the importance of Mao's aphorism that "political power grows out of the barrel of the gun," but one major contribution Torigian makes—without, perhaps, theorizing it explicitly—is that the specialists in violence are not important in these systems

¹ The "two whatevers" are generally translated as "We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made and unswervingly follow whatever instructions he gave." Hua's supporters were sometimes known as the "whateverists."

² Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:1 (1999): 115-144; Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

³ See for example, Joseph Wright, "The Latent Characteristics that Structure Autocratic Rule," *Political Science Research and Methods* 9:1 (2021): 1-19; Jia Li and Joseph Wright, "How Personalist Parties Undermine State Capacity in Democracies," *Comparative Political Studies* 56:3 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414023116>; Erica Frantz, Erica, Carisa Nietzsche, Joseph Wright, and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, "How Personalist Politics Is Changing Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 32: 3 (2021): 94-108; Erica Frantz, Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Joseph Wright, and Xu Xu, "Personalization of Power and Repression in Dictatorships," *Journal of Politics* 82:1 (2020): 372-377.

because they are themselves either physical kingmakers or potential replacement rulers, as they are in many political systems where coups are more common than under Leninist party-states, but that they are objects and sites of contestation over power. In the aftermath of Mao's death, Torigian argues, the Gang of Four, Chinese leaders who had backed Mao, recognized that they lacked authority in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and tried to make up for this deficiency by building up (inadequate) militia forces in Shanghai, only to be arrested by Wang Dongxing's Central Guards Bureau (86); a few years later, Deng's worry that Hua, who was officially then the chairman of the Central Military Commission, was building his own influence in the military prompted Deng's counter-moves (171).

In both cases, the central issue was who exercised political control over the PLA, but the PLA itself was not used to violently remove an elite rival. Moreover, the two cases also differ from each other in the role played by the PLA. After the Gang attempted to counterbalance the PLA organizationally by strengthening militia forces,⁴ Hua used a parallel security agency, the Cultural Guards Bureau, to remove the Gang of Four. Later, Deng demonstrated his control over the military—including by ordering an attack on Vietnam when he knew the leadership did not have consensus in support of this action—to influence the political calculations of other Chinese leaders with respect to leadership succession, resulting in the fall of Hua Guofeng. In both cases, the actor who feared loss of control over the PLA acted to preserve it, but Deng used the PLA to protect his existing line of political control, while Hua used a different security force.

The role of specialists in violence similarly differs even in the two Soviet cases that Torigian examines. The military did physically arrest Lavrentiy Beria, Joseph Stalin's head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, during a Presidium meeting (39-40), partly out of fear that the secret police he commanded had grown too powerful, an example of the Party moving to reduce the effects of counterbalancing. By contrast, General Georgi Zhukov's support for Nikita Khrushchev, the future party leader, in a Presidium meeting (and the implication that Khrushchev therefore had the broader support of the military and the KGB as institutions) was enough to block the anti-party group's attempt to remove the latter (80-81). In both cases, military loyalty was essential, but the role of other security institutions differs: Beria's control over the secret police led to his downfall, but Khrushchev's control over the KGB led to his survival. Given the differences even across these four cases, it would be interesting and intellectually fruitful for someone to build on the historical repertoire of roles that Torigian describes the military and security forces as having played, and to use this empirical basis and other comparative data to systematically theorize conditions under which these actors serve one role and function in autocratic political systems versus another.

This point about the role of specialists in violence reflects a broader assessment of the nature of Torigian's project and of his contribution to our historical and scholarly understanding. Torigian does not include a generalizable theory of power transitions in Leninist systems. He notes that the struggle for personal power often depends on the strength of individual ties and networks, but also on an individual's ability to weaponize these assets at key moments against rivals, which can vary according to personality and other highly contingent factors that are hard to predict *ex ante*, especially in interaction with each other. The "theory," then, is a looser explanatory framework, in that it does not generate empirically falsifiable predictions about how directional changes in the factors and conditions he highlights would be likely to produce different outcomes.

This does not mean, however, that Torigian's book lacks broader comparative utility. Indeed, a short section in his concluding chapter draws on the book's themes about the political uses of revolutionary history to either promote oneself or damage one's rivals in order to illuminate the transition of power from Kim Il Sung, North Korea's founder, to his son Kim Jong Il, identifying historical bonds with North Korea's ruling

⁴ On counterbalancing, see Erica DeBruin, *How to Prevent Coups d'état: Counterbalancing and Regime Survival* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

family as the political currency of power in the regime today.⁵ Additionally, Torigian's account of the power contest between Deng and Hua is not simply old history, but draws out insightful parallels into Xi Jinping's current drive to concentrate power and what that means for the political landscape in which any eventual successors will have to maneuver.

Nonetheless, in many ways, the most powerful lesson from the book is how much rests on the personal traits, choices, and relationships among individuals at the top of a non-democratic political system, and thereby how limited our ability to predict outcomes with precision years in advance will actually be. In a world where Leninist rule seems likely to continue to shape world politics for the foreseeable future, however, that analytical humility, grounded in meticulous historical evidence and careful tracing of key patterns, is a valuable caution for scholars and policymakers alike; while unorthodox, it is one of the book's important contributions to scholarship and policy.

⁵ For another take on how China, North Korea, and Russia use history, see Katie Stallard, *Dancing on Bones: How Past Wars Shape the Present in Russia, China, and North Korea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); on how North Korea propagandizes the role of the Kim family, see: Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); and Heather-Leigh K. Ba, Sheena Chestnut Greitens, and Yu Bin Kim, "Authoritarian Audiences: Theory and Evidence for Subnational Propaganda Targeting in North Korea," *Comparative Politics*, 56:1 (2023): 49-72.

Review by Chris Miller, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

Joseph Torigian's new book, *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion*, is an extraordinary account of the struggles for power after the deaths of two of the twentieth century's most important leaders. It provides a fresh, well-argued, and deeply sourced account of Soviet politics after the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, and Chinese politics after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong. It adds meaningfully to scholarly knowledge about each of these power transitions and provides useful criticism of scholarly approaches to leadership succession in Marxist-Leninist systems more generally.¹ Finally, it provides an exemplary model for political scientists who are looking to engage deeply with history.

In researching this book, Torigian examined an impressive range of sources. When it comes to the Soviet/Russian sources, the book draws extensively from documents collected from the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) as well as a broad range of published documents from Soviet Communist Party history. Torigian also conducted a subtle and sophisticated analysis of the vast but highly self-serving memoir literature from Soviet leaders and their family members. Finally, the book engages seriously with both the Russian and English language historiography. It also draws on a select number of Chinese sources to understand Soviet politics.

Historians occasionally, and at times justifiably, criticize political scientists who undertake archivally driven case-study analysis for only superficially dipping into archives. This is not a claim one could make against this book. Its primary source base is as broad as those in many history dissertations, and it treats complex and contested documents with sophistication.

If *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion* were simply a narrative of the conventional wisdom about the post-Stalin political transition, it would be the best documented account, among many articles and books (and now films) about Soviet politics after Stalin's demise.²

However, *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion* uses these sources to demolish conventional views of the fall of secret police chief Lavrentiy Beria's fall and Nikita Khrushchev's accession to the position of General Secretary. For seventy years, many Western scholars have attributed policy differences to the various Soviet leaders vying for power after Stalin's death. For example, long-serving foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov was often cast as a Cold War hawk and Khrushchev a comparative dove. Recent archival findings, especially about Molotov's relative dovishness, have created a puzzle about who thought what.³ *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion* shows that few of the Soviet leaders had durable political beliefs, even about critical issues such as relations with the United States or the division of Germany. Instead, Khrushchev switched policy views rapidly according to political expedient. He was neither hawk nor dove, simply a cynical politician.

Political scientists and historians alike have sought to describe Soviet politics in the context of "selectorates," ideological disputes, or patronage networks.⁴ Torigian argues that during leadership successions—when the political stakes are highest—none of these models fit the facts. Policy differences were insignificant because

¹ See also Mark Kramer, "Leadership Succession and Political Violence in the USSR after Stalin's Death," in Paul Hollander, ed., *Political Violence: Belief, Behavior, and Legitimation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 69-92.

² For one recent detailed account, see Joshua Rubenstein, *The Last Days of Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

³ For a complex view of Molotov, see Geoffrey Roberts, *Molotov: Stalin's Cold Warrior* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2012).

⁴ Eg Paul du Quenoy, "The Role of Foreign Affairs in the Fall of Nikita Khrushchev," *International History Review* 25:2, (2003): 334-356.

leaders like Khrushchev espoused different policies in quick succession. The best interpretation of the struggle for power was not about policy differences, as political scientists and historians have long thought, but about backstabbing and manipulation unrelated to any disagreement over policy.

Moreover, Torigian shows that there was no set of rules governing succession processes and no agreement about who should have a say. Instead, he shows that use or threat of force from military leaders was a decisive factor in political succession. This is the second major innovation of *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion*: its foregrounding of the role of the Soviet military in politics. The conventional wisdom has long been that the security services (the KGB, etc.) played a major role in politics but that the military had been mostly removed from high politics and was under civilian control. Stalin's repeated purges of generals seemed to confirm this. It has long been known that Minister of Defense Georgi Zhukov played a role in the machinations around Khrushchev's rise to power, but most accounts took his participation as a secondary factor relative to civilian political maneuvering.⁵

Torigian shows that Zhukov and the military more generally were fundamentally important in deciding the struggle for power, precisely because of their ability to mobilize military resources, threaten violence, and arrest Beria. He notes, for example, how the military surrounded interior ministry buildings and deployed tanks in the capital at a critical moment. He quotes Georgy Malenkov as admitting "we relied on military comrades in this manner at the most necessary moment" (40). Longstanding assumptions about civilian control of the Soviet power ministries must therefore be reassessed. The Russian military may be highly institutionalized, and certainly it is not prone to coups led by colonels.⁶ Yet it has inserted itself or has been drawn into domestic political struggles more often than the literature admits (1917 and across the entire revolutionary era; the post-Stalin struggle; 1991; 1993; and arguably now again in 2023.)

Of course, as Torigian notes, some informal norms and institutions evidently held. Beria was shot, but many of the other losers of political struggles were sidelined or retired. Moreover, Beria was shot after he was removed. The threat of violence contributed to the decision to arrest Beria, but his assassination was probably superfluous to his sidelining, given that he was already safely jailed before being shot. In other words, threats of violence played a part in leadership transition processes—and given the recent experience of Stalinist purges, threats of violence were undoubtedly taken seriously—but the transitions could have been vastly more violent in a less institutionalized system. Stalin's rise to power after Vladimir Lenin's death certainly was. This suggests we should see 1) recourse to violence and 2) the level of institutionalization as a spectrum, rather than a binary. Still, Torigian's analysis left me convinced that scholars have collectively overestimated institutionalization and underestimated violence and threats in post-Stalin leadership transitions.

Though I am not an expert in Chinese politics, I found Torigian's contributions to the study of Chinese elite politics equally important and contrarian. *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion* shows how traditional explanations of the transition from Premier Hua Guofeng to leader Deng Xiaoping did not match the narrative that the Chinese government promoted or that most scholars have accepted. Like the work of scholars of the Soviet Union who searching for policy differences between Khrushchev, Molotov, and other leaders, many established accounts of China's post-Mao transition see Hua as a Maoist and Deng as a "reformist."

Torigian shows how both leaders had broadly similar views on substantive policy issues, so the description of Hua as a "Maoist" is better seen as a propaganda technique by Deng and his allies, rather than a substantive

⁵ This is how Khrushchev himself portrays dynamics in his memoir.

⁶ The most detailed study of this topic is Brian Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

description of Hua's politics. This analysis overturns a longstanding school of thought in scholarship on Chinese elite politics exemplified by Ezra Vogel's biography of Deng Xiaoping.⁷

Torigian's account raises questions about how scholars should interpret the period in the 1990s and 2000s, when many analysts perceived institutionalization in Chinese politics, such as the transfers of power between General Secretaries Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, and then from Hu to Xi Jinping. However, Torigian's account helps clarify how Xi consolidated power so dramatically. Many scholars argue that Xi broke informal rules. Torigian's account suggests there may not have been any rules in the first place.

In sum, Torigian has provided a deeply researched and counterintuitive intervention into both post-Stalin Soviet politics and post-Mao Chinese politics. In so doing, he has not only forced historians of Russia and China to reconsider their assumptions about the operation of high politics at points of political stress. *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion* also raises questions about whether institutionalization is actually possible in a Marxist-Leninist political context. If the two leadership transitions that looked most institutionalized were driven by cynical backstabbing and threats of violence, we must be skeptical of accounts that suggest Marxist-Leninist parties can build institutions over time. Instead, Torigian suggests, such systems rely fundamentally on violence to resolve political disputes.

⁷ Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

 Review by Brian D. Taylor, Syracuse University

As noted by Thomas Pepinsky, in recent decades the comparative study of authoritarianism has taken “an institutional turn.”¹ Joseph Torigian suggests that this turn has been too sharp and that a course correction is in order, arguing for a return to greater focus on personality in the study of authoritarian leadership politics. He does so in a deeply researched account of the power struggles that followed the deaths of two of the twentieth century’s most prominent dictators, Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong in China.

Torigian revisits, with a wealth of new evidence, the victories of First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev and Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping over their respective rivals following Stalin’s and Mao’s deaths. He argues that Khrushchev and Deng came out on top not because they were more effective at building coalitions based on either patronage or policy appeals within a set system of rules—what he calls the “economic model” (5)—but because they used their personal connections, including to military and secret police officers who controlled coercion, to manipulate the rules in their favor—Torigian’s “authority model” (6).

The book’s historical research is very impressive. Torigian’s facility with both Russian and Chinese primary sources makes this a noteworthy contribution to the comparative study of Communism.² He mines evidence from archives, memoirs and diaries, recently published documents, and the latest historical work in multiple languages. His detailed footnotes are commendable for their thoroughness and transparency. Especially effective is the way that Torigian uses long quotations from primary documents, allowing many of the contenders for power to speak for themselves about their behavior and motives.

My remarks concentrate on the Soviet cases, which I know much better than the Chinese ones. I first address the cases themselves and what Torigian’s arguments tell us about Soviet leadership politics, and then discuss Torigian’s economic and authority models.

Torigian examines the first two leadership struggles after Stalin’s death: the arrest of Lavrentiy Beria in June 1953 and Khrushchev’s victory over the so-called “anti-party group” in June 1957. Much remains murky about the arrest of Beria, especially in terms of how the conspiracy against him came together. Torigian argues convincingly that the reasons for the arrest of Beria probably were not due to major policy differences, but arose because other members of the Party’s leadership feared Beria’s power as head of the secret police, including his ability to use so-called *kompromat* (compromising information) against them. Torigian also makes clear that the rules and procedures that were supposed to govern leadership decisions were thrown out the window.

Instead, a more naked power struggle took place, in which Beria’s opponents had to rely on several military officers to carry out his arrest in the middle of a Presidium (Politburo) meeting because Beria himself controlled the Kremlin guard as head of the secret police.³ At the same time, existing accounts are sometimes contradictory, which Torigian admirably details. These disagreements about who did what and why, however, make it hard to show which of Torigian’s competing models better explains every aspect of the affair.

¹ Thomas Pepinsky, “The Institutional Turn in Comparative Authoritarianism,” *British Journal of Political Science* 44:3 (2014): 631-653, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123413000021>.

² Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970); Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: Ecco, 2009).

³ The top Communist Party leadership grouping was called the Presidium between 1952 and 1966, but for most of Soviet history it was known as the Politburo (Political Bureau). In June 1953 both the regular and secret police, including Kremlin guards, were in a unified Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), which was created after Stalin’s death and put under Beria’s control.

In the struggle for power between Khrushchev and the “anti-party group” of old guard Presidium members Georgiy Malenkov, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Lazar Kaganovich, Torigian emphasizes that Khrushchev’s victory depended less on the popularity of his policies and his ability to co-opt supporters, and more on his manipulation of the rules and support from the military and the KGB. Torigian’s argument is persuasive on the way Khrushchev was able to use his ties with the “power ministries” to force a full Central Committee vote, even though the majority of the Presidium supported Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich. At the same time, some of the statements made by Molotov and Kaganovich that downplayed their policy differences with Khrushchev, which Torigian cites as evidence that policy was not a key ground for the power struggle, sound self-justificatory, an attempt to downplay policy differences when they were facing defeat (58, 63-64).

I read with particular interest Torigian’s discussion of the behavior of the Soviet military in 1953 and 1957 because of my own previous work on this issue.⁴ I agree with Torigian that the role of top military officers was crucial in both 1953 and 1957. He challenges my claim that the officers who arrested Beria in 1953 “had every reason to see the order as a legitimate one” (35). This is a matter of interpretation with no clear correct answer. Torigian notes that “the plotters were relying on extremely tendentious interpretations of party rules” (35). At the same time, as Mark Kramer observes, “Malenkov as prime minister and Bulganin as defense minister had the authority to issue legitimate orders to Soviet army officers.”⁵ Nikolay Bulganin, it should be noted, had made his career as a party official and was not a professional officer. Torigian and I agree in our assessments that the support of Defense Minister Marshal Georgiy Zhukov (and KGB head Ivan Serov) was crucial in Khrushchev’s defeat of the anti-party group.

There are two further issues with respect to the military’s role in Soviet leadership politics after Stalin, an empirical one and a conceptual one. The factual issue is to what extent top military officers were involved in *plotting* against Beria, as opposed to carrying out his arrest. Torigian discusses officers arresting Beria, but does not specify how and when they were brought into the operation (32-33). The available evidence shows that all of the key plotters were civilian Communist party leaders and that professional military officers were added the day before the meeting with the task of physically arresting Beria.⁶

The conceptual issue is the more important one: to what extent should we think of the military qua *institution* as an autonomous actor in Soviet politics in this period? Torigian’s authority model emphasizes the “leeway” power ministries have in influencing leadership decisions because of weak institutions with unclear rules (8). At the same time, he stresses that “norms of civilian supremacy” in Leninist regimes mean that military or secret police coups are off the table (10). This is a fair way to characterize the nature of civil-military relations in Communist states, especially in the specific periods he studies after Stalin’s and Mao’s deaths.

The importance of norms against military intervention in politics in Soviet politics were evident during the so-called Zhukov Affair, which took place just four months after the anti-party group episode. In October 1957, Khrushchev accused Marshal Zhukov of seeking a “military junta” and had him removed as defense minister and tossed out of the Presidium. There is no evidence that Zhukov was planning a coup, and the rest of the military willingly went along with Khrushchev’s decision. Although during Communist leadership struggles top military and secret police officers might have some room for choosing sides, this situation differs widely from political systems in which the power ministries directly try to seize power and rule. Although Torigian mentions this episode briefly in the conclusion, I would have been interested in learning

⁴ Brian D. Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 175-192.

⁵ Mark Kramer, “Leadership Succession and Political Violence in the USSR Following Stalin’s Death,” in Paul Hollander, ed., *Political Violence: Belief, Behavior, and Legitimation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 69-92, here 83.

⁶ Kramer, “Leadership Succession and Political Violence in the USSR Following Stalin’s Death,” 83-84.

how he thinks it related to his arguments about the critical importance of the power ministries in leadership battles.

My final points have to do with Torigian's theoretical models: the economic model versus the authority model. For someone old enough to have been trained in the dark arts of Kremlinology, Torigian's models reminded me strongly of the 1960s arguments between Robert Conquest and Carl Linden. Conquest portrayed Soviet politics as a continual struggle for power in which policy differences were merely tools that were used to gain political advantage. Linden, in contrast, articulated an approach in which the power struggles were structured around competing conservative and reforming tendencies that were real and consequential.⁷ Torigian's authority model reads somewhat like a return to Conquest's approach, in which "policy differences do not distinguish competitors" (7), who vie continually to control the leading organs of the Communist Party.

It is worth emphasizing that both of Torigian's models are ultimately his constructs. He derives competing hypotheses based on two general styles of analysis, one based on "exchange" and the other based on "authority" (7). These styles of analysis are not really coherent theories with interlocking hypotheses, at least as I read them. To the extent that Torigian has specific scholars in mind when positing an "economic model," he is referring to works such as Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith's *The Dictator's Handbook*. I agree that Bueno de Mesquita and Smith's work emphasizes "the overriding importance of material and economic benefits in authoritarian regimes" (5) and that it contends that there is an identifiable group—the "selectorate"—within which potential rulers must win over a sufficient coalition to gain power. I am less persuaded that their work assumes, as Torigian states in one hypothesis, that "the power ministries (military or secret police) do not play an independent or unique role" (6). After all, Bueno de Mesquita and Smith return in several places in *The Dictator's Handbook* to Liberia's Samuel Doe as an example of someone who held on to power "because his group had the guns."⁸ I agree with Torigian that it is not so straightforward to define who the selectorate is in authoritarian states, and that rulers and power seekers can manipulate that process; I disagree that interest-based approaches necessarily treat those who wield coercion as unable to play an independent role.

Overall, Torigian has written a compelling and important book about leadership succession in authoritarian states. It stands out for two important reasons for political scientists. First, it shows the promise and value of painstaking historical research for our understanding of elite politics in authoritarian regimes. Second, it provides an important corrective to comparative authoritarianism literature that fixates on institutions and interests⁹ to the neglect of personality, manipulation, and score settling—in Torigian's memorable phrase, "a knife fight with weird rules (4)."

⁷ Robert Conquest, *Power and Policy in the USSR* (New York: St. Martin's, 1961); Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership, 1957-1964* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

⁸ Bruce Bueno De Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 24.

⁹ Pepinsky, "The Institutional Turn in Comparative Authoritarianism"; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook*; Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Response by Joseph Torigian, American University

I want to begin by thanking Dorothy Solinger for writing the introduction and the late Tom Maddux for organizing this forum. He found exactly the right scholars to evaluate my book: Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Chris Miller, and Brian Taylor, a mix of political scientists and historians with expertise in both China and Russia.¹ They all took painstaking care to produce reviews that go beyond a simple summary of the book's content or a list of its strengths and weaknesses. Instead, they take the book's conclusions in new directions to generate fresh insights. As I read the reviews, I found myself regretting that I was not able to take some of those reactions and incorporate them into the manuscript before publication.

Since the reviewers do not generally challenge my core conclusions or empirics, I will instead briefly react to some of the most interesting thoughts they raised.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Chris Miller touch upon what is perhaps the most significant takeaway of my book for China today. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) inability to achieve real institutionalization, even in the wake of Chairman Mao Zedong's death and the disaster of the Cultural Revolution, is indeed deeply revealing about the nature of power in Zhongnanhai. Leninist systems, "organizational weapons" in the words of Philip Selznick, have always been extremely "leader-friendly," to put it mildly.² My forthcoming book on Xi Zhongxun, President Xi Jinping's father, is a sort of sequel that will provide more details on the full implications of a poorly institutionalized system under paramount leader Deng Xiaoping—and how Xi Jinping's model of leadership can be understood as both reflecting continuity with the Deng era, but also attempting to address its inherent pathologies.

I very much appreciate Chestnut Greitens's suggestion that my book problematizes typologies that overly essentialize regime types. My research shows that Leninist systems were more personalist than previous accounts suggested. Yet it also matters, unambiguously, that the Soviet Union and China had strongman leaders *and* party systems. One of the reasons that it was so hard to resist Soviet leaders Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev, as well as Mao and Deng, was that opposing those leaders meant opposing the Party itself—an act that was inconceivable for most cadres. Yet Party leaders still cared about the apparent legitimacy that institutions provided—even as they broke weak rules to ensure their victory. The simultaneous existence of a multiplicity of structures, both personalist and institutional, is one reason for why the interactions among participants of the system were so extraordinarily subtle and contextual.

I particularly like how Chestnut Greitens extended my thoughts about the role of the "specialists in violence" (2). I agree that the many ways in which the people with guns could incite struggle and shape its resolution is remarkable, even without playing any kind of operational role, let alone a conventional "coup." Further work in this area could strive to be more explicit about the exact list of mechanisms by which the "specialists in violence" shape political contestation. Greitens also notes that the military and political police deserve separate theorizing—something I did not do in my book. There was a lot going on that my two hypotheses on the specialists in violence only partially captured.

Chestnut Greitens describes exactly what I was trying to accomplish with my methodological approach. In my book, I rejected empirically falsifiable predictions, but I still wanted to answer questions such as: So what? What does this teach us about the nature of politics? How does it fit in the broader literature? I also did not

¹ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Chris Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Brian D. Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil–Military Relations, 1689–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

² Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1952).

want to do too much violence to the historical record in the process. So, I devised questions that could be answered with empirical evidence and whose answers would say something broader about how Leninist regimes worked.

Like Chestnut Greitens, I believe that this less ambitious approach has useful implications for how we study China today. My findings show just how hard it is to figure out what is going on inside the CCP, but, at the same time, my book does give a sense for how the Party works. It sensitizes us to the kinds of things that CCP members worry about and think about. That analytical firepower might not allow us to know exactly what is transpiring, but it does provide a framework, or, at the very least, helps generate a set of hypotheses that may not be immediately intuitive to people with a weak grounding in history.

Chris Miller's review of my book raises an interesting question. Is it political science, or is it history? He suggests that it is a "model for political scientists who are looking to engage deeply with history." I share his suspicion of "political scientists who undertake archivally driven case-study analysis for only superficially dipping into archives." Elsewhere, I have argued that the comparative method often provides less firepower than many political scientists think. For low-*n* studies in particular, if the case is wrong everything is wrong. Of course, that is not to say that there is nothing to be learned by looking at more than one case, or that there are no benefits from looking for variation across a small population. But my view is that while the study of individual events can help sensitize us to concepts and ideas that make the world legible, they cannot identify a precise constellation of variables that has a deterministic relationship with an outcome.³ Does that make me a historian or a political scientist? In a way, this question does not matter much for me since I teach at a wonderful policy school, where I can focus on whatever research I think is the most meaningful. But more seriously, we should worry less about whether a publication is a work of political science or history, and focus more on whether the research is rigorous and its methodology is based on serious epistemological priors. Political scientists should not wave their hands and justify a poor case study as "political science." And historians who want to explain a past historical event should not pretend they are not making an argument—or bury it too deeply.

Miller writes that Khrushchev was "neither hawk nor dove, simply a cynical politician." My book could have spent more time addressing this question of "factions." It is an important question because outside observers (as well as participants) so often see evidence of coordinated behavior or groups who are united by ideological cohesion. Certainly, the Party is "clumpy," especially at lower levels, but more scholarship is needed to delineate why the deck is so stacked against factions in the Party center. My forthcoming book on Xi Zhongxun will return to these themes as well.

Miller raises one other point I find very interesting: Was deeper institutionalization ever actually possible in a Marxist-Leninist political context? To return to a theme from earlier in my response, one thing that made the post-Stalin and post-Mao transitions so interesting is that there were multiple driving forces at the same time. Certainly, there were very good reasons for why strongman rule in both countries won and persisted. But many in the elite still did not want that to happen. Even now, some princelings and historians in China rue that former leader Hua Guofeng did not secure his status as successor, which, given his consensus-oriented style, might have put China on a very different path.

Scholars of the Soviet Union and China have debated such cases of "possibility-hood" for decades.⁴ What if Nikolai Bukharin became leader, and not Stalin? Was the collapse of the Soviet Union about Mikhail Gorbachev's personal failings or structural causes? Naturally, these questions are too big to answer in a short

³ Joseph Torigian, "A New Case for the Study of Individual Events in Political Science," *Global Studies Quarterly* 1:4 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksab035>.

⁴ Howard W. French, "China's Foreclosed Possibilities," *New York Review of Books*, 2 November 2023.

response like this, but for now I will say this: counterfactuals are a useful heuristic, but we probably still do not know enough about China after Mao to try to answer such grand questions yet. And precisely because so many countervailing structures existed at once, we will still be debating the answer even after the archives finally open. (Coincidentally, as I am writing these words I am preparing to teach on the origins of World War I). But Miller is certainly right to note that in a Leninist system the raw material for an ambitious leader to work with is quite extensive.

Brian Taylor is basically persuaded by my book, but I thank him for raising some important questions. As I read his remarks about my chapter on Lavrentiy Beria, I found myself remembering how much I had to cut from that chapter on the plotting for reasons of space and relevance (interested parties can read my dissertation).⁵ I had broken down the various pieces of evidence and suggested which accounts were the most persuasive. Several pages discussed Georgy Malenkov alone. I cut this material in the book because, even though I could not resolve certain questions decisively, none of the *possible* answers, at least based on this collection of problematic evidence, challenged the basic theoretical point I was trying to make. In a way, this sheer confusion supported the core argument: that Soviet leaders had little clue about what others thought, which allowed Khrushchev to take the initiative in a way that made the idea of a “selectorate” (5) meaningless. I do feel like this evidence should be published and debated at some point. Unfortunately, an author will sometimes need to master a set of material that does not end up in the final publication but that nonetheless shapes that scholar’s broader conclusions.

Taylor suggests that “some of the statements made by [Vyacheslav] Molotov and [Lazar] Kaganovich that downplayed their policy differences with Khrushchev...sound self-justificatory.” Taylor makes a very significant point that anyone studying authoritarian regimes should remember: just because something is in the archives does not make it true, especially when people are fighting for their political and physical lives. In fact, many of the persistent (and wrong) versions of Soviet and Chinese historiography are artifacts of overly credulous analysis. That said, I included their remarks for a few reasons. First, I use other evidence from before the showdown that suggests policy differences were limited, and the remarks by Molotov and Kaganovich fit that evidence quite well as a good explanation. Second, when Molotov and Kaganovich made their points, neither Khrushchev nor his supporters were able to meaningfully counter them. Even Presidium member Anastas Mikoyan (lame) admitted that the “anti-party group” did not really have a platform. It is certainly the case that most members of the Group had little in common with one another. And finally, to take a step back, it’s striking that, at the decisive 1957 plenum, they were hardly debating policy at all, even denying the existence of fundamental differences—clear evidence in support of the “authority” model.

When Taylor raises the question of whether the order to arrest Beria was a “legitimate one,” he suggests that “this is a matter of interpretation with no clear correct answer.” That is exactly the point I was trying to make. I would also note that Khrushchev and his allies themselves believed that it was impossible to struggle against Beria with “party means,” and some members of the military high command were reluctant to execute the mission.

I discussed the case of Minister of Defense Georgy Zhukov in my dissertation, and I am turning most of the findings from that chapter into a new project. My basic conclusion about Zhukov fits with the broader claims of my book: when the Party is united, no military leader could hope to represent a real threat (10). Zhukov was a member of the military, but he was still primarily a Party man.

I have two brief comments on whether I sit in the Robert Conquest school, where politics are “a continual struggle for power.” While I recognize the validity in Taylor’s statement, I have two very small qualms. First, I

⁵ Joseph Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles and the Fate of Three Revolutions,” PhD diss. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016).

do not believe everyone is constantly fighting for power. Hua Guofeng did not: he put the Party's interests first. Khrushchev could have tried harder to come out on top in 1964.⁶ And second, “struggles” happen most of the time in Leninist regimes when the top leader goes after a hapless and loyal deputy—deputies are not constantly scheming to seize power. And when deputies do go after the top leader, it is because they have no other option. And most of the time, even when they face political annihilation, they do not even try.

With regard to Taylor's final point, he is right that Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith allow that militaries are part of the selectorate—often an important part. But for Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, they are just that: decisive members of the selectorate.⁷ Their research paints in such broad brushstrokes that their work does not do justice to the intricacies of civil-military relations that I describe on pages 8–10 of my book. There is no specific Leninist context—it is just the size of the selectorate and who is in it. Furthermore, I also cite Samuel Huntington as a scholar who believes in total civilian control in Leninist regimes (in fact, I cite him before Bueno de Mesquita and Smith on page 5).⁸ I would also note that my other “foils” include the historiographies of these eras of Soviet and Chinese history, as well as political scientists who drew upon this supposed era of collective leadership to facilitate their theorizing.

Again, I thank the reviewers. Their comments are precisely the kind of thoughtful reactions that make writing a book meaningful.

⁶ Joseph Torigian, “You Don't Know Khrushchev Well: The Ouster of the Soviet Leader as a Challenge to Recent Scholarship on Authoritarian Politics,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 24:1 (2022): 78–115.

⁷ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

⁸ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).