

Russia, China, and Food Geopolitics



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“Food should not be used as an instrument for political and economic pressure”

(1996 World Food Conference)

Rationale

- Modern parallels in 20th and 21st century:
 - Socialism, collectivization, famine, more recent economic liberalization
 - Similar political systems, similar rhetorical positions on questions of (international) governance
- Geopolitical relevance
- In structural terms, the two face extremely different conditions

Tools of Foreign Policy

- Geo-economics (Luttwak 1990)
“the logic of warfare in the grammar of commerce”
- Scarce Commodities (Wallensteen 1976)
 - Scarcity
 - Supply Concentration
 - Demand Dispersion
 - Action Independence

= *‘Structural possibility’ of using commodity as political tool*

Cold War Experiences

- 1980 US Grain Embargo
 - US President Carter to Congress: will decrease Soviet meat consumption by 20%
 - Vice President Mondale, "...will undermine the USSR's objective of supplying high-protein meat to the Soviet people."
- 1950-1969: US imposes total trade embargo against China
 - China attempts to approach international grain market in 1961
 - As creditor, Soviet Union imposes equivalent of embargo
 - "...only underdeveloped country not receiving economic aid from any source." (Hoeffding, 1980)

Parallels

- FAO definition of food security is individual-centric
- In Russia and China, food security is state-centric
 - Defensive autarky
 - “自给自足” “自力更生”
 - “Продовольственная независимость”
 - Securitized lens
 - China’s National Security Strategy 2015
 - Russia’s National Security Strategy 2009, 2015
 - Very weak organized independent civil society

Liberalization Experiences

- China
 - Gradualist economic reform and growth
 - Poverty reduction, avg. per capita consumption increases
 - WTO accession in 2001 (15.2% avg. agricultural tariff)
 - “Grains” (corn, wheat, rice) protected with TRQs
- Russia
 - Shock therapy and economic decline
 - Loss of food independence / sovereignty
 - 1999-2000 Food donations from US, EU more than all their food aid to Africa

Food Security in Russia

- Re-emergence of state in agriculture under Putin
- Food Security Doctrine 2010
 - Self-sufficiency targets of 80%-95% in food product categories
 - *'Food security of the Russian Federation is the state of the country's economy that ensures food independence of the Russian Federation'*
 - Accelerated import substitution policies
- Economic nationalism
 - *"In the next four to five years we must fully ensure our independence in all major types of food production, and Russia must then become the world's largest producer of food. This will open up huge new opportunities for us"* - Putin, Federal Assembly Address 2012

Russian Food ‘Diplomacy’

Russia *“can effectively ease world food shortages and contribute to global food security”* – Medvedev, 2009

- Offensive power projection
 - Grain exports
 - 2009 floated idea of Black Sea grain pool
- Punitive tool
 - Since 2000s, “arbitrary” and “inconsistent” application of phytosanitary requirements
 - 2014 agricultural embargo against Western countries
 - 2015 agricultural “retaliation” against Turkey

Russian Food Power

Russia can gain back status of “*agricultural superpower*”
– Minister of Agriculture, 2015

- Increase in food power?
 - Greater supply concentration in world wheat markets
 - Export-import ratio from 12-14% in 1990s, now up to 40%
- Impact of Russia’s counter-sanctions
 - Russia was second-largest destination of agricultural products for EU
 - Dairy (-10%), Vegetable and Fruits (-12%) after first year
 - March 2016 dairy farmers’ protest in Brussels

Food Security in China

“Ensuring national food (grain) security is an eternal issue for us.”

- Xi Jinping, 2013

- “Grain” security highlighted since 1990s
 - 1996 White Paper “China’s Food (Grain) Problem”
 - 95% self-sufficiency target in grain established
- Since 2003, annual No. 1 Policy Document of CCP has focused on rural issues and agriculture
- National Security Strategy 2015
- Policy shifts

Chinese Food ‘Diplomacy’

- Defensive
 - Exhibits sensitivity to criticism and ‘China threat’
 - 1996 White Paper
 - *“what the international community called the ‘China food threat’ is groundless”*
 - Import Diversification Strategy
- Medium Long Term Framework Plan for National Food Security (2008-2020)
 - *‘Strengthening the intergovernmental cooperation, and establishing with certain important grain- producing countries, long-term and stable agricultural liang you [grain and edible oils] partnerships’*

Chinese Food 'Diplomacy'

- Reaching Outwards
 - 'Farm diplomacy' (CPC News)
- Agricultural 'Belt and Road' (May 2017)

共同推进“一带一路”建设农业合作的愿景与行动

中华人民共和国农业部 中华人民共和国国家发展改革委员会中华人民共和国商务部 中华人民共和国外交部

(2017年5月)

- Geo-economics 'with Chinese characteristics'
logic of commerce, in the grammar of diplomacy

Overall

- Both Russian and Chinese governments actively reducing vulnerabilities, while building political-trade networks to diversify their dependencies
- However, very different behavior at international level in relation to weaponization of food / use of food power
- May be connected to:
 - Structural vulnerabilities in relation to (agricultural) resources
 - Different geopolitical environment
 - Different government priorities / strategic culture
- But ultimately these are political questions
- Entry points for use of data on their actual relative market power