

# The Authoritarian Challenge

China, Russia and the Threat  
to the Liberal International Order

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Japan-U.S. Program



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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	6
Chapter 1: Origins.....	10
The Rise (or Return) of the Authoritarian Capitalists .....	10
China .....	12
Russia.....	18
Chapter 2: Drivers.....	30
Resentment.....	31
Ambition .....	35
Insecurity.....	41
Chapter 3: Strategies.....	48
1. Exploit the Economic Openness of the West .....	48
2. Defend against Penetration and Subversion.....	50
3. Deter Intervention .....	53
4. Reshape the Periphery.....	56
5. Prevent Effective Counterbalancing .....	59
6. Build an Alternative, Illiberal Order .....	65
Conclusion .....	70
Contrasts.....	70
Implications.....	72



# Introduction

# Introduction

Over the course of the past decade, numerous observers have heralded the return of what has variously been described as “geopolitics,” “great power politics,” “power politics,” or simply “history.” As evidence of this trend, analysts point to Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia, followed closely by the intensification of China’s efforts to assert its claims in the East and South China Seas, and then, by Moscow’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its ongoing intervention in eastern Ukraine. Both in Europe and in Asia, revisionist powers appear to be using traditional means—coercion and armed force—to achieve traditional ends—the seizure of territory and the readjustment of international boundaries. The post-Cold War dream of a peaceful world, filled with liberal, law-abiding states working together to solve common global problems has been revealed as an illusion; the “end of history” is at an end.<sup>1</sup>

This view of recent developments is not so much wrong as incomplete and, in certain respects, misleading. The first and most obvious point to make is that geopolitics—the maneuvering for power, influence, and position among nations—never went away and hence cannot truly be said to have “returned.” To take only the most obvious example, the United States and China have been engaged in what the late Singapore leader Lee Kuan Yew labeled a “contest for supremacy” in East Asia since at least the mid-1990s.<sup>2</sup> Reports of the death of power politics, and of its resurrection, have been greatly exaggerated.

The notion that the world is somehow headed “back to the future” also risks distortion on several counts. As recent events make plain, both the means deployed in today’s great power rivalries and the ends being sought differ in important respects from those of earlier eras. Neither Russia nor China is relying solely on familiar military or diplomatic tools and neither is engaged simply in old-fashioned, nineteenth-century-style “gunboat diplomacy” or crude, cross-border land grabs. Both seek to shape the perceptions and behavior of domestic as well as foreign audiences, and each has deployed the full array of instruments of modern state power, including political, legal, information, and economic “warfare,” in order to achieve its aims. Nor are those objectives limited to the acquisition of resources or territory or prestige, as important as each may be. Moscow and Beijing both seek to weaken, if not yet to overthrow, prevailing rules and existing international institutions and, at least within the areas over which each hopes to exert a preponderant influence, to put new ones in their place.

A final and related point is central to the argument of this essay: casting what is happening in Europe and Asia as a return to traditional great power politics risks downplaying or ignoring

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<sup>1</sup> Among the most articulate and thoughtful statements of these views are Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Knopf, 2008) and Walter Russell Meade, “The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3 (May/June 2014): 69–79. For an insightful account of the likely future shape of geopolitical rivalry see Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the 21st Century and the Future of American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> See Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).



one of the most important distinguishing features of the current situation. Today's Russian and Chinese rulers preside over illiberal, undemocratic political systems and they are motivated not merely by calculations of material interest and advantage but by less tangible considerations of ideology and belief. Unlike their Cold War forebears, neither group sees itself as the standard-bearer for a transnational creed that it seeks to spread to every corner of the earth. To the contrary, eager to rally domestic support, bolster legitimacy, and secure their grip on political power, both regimes have crafted nationalist narratives that highlight the uniqueness, superior virtue, historical grievances, and glorious destiny of their respective peoples. Notwithstanding their efforts in this regard, both regimes believe themselves to be threatened, perhaps mortally, by the crusading ideological evangelism of the Western liberal democratic powers, led by the United States, and by certain key features of the order that those powers put into place at the end of the Second World War. It is this perceived threat, and the response of the authoritarian powers to it, that drives their growing challenge to the contemporary international system.



# Chapter 1

## Origins

# Chapter 1: Origins

## *The Rise (or Return) of the Authoritarian Capitalists*

Today's Russian and Chinese regimes differ in many details, but they share certain essential features. In terms of politics, both are authoritarian systems in which decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of a small ruling elite, unchecked by free elections, autonomous legislatures, or independent judiciaries. Neither provides protections for civil liberties or basic human rights and, to the contrary, both impose strict controls on speech, the press, political opposition, civil society, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>3</sup> To justify their harsh rule, both deploy nationalist ideologies emphasizing the need for military strength and eternal vigilance against the supposed dangers of foreign aggression and domestic subversion. In recent years, both have been ruled by vigorous, visible, and evidently popular "maximum leaders" of the sort historically associated with fascism.

As regards the workings of their economies, both Russia and China deploy a form of state capitalism, a mix of private and public ownership of the means of production, albeit one in which the dividing line between the two spheres is often blurred beyond recognition. In part as a result, both have experienced extremely high levels of corruption.<sup>4</sup> In both systems, resources are allocated largely, though not exclusively, by the workings of the market; the state still formulates plans and intervenes to support "national champions," protect sectors deemed "strategic," and shape the overall evolution of the economy, but prices for most goods and services are determined by the forces of supply and demand. Last, but for our purposes most important, both nations are now deeply integrated into the global economic system, with substantial inward and outward flows of goods, services, and capital.

This distinctive combination of economic and political characteristics has given rise to a regime type that can best be described as "nationalist authoritarian capitalism." As historian Azar Gat points out, authoritarian capitalist regimes are not new and, in fact, earlier variants (most notably Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan) played a leading role in world politics prior to 1945.<sup>5</sup> Today's nationalist authoritarian capitalist great powers, however, are lineal descendants of the Communist totalitarian behemoths of the twentieth century or, more precisely, they are the outgrowth of mutations that those regimes experienced under the stress of an increasingly challenging international environment during the latter stages of the Cold War. After seeming at first to follow divergent paths during the 1990s, since the turn of the century both Moscow and Beijing have converged on a similar set of arrangements that have thus far enabled them

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<sup>3</sup> See the annual "Freedom in the World" country assessments published by the Washington-based NGO Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017>.

<sup>4</sup> In 2016, Transparency International ranked Russia 131 and China 79 out of 176 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index, <https://www.transparency.org/country/>.

<sup>5</sup> Azar Gat, "The Return of Authoritarian Capitalists," *New York Times*, June 14, 2007; and *Victorious and Vulnerable: Why Democracy Won in the 20th Century and How It Is Still Imperiled* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).

to enjoy many of the advantages of market-based, globally-integrated economies, while at the same time retaining tight, repressive control over their respective societies.<sup>6</sup>

This is not, to say the least, how things were supposed to turn out. The point of Francis Fukuyama's famous article proclaiming "the end of history" was that, with the close of the Cold War, the centuries-old struggle among alternative forms of social and economic organization would also come to an end. Having proven its superior evolutionary fitness by out-fighting, out-producing, and out-lasting a succession of monarchies, autocracies, and fascist and communist dictatorships, liberal democracy would finally emerge unchallenged as the dominant political lifeform on the planet.<sup>7</sup> In the last quarter century, however, illiberal, undemocratic regimes have not become extinct; instead they have adapted and evolved, learning to survive and even to thrive in the open global system that the democracies created for themselves in the wake of World War II. From weak and vulnerable fledglings, the nationalist capitalist authoritarians have grown in strength and confidence to the point where they now pose a deadly threat to the continued existence of that system.

The broad outlines of this story are familiar: as of the 1970s, both China and the Soviet Union were ruled by Marxist-Leninist party-states that aspired to control virtually every aspect of national economic, social, and political life. Divided by a common ideology, each proclaimed itself to be the leader of the world revolutionary Communist movement. As a matter of principle (and a result of the containment policies pursued by the United States and its liberal democratic allies) both were largely cut off from the increasingly integrated, dynamic, and prosperous Western economic system.

Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the leaders of both China and the Soviet Union came to see themselves as confronting foreign and domestic problems of growing complexity and severity. At home, economic growth had slowed to a crawl following decades of inefficient and wasteful central planning that was made worse, in China's case, by a protracted interval of bloody political turmoil and virtual civil war. Internationally, Beijing felt threatened by the mounting military might and hostility of the Soviet Union, while the Soviets, for their part, strained to keep pace with the increasing technological sophistication of Western weaponry and commercial products. Faced with these challenges, the Chinese leadership, followed in a few years by their Soviet counterparts, began what soon became far-reaching programs of reform. It is the consequences of these reform programs, intended and otherwise, that provide the foundations for today's authoritarian capitalist regimes.

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<sup>6</sup> Such regimes have sometimes been described as "open authoritarian," but they are in fact not truly open either economically or politically. See Naazneen H. Barma, Ely Ratner, and Regine A. Spector, "Open Authoritarian Regimes: Surviving and Thriving in the Liberal International Order," *Democracy and Society* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 8–11.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18.

## China

With the exception of one major disruption, China's trajectory from past to present has been comparatively straight and with a steep upward slope. At the end of 1978, Deng Xiaoping, who had returned from political exile after the death of Chairman Mao two years earlier, launched China on the path toward becoming a market-based economy. Deng's stated goal was to achieve the "Four Modernizations," transforming agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense by instituting a comprehensive program of "reform and opening up."<sup>8</sup> Wary of the possible disruptive effects of rapid change, Deng proceeded cautiously at first and in piecemeal fashion, but his initiatives soon generated tangible results and quickly gathered momentum and support. The shift away from massive, unproductive collective farms to more efficient, privately-owned agricultural plots freed millions of workers and it was followed by the creation of openings for entrepreneurship and the emergence of small businesses in the nation's cities. Gradually at first, and then with increasing speed, the state reduced its role in regulating prices, setting production targets and owning and managing all the means of production. After decades of self-imposed isolation and virtual autarky, China opened its doors to foreign capital and technology, combining these with its own vast supply of low-cost labor to transform itself into a major global platform for manufacturing and exports.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1980s, as China's economy was beginning to boom, there was serious discussion of the need for a "Fifth Modernization," one that would transform and democratize the nation's political system. In addition to calls for reform from students and intellectuals, some high-ranking officials within the Chinese Communist Party were sympathetic to the view that change was not only desirable but positively necessary in order to sustain growth and material progress. Indeed, according to Minxin Pei, by the mid-1980s, "the sense that China's economic reform could not move forward without complementary political reform was widely shared by the ruling elites." As one member of the Politburo Standing Committee put it in April 1986, "Economic reform cannot make progress without political and cultural reforms . . . We should not cede the ideas of freedom, democracy and human rights to capitalism."<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding such sentiments, influential figures within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), not least of whom was Deng himself, remained fundamentally opposed to any suggestion that the Party should loosen its grip, let alone permit genuine political competition. Even

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<sup>8</sup> For an illuminating account of Deng's return and opening moves see Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 21–32, 117–26, 169–80, 243–60, 327–38.

<sup>9</sup> For accounts of the reform process see, among many others, Barry Naughton, *Growing out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978–1993* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Gregory Chow, *China's Economic Transformation* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2007); Minxin Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Minxin Pei, *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 50. A note about names: in what follows I have used the Chinese order for the names of well-known public figures (family name first, e.g. Deng Xiaoping). The names of Chinese scholars are presented in the order in which they appear in the authors' own work. Most of those living and working in the West prefer to put their family name second (e.g. Zheng Wang and Minxin Pei) while those living and working in China follow the opposite pattern (e.g. Yan Xuetong).

before the Tiananmen Square “incident” of June 1989, in which the authorities used indiscriminate force to disperse a large crowd of pro-democracy demonstrators, some leading advocates of greater openness had been removed from the top ranks of the Party.<sup>11</sup> Afterward, in addition to arresting thousands of dissidents and driving many others into exile, the regime proceeded to purge itself of all those who had expressed support for liberalization or were suspected of harboring “bourgeois” views.<sup>12</sup>

Tiananmen marked a decisive turn in China’s development and set the country on the course that it has followed ever since. Despite efforts by some hardliners to slow or reverse Deng’s economic policies (which, with some justification, they blamed for the recent turmoil), the CCP leadership ultimately decided to resume and even to further accelerate the process of “reform and opening up.” On the political side of the equation, meanwhile, the effects were equally significant and far-reaching. While, there may have been real prospects in the 1980s for meaningful reform, after Tiananmen that possibility was effectively eliminated.

Instead of pursuing liberalization, an approach that might have eased the contradictions between a rigid political system and an increasingly diverse and dynamic society by strengthening the rule of law and permitting expanded political participation and a greater role for civil society, in the aftermath of Tiananmen the CCP regime instead opted to pursue a policy of “illiberal adaptation.”<sup>13</sup> In addition to the promise of improvements in individual welfare from continued economic growth, the Party deployed an array of policies and programs designed to squelch dissent and encourage support, or at least acquiescence, from the general population. Included among these were the selective repression of key “troublemakers” through both legal and extra-judicial means; the active recruitment and cooptation into the Party of people from potentially influential societal groups, especially intellectuals and business executives; experimentation with new techniques for gathering data about public opinion, priorities, and concerns; the continuous expansion and improvement of procedures for controlling information and monitoring communications; and the development, refinement, and promulgation of materials aimed at instructing elites and indoctrinating the masses.<sup>14</sup>

Because of its implications for China’s foreign and military policies, the last element in this portfolio deserves particular attention. Tiananmen has been described as a “near-death experience” for the Chinese Communist Party, a trauma whose impact was heightened by the nearly simultaneous collapse of Soviet Communism.<sup>15</sup> Recognizing that “Marxism-Leninism, Mao

<sup>11</sup> Included among these was Hu Yaobang, whom Deng removed from his post as general secretary of the Party in 1987. Hu’s subsequent death, in April 1989, provided the occasion for the initial student gatherings in Tiananmen Square.

<sup>12</sup> Among those purged was Hu’s replacement, Zhao Ziyang. See Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21–43.

<sup>13</sup> Pei, *China’s Trapped Transition*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent overview of many of these techniques as they have evolved over the decades since Tiananmen, see Bruce J. Dickson, *The Dictator’s Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party’s Strategy for Survival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Minxin Pei, “Beijing’s Social Contract is Starting to Fray,” *YaleGlobal Online*, June 3, 2004, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/beijings-social-contract-starting-fray>.

Zedong Thought” no longer had the power to evoke loyalty and sacrifice from the people, and especially from the young, the CCP leadership set about to create a new belief system that would be adequate to the task. This was perceived to be a matter of the utmost importance, one on which the very survival of the Party might well depend.<sup>16</sup>

First unveiled in 1991, the “Patriotic Education Campaign” became the vessel into which this fresh ideational content was poured and the delivery vehicle with which it has subsequently been spread to every corner of the land. The key ingredient of the new ideology is nationalism, “the one bedrock of political belief shared by most Chinese people in spite of the rapid decay of Communist official ideology.”<sup>17</sup> But this is state-constructed nationalism of a very particular sort. Through educational materials, books, films, television programs, museum exhibits, and monuments, the Patriotic Education Campaign stresses the “century of national humiliation,” the period between the Opium Wars of the 1840s and the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, during which China was invaded, occupied, exploited, and abused by ruthless and unscrupulous foreign powers.<sup>18</sup>

The narrative of national humiliation serves several purposes. First, as William Callahan notes, it enhances “the ideological, regime, and cultural security of the CCP” by shifting “the focus of youthful energies away from domestic issues back to foreign problems.” More precisely, it directs popular attention and resentments “toward the foreigner as an enemy, as an External Other.”<sup>19</sup> Patriotic education also binds the people to the Party by recasting the CCP, not so much as the leader of the proletarian revolution but rather as the savior of the nation and the defender of its honor. “Patriotism rather than Communism,” writes Suisheng Zhao, has thus become “the basis of the CCP’s . . . legitimacy.”<sup>20</sup> Finally, the theme of national humiliation has proven to be a renewable resource, one that can be refreshed and redeployed to mobilize popular support in a seemingly limitless variety of situations. The list of past affronts and assaults on national unity and dignity is long, and even if more familiar ones are eventually erased, others are available to take their place.<sup>21</sup> Nor is this simply a matter of correcting the verdict of history. As Callahan explains, “Starting in the 1990s, the national-humiliation theme was used . . . to reinforce claims on islands (e.g., Hong Kong and the Spratleys) as ‘naturally Chinese.’ Since China lost face by losing territory to Western powers and Japan before 1945, now it must make sure not to lose face again by losing territory to its Southeast Asian neighbors.”<sup>22</sup> In sum,

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<sup>16</sup> Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 102.

<sup>17</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 1 (1998): 289.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to Wang and Zhao, see Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> William A. Callahan, “History, Identity, and Security: Producing and Consuming Nationalism in China,” *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2006): 186.

<sup>20</sup> Zhao, “A State-Led Nationalism,” 297.

<sup>21</sup> Beijing only began to question Japan’s control of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the 1970s and has only done so in an active way since 2010. Recently, some commentators have begun to suggest for the first time that China has a rightful claim to Okinawa.

<sup>22</sup> William A. Callahan, “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism,” *Alternatives* 29, no. 2 (March 2004): 212.



the threat of humiliation remains very much alive, and for as long as it does, the Party must continue to play its leading role.

By the end of the 1990s, China had essentially completed the transition from a communist totalitarian system still in the grips of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, to an authoritarian capitalist regime with a newly minted nationalist ideology. These basic features have persisted down to the present, with some notable adjustments in the economic, political, and ideological spheres. In each, the trend since the turn of the century has been toward tightening rather than loosening, and toward greater control at home and a more assertive posture abroad, rather than the progressive relaxation and peaceful integration that had been widely expected in the West.

Throughout the 1990s, China was generally seen to be moving steadily toward greater reliance on market forces. The modification of laws and regulations during this period was no doubt due in part to Beijing's desire to gain admittance to the World Trade Organization (WTO), but it also evidently reflected the beliefs and preferences of Deng's handpicked successor, Jiang Zemin, and his deputy, Premier Zhu Rongji. This liberalizing trend continued for two years after China's accession to the WTO, but it slowed markedly with the rise to power of a new generation of Party leaders, led by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. As described in an analysis prepared by the office of the U.S. Trade Representative, from 2003 onward, "while the Chinese government continued to take steps to implement China's outstanding WTO commitments, it generally did not pursue economic reforms as aggressively as before." Instead, Beijing "increasingly emphasized the state's role in the economy," placing relatively less reliance on market forces and more on "economic planners and state-owned enterprises [SOEs]." <sup>23</sup> While the number of SOEs continued to fall, instead of being privatized, many smaller entities were merged into new conglomerates. <sup>24</sup> The state sector also received a sizeable boost in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 global financial crisis when SOEs became the favored recipients of the government's massive stimulus package. <sup>25</sup> Although their share has diminished since the 1990s, SOEs still account for an estimated 25–30 percent of national output and continue to play a central role in advancing the regime's political goals, including "supporting social stability and crisis response in China, and advancing economic initiatives abroad." <sup>26</sup>

The first years of Hu's regime also saw the creation of new bureaucratic mechanisms and the initiation of new targeted industrial policies intended to encourage "indigenous innovation" and nurture sectors regarded as essential for the further development of China's economic and military power. <sup>27</sup> These policies have grown more elaborate and ambitious over time and now

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Trade Representative, *2015 Report to Congress on China's WTO Compliance* (Washington: Executive Office of the President, 2015), 3.

<sup>24</sup> See Wendy Leutert, "Challenges Ahead in China's Reform of State-Owned Enterprises," *Asia Policy*, no. 21 (January 2016): 88–89; Gabriel Wildau, "China's State-Owned Zombie Economy," *Financial Times*, February 29, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, *State Capitalism: How the Return of Statism Is Transforming the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 100–1.

<sup>26</sup> Leutert, "Challenges Ahead," 86.

<sup>27</sup> For an account of what is described as "the surge of national industrial policy programs in China after 2004," see Sebastian Heilmann and Lea Shin, "The Rise of Industrial Policy in China, 1978–2012," (Cambridge MA:

include programs aimed at making Chinese firms the world leaders in semiconductors, information technology, and robotics, among other sectors.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the political sphere, starting with the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, followed by the events of the “Arab Spring” in 2011, the Chinese authorities have increased the already considerable resources they devote to repression, surveillance, and ideological indoctrination.<sup>29</sup> These tendencies, already visible during the waning years of Hu Jintao’s administration, have become even more marked since the elevation of Xi Jinping to the top positions in the party-state apparatus at the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013; indeed, they have become the distinguishing features of his rule.

Effectively dispensing with the fiction that China is governed by a collective leadership of fraternal Party comrades, Xi has concentrated virtually all decision-making power into his own hands.<sup>30</sup> While officially rejecting the notion of a “cult of personality,” he has nevertheless become a far more visible, dynamic, and evidently popular leader than China has had in decades.<sup>31</sup> Using his newfound authority to move quickly and decisively, within months of taking office, Xi unleashed a series of initiatives intended to reinforce the legitimacy of the CCP by cracking down on official corruption and boosting China’s sagging economic growth rate. He also took steps to strengthen the regime’s stranglehold on political power by intensifying repression of dissidents, restricting the activities of NGOs, and further tightening control over the Internet.<sup>32</sup> Among other measures, the regime drafted new counterespionage and counterterrorism laws that “equate[d] peaceful dissent with terrorism, strengthen[ed] control over civil society groups that receive foreign funding, and appear[ed] to target specific ethnic minority groups.”<sup>33</sup> At Xi’s direction, Beijing unleashed what the group Human Rights Watch

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Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2013), 1. Regarding indigenous innovation, see James McGregor, “China’s Drive for ‘Indigenous Innovation’: A Web of Industrial Policies,” (Washington DC: U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> See Executive Office of the President, President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, “Report to the President: Ensuring Long-Term U.S. Leadership in Semiconductors” (January 2017); Jost Wübbeke, et al., “Made in China 2025: The Making of a High-Tech Superpower and Consequences for Industrial Countries,” Mercator Institute Papers on China, no. 2 (December 2016); U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Preventing Deglobalization: An Economic and Security Argument for Free Trade and Investment in ICT” (September 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Dickson, *Dictator’s Dilemma*, 39–40.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to putting himself in charge of the existing “leading small groups” that address the most important policy issues, Xi created several new ones. He also oversaw the creation of a National Security Commission that David Lampton describes as making Xi “almost the solo coordinator of Chinese foreign and national security policy.” See Alice Miller, “More Already on the Central Committee’s Leading Small Groups,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 44 (Summer 2014); Andrew Nathan, “China in 2016,” *ChinaFile*, December 23, 2015, <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/china-2016>. David Lampton, “Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: Policy Coordination and National Power,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 95 (2015): 770.

<sup>31</sup> See “Xi Jinping: A Cult of Personality?” *ChinaFile*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/xi-jinping-cult-personality>.

<sup>32</sup> For background, see Nadège Rolland, “China’s National Power: A Colossus with Iron or Clay Feet?” in *Foundations of National Power in the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Ashley Tellis (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016), 36–43. For an overview of many of Xi’s initiatives, see Christopher K. Johnson, *Decoding China’s Emerging “Great Power” Strategy in Asia* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2014).

<sup>33</sup> “China: Political Repression at a High Mark,” *Human Rights Watch*, January 29, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/29/china-political-repression-high-mark>.

has described as “an extraordinary assault on human rights and their defenders with a ferocity unseen in recent years.”<sup>34</sup>

In addition to all these more concrete measures, Xi sought to stiffen ideological discipline in the CCP and the nation as a whole. Soon after taking office, he approved the circulation to Party officials at all levels of a “Communique on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere.” This document spelled out seven “noteworthy problems” that demanded special vigilance and redoubled attention. Included among these “perils” were efforts by foreign and domestic enemies to promote subversive ideas such as “Western constitutional democracy,” “universal values,” “civil society,” “neoliberalism,” “the West’s idea of journalism,” and “historical nihilism,” while calling into question “Reform and Opening and the socialist nature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>35</sup> This directive provided the basis for a “rectification campaign” aimed at improving the performance of CCP members, as well as a subsequent move to strengthen the “Patriotic Education” program and expand it to include Chinese students studying abroad.<sup>36</sup>

Xi also put his own distinctive mark on official ideology by declaring his intention to achieve the “China Dream,” defined as “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”<sup>37</sup> These slogans grow directly out of the discourse of humiliation and evoke its now-familiar themes. China requires rejuvenation and renewal because of the injustices and suffering inflicted on it by foreign powers; what it seeks is not merely to rise, but to be restored to its rightful place in the world.<sup>38</sup> But Xi’s rhetoric also gives voice to a more assertive, self-confident, and forward-looking brand of Chinese nationalism. Under his guidance, instead of continuing to follow Deng Xiaoping’s cautious 1991 dictum that the nation should “hide its capabilities and bide its time,” China will now “strive for achievement.”<sup>39</sup> By 2049, the nation’s 100th anniversary, Xi has promised that the China Dream will “inevitably” be achieved, although precisely what this would mean remains unclear.

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2015: China,” <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>.

<sup>35</sup> “Communique on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere,” April 22, 2013. See “Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation,” *ChinaFile*, November 8, 2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

<sup>36</sup> See Brendan Forde, “China’s ‘Mass Line’ Campaign,” *Diplomat*, September 9, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/09/chinas-mass-line-campaign-2/>; Chris Buckley, “China Says Its Students, Even Those Abroad, Need More ‘Patriotic Education,’” *New York Times*, February 10, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> On the meaning of Xi’s “China Dream,” see Ming Wan, “Xi Jinping’s ‘China Dream’: Same Bed Different Dreams?” *Asan Forum*, August 2, 2013, <http://www.theasanforum.org/xi-jinpings-china-dream-same-bed-different-dreams/>; Camilla T. N. Sorensen, “The Significance of Xi Jinping’s ‘China Dream’ for Chinese Foreign Policy,” *Journal of China International Relations* 3, no. 1 (2015): 53–73.

<sup>38</sup> Zheng Wang, “The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context,” *Journal of Chinese Politics*, no. 19 (2014): 9; William A. Callahan, “Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream,” *Politics* 35, no. 3–4 (2015): 223.

<sup>39</sup> On the significance of this phrase, see Yan Xuetong, “From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2 (2014): 153–84.

## *Russia*

In contrast to China, Russia's political and economic development over the past quarter-century has been marked by several sharp twists and turns. Despite these perturbations, however, the Russian system has also evolved from communist totalitarianism to a form of nationalist authoritarian capitalism that appears for the moment at least to be relatively stable. This story can usefully be divided into three phases.

By the early 1980s, it had become clear, even to those at the top of the Soviet hierarchy, that the system of central economic planning that had helped propel the USSR to superpower status was broken and increasingly dysfunctional. Aggregate growth rates had spiraled downwards over the course of the two preceding decades, causing living standards to stagnate and increasing the burden imposed by rising military expenditures and the mounting costs of propping up Soviet clients in Eastern Europe and the Third World.<sup>40</sup> To make matters worse, despite massive investments in research and an extensive program of industrial espionage, the Soviet Union was being left behind in the information revolution that was beginning to transform the armed forces and civilian economies of the advanced industrial democracies.<sup>41</sup>

Following the death of long-time leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1982 and the subsequent appointment and untimely demise of two geriatric successors, in 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev was elevated to the position of general secretary of the Communist Party. Gorbachev was the first Soviet leader to have come of age after the end of the Second World War and he began his rise through the Party ranks in the hopeful period that followed the death of Josef Stalin. In contrast to his predecessors, Gorbachev was quick to recognize the full scope and magnitude of the failings of the existing system but, unlike them, he was not exhausted and cynical about the prospects for meaningful reform. As historian Stephen Kotkin points out, Gorbachev was representative of a new generation of idealistic Party officials who still had faith in the possibility of building what Czech leader Alexander Dubček had called “socialism with a human face.” Gorbachev and those around him “believed the planned economy could be reformed essentially without introducing full private property or market prices. They believed relaxing censorship would increase the population’s allegiance to socialism. They believed the Communist Party could be democratized. They were mistaken.”<sup>42</sup>

When Gorbachev’s opening moves toward *perestroika*, the restructuring of the Soviet economy, were met with resistance from entrenched Party bureaucrats, he counterattacked by introducing the concept of *glasnost*, or openness. Given greater freedom to speak their minds, Gorbachev expected that his countrymen would aid the cause of reform by venting their frustration at

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<sup>40</sup> See Charles Wolf Jr., K.C. Yeh, Edmund Brunner, Jr., Aaron Gurwitz, Marilee Lawrence, *The Costs of Soviet Empire* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1983).

<sup>41</sup> See the discussion in Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America’s Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 334–39.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

inefficient managers and officials. Instead, after some initial hesitation, they began to indulge in what Karl Marx might have called “a ruthless criticism of everything existing.” Media outlets multiplied, as did expressions of dissatisfaction.<sup>43</sup> Critics challenged Marxist-Leninist ideology; the compulsory unification of various ethnic and national groups into a single, Russian-dominated state; and even the continued validity of one-party rule. According to one émigré economist, “By 1989 there was little left unattacked. The people were told that they were being governed by the party responsible for monstrous atrocities, inflicting misery on its subjects, and leading the country to ruin.”<sup>44</sup> The erosion of its legitimacy left the regime brittle and its dwindling band of defenders demoralized and uncertain. When a group of Party hard-liners and military men finally bestirred themselves to attempt a coup in the summer of 1991, it quickly failed. Within a matter of months, the Communist regime had collapsed and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics shattered into its constituent parts, of which Russia was largest.

The second stage in Russia’s evolution is demarcated by Boris Yeltsin’s two terms as the nation’s president, a tumultuous and often chaotic interval extending from 1991 to 1999. This period was marked by the emergence of a severely weakened post-Soviet state, the marketization of the Russian economy, and the start of a movement away from something resembling democracy and toward a new form of authoritarianism.

In terms of its ability to monitor and control all aspects of social, economic, and political life, the once-mighty Soviet totalitarian state had already grown weaker over the course of Brezhnev’s protracted reign, and weaker still during Gorbachev’s six years of increasingly desperate improvisation and experimentation. Following the Soviet collapse, Yeltsin had the option of sweeping away all remaining Soviet era institutions and building entirely new state structures in their place. As Michael McFaul explains, Yeltsin was presented with a “window of opportunity” in which “he could have established a harsh authoritarian state . . . or . . . moved to consolidate a democratic polity.” In the event, he did neither. Seeking to avoid what they saw as Gorbachev’s mistake of emphasizing politics at the expense of economics, Yeltsin and his team made the opposite error, deferring questions of institutional design and concentrating instead on implementing a program of radical economic reform.<sup>45</sup>

The weakness at the center of the new Russian system was offset to a degree by the passage of a new constitution in 1993, under which the executive was granted extensive powers, at least on paper.<sup>46</sup> But, in practice, the events of the early post-Soviet period left a legacy of weakness that lingered throughout the 1990s. The central authorities were unable to effectively perform the most basic tasks of a modern state: collecting taxes, regulating the circulation of money, and

<sup>43</sup> On what he describes as the “liberal takeover of the mass media,” see Pei, *From Reform to Revolution*, 179–204.

<sup>44</sup> Vladimir Kontorovich, “The Economic Fallacy,” *National Interest*, no. 31 (Spring 1993): 41.

<sup>45</sup> Michael McFaul, “State Power, Institutional Change, and the Politics of Privatization in Russia,” *World Politics* 47 (January 1995): 225–26.

<sup>46</sup> On the period of what he calls “lame presidentialism,” see Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 147–54. The 1993 constitution created powers—including direct control of army, police, and security services and the ability to rule by decree—that Vladimir Putin would later put to use in consolidating his control over the Russian system.

even maintaining a monopoly over the use of armed force.<sup>47</sup> Regional leaders often “ignored central directives, gained de facto control over natural resources in their territories, and dictated policy in areas that were officially the realm of the central government (e.g., citizenship, tax collection, and privatization).” Army conscripts failed to report for duty in increasing numbers, military wages went unpaid and local commanders at times took matters into their own hands in prosecuting border disputes with some of Russia’s newly independent neighbors. Among the few organs of central state authority that continued to function effectively were the security services which, despite being broken up and reconstituted, retained most of their personnel as well as their intrusive powers.<sup>48</sup>

The weakening of the state was accompanied by a sudden and dramatic expansion in the role of the market and the creation of a capitalist economic system, albeit one with some unusual characteristics. Acting on the advice of Western economists, Yeltsin sought to achieve a rapid, radical transition from communism to capitalism through the administration of what came to be referred to as “shock therapy.” Starting in 1992, most Soviet-era price controls and subsidies were abandoned virtually overnight, the first steps were taken toward opening the Russian economy to foreign trade and investment, and the process of privatizing assets and dissolving the state’s long-standing ownership of the means of production was begun. Between 1993 and 1995, over 75,000 SOEs were sold off.<sup>49</sup> Having started from a base of close to zero, by the end of the decade private enterprise accounted for roughly 75 percent of Russia’s GDP and employed 80 percent of its labor force.<sup>50</sup> The Swedish economist Anders Åslund concludes that, after a few years of transition, and without significant backsliding, Russia had acquired a functioning market economy.<sup>51</sup>

As was true of Gorbachev’s efforts to reshape the Soviet system, however, the most important and long-lasting consequences of Yeltsin’s reforms may have been the ones that were unintended. The lifting of price controls triggered runaway inflation, wiping out private savings and pushing many to the brink of poverty. Factories closed, millions were put out of work, output fell, and GDP contracted year-on-year for the better part of a decade. Albeit without the massive loss of life, Russia suffered an economic setback larger and more protracted than the one caused by the First World War and the Russian Revolution.<sup>52</sup> While the great majority

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<sup>47</sup> Piotr Dutkiewicz, “Missing in Translation: Re-conceptualizing Russia’s Developmental State,” in *Russia: The Challenges of Transformation*, ed. Vladimir I. Yakunin (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 16.

<sup>48</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 188–89.

<sup>49</sup> Pawel Augustynowicz, “State-owned enterprises in Russia – The origin, importance and principles of operation,” in *Crisis Management and the Changing Role of the State*, ed. E. Voszka and G. D. Kiss (Szeged, Hungary: University of Szeged Doctoral School of Economics, 2014), 134.

<sup>50</sup> Victor Supyan, “Privatization in Russia: Preliminary Results and Socioeconomic Implications,” *Demokratizatsiya*, no. 9 (Winter 2001): 144.

<sup>51</sup> The defining features of such a system, Åslund writes, are that “economic decisions are predominately made by free individuals and independent firms . . . No State Planning Committee tells enterprises what to produce. Nor does the state allocate goods. Prices and trade are generally free . . . Transactions are overwhelmingly monetized.” Anders Åslund, “Why Market Reform Succeeded and Democracy Failed in Russia,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 2, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Dutkiewicz, “Missing in Translation,” 14.

of ordinary people saw their prospects worsen, a clever, ruthless, and unscrupulous few were able to take advantage of the privatization process, using connections, muscle, and borrowed money to buy up state assets at a fraction of their real value and accumulating vast fortunes in the process. Inequality skyrocketed as a new class of super-wealthy “oligarchs” gained control over significant sectors of the nation’s economy and a growing share of its total wealth.<sup>53</sup>

These developments, in turn, had a major impact on Russia’s political development. Economic hardship quickly eroded support for reform and increased the popularity of ultra-nationalists and unrepentant Communists, who won election to parliament and used their position there to try to block the further implementation of Yeltsin’s plans. By 1993, the situation had devolved from constitutional crisis to virtual civil war, as Yeltsin used tanks to shell the parliament, driving out its members, forcing its dissolution, and pushing through a new constitution that greatly enhanced his nominal powers.

The emergence of the oligarchs introduced another element into Russian politics that did not bode well for the future of liberal democracy. Despite his seeming success in consolidating power, Yeltsin’s policies remained unpopular, he continued to face strong opposition from parties of the left and right and he still needed to win re-election. In 1996, fearful of defeat and in desperate need of cash, the Yeltsin administration made a deal with a handful of wealthy investors, giving them shares in a dozen large state-owned energy, mineral, and shipping companies in return for \$800 million in “loans.”<sup>54</sup> These funds were used to help finance the government deficit, preventing a relapse into hyperinflation that might have been fatal to Yeltsin’s chances for re-election. Some portion also found its way directly into his presidential campaign, where it was used to buy advertising and votes.<sup>55</sup> Newspapers and television channels owned by the oligarchs, as well as those under direct government control, provided additional assistance by offering up a steady flow of pro-Yeltsin “news” and information.<sup>56</sup>

The 1996 campaign is widely regarded as a turning point in Russia’s post-Cold War political development. In its aftermath, the country remained an electoral democracy and its politics remained competitive (in part because of the weakness of the incumbent), but the ruling party’s advantages in mobilizing resources and controlling information meant that they were becoming less competitive with the passage of time. According to the indices of political rights and civil liberties compiled by Freedom House, Russia went from being a “not free” country in 1985 to “partly free” in 1990. It retained this standing throughout the decade, but its scores peaked in the mid-1990s and declined thereafter, returning to “not free” status by 2005.<sup>57</sup> As dissident

<sup>53</sup> Between 1985 and 1994, Russia’s gini index doubled from 0.24 to 0.46. Daniel Treisman, “Inequality: The Russian Experience,” *Current History* 111, no. 747 (October 2012): 264–69.

<sup>54</sup> See Daniel Treisman, “Loans for Shares? Revisited,” *NBER Working Paper Series*, no. 15819 (Cambridge MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, March 2010).

<sup>55</sup> By one estimate, Yeltsin’s campaign spent somewhere between 30 and 150 times more than the Communists but still managed to win election with only 54 percent of the vote. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 194–95.

<sup>56</sup> John Lloyd, “The Russian Devolution,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 19, 1999.

<sup>57</sup> See the table in Young Choul Kim, “Economic Transition in China and Russia,” *European Scientific Journal* 1 (May 2015): 360.

Garry Kasparov notes, Yeltsin's actions in 1996 "undermined nearly every aspect of a democratic society and it never recovered. His successor would quickly take up Yeltsin's campaign tools of repression and corruption and apply them to everyday governance."<sup>58</sup>

Yeltsin's surprising decision to step down before the completion of his second term in 1999, his appointment of Vladimir Putin and Putin's subsequent election to the presidency in his own right in 2000 marked the start of the third phase in the development of the Russian system and its emergence as a stable, authoritarian-capitalist nationalist regime. Of the three major trends visible during the Yeltsin era, Putin reversed two and accelerated the third, strengthening the Russian state and partially undoing the process of privatization, while pushing the nation rapidly toward full-blown authoritarianism. In contrast to his predecessor, Putin also eventually abandoned any pretense of wanting to join the liberal democratic world and proceeded to craft a frankly illiberal, anti-Western, nationalist ideology to rally popular support and legitimize his regime.

In their insightful study of the intellectual and psychological foundations of his rule, Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy conclude that, among his various beliefs and identities, Putin is above all "a man of the state . . . a statist."<sup>59</sup> As a middle-ranking KGB officer, Putin had watched in dismay as the Soviet empire collapsed, followed in short order by the Soviet Union itself. He regarded the years that followed as a time of weakness, chaos, and humiliation and, like many of his conservative contemporaries, he concluded that rebuilding a strong state was essential to Russia's rehabilitation as a great power and even to its survival as a nation. Well-read in his country's history, Putin self-consciously styled himself after previous leaders, like Nicholas II's Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, who had sought to strengthen Russian institutions after periods of internal division and disunity.<sup>60</sup> As he explained in his "Millennium Message" at the end of 1999, "For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly to fight against. Quite the contrary, it is the source and guarantor of order, the initiator and main driving force of any change."<sup>61</sup>

With this end in view, over the course of the next several years Putin took a series of steps aimed at rebuilding the power of the Russian state: reducing and then eliminating the autonomy of regional governments, strengthening the legal system so that it could be used more effectively as an instrument of social and political control, improving the yield of the tax system and reigning in the power of the oligarchs.<sup>62</sup> At a meeting with a handful of Russia's wealthiest men in the summer of 2000, a few months after his inauguration, Putin laid out new "rules of the game": the oligarchs could keep their fortunes, regardless of how they had been obtained, provided that they did not seek to oppose him.<sup>63</sup> This was the first move in what would become a sustained

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<sup>58</sup> Garry Kasparov, *Winter is Coming: Why Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World Must Be Stopped* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 58.

<sup>59</sup> Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2015), 39.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 71–72.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> See Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 266–312.

<sup>63</sup> Marshall I. Goldman, "Putin and the Oligarchs," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 6 (November/December 2004): 33–44.



effort to “reverse the state-business relationship to restore the dominance of the state.”<sup>64</sup>

At the heart of this shift was a “judicious and incremental” campaign aimed at reasserting state control over the most important sectors of the Russian economy and, in particular, over the production and transportation of energy and natural resources.<sup>65</sup> At his direction, Gazprom and Rosneft, two energy giants that Yeltsin had sought to privatize, were brought back firmly under the ownership of the government. Even where companies remained nominally in private hands, Putin made sure that they were managed by his close associates, members of a new class of “crony oligarchs.” Under these arrangements, as Hill and Gaddy explain, “the juridical ownership of the core Russian companies has proven almost irrelevant,” with public and private firms alike subject to oversight and direction from the Kremlin and from Putin himself.<sup>66</sup> Given that much of Russia’s GDP is generated by the energy and resource sectors, and that these are dominated in turn by a relatively small number of companies, it is possible in this way for the state to monitor and control a significant portion of the nation’s economic activity.<sup>67</sup>

The resulting system has been variously described as “state corporatism”<sup>68</sup> and a form of “natural-resource-based capitalism with Russian characteristics.”<sup>69</sup> In addition to its dominant role in the natural resources sector, the state owns or controls companies in other industries believed to be of vital importance to national welfare and security, including “railroads, ship-building . . . aviation and space . . . nuclear power stations, and weapons design and manufacture.”<sup>70</sup> Much like in China, Russia’s “political-economic landscape . . . is now . . . dominated by big businesses close to or part of the state, especially in sectors deemed ‘strategic.’”<sup>71</sup> And, as in China, the state seeks to play a central role in guiding and directing the development of the national economy. As economist Michael Ellman explains, “This is not planning in the Soviet sense of replacing the market by the bureaucratic allocation of resources. It is planning *in the market* . . . the formulation and attempted implementation of strategic national programs in an economy with a large private sector and predominately market prices where much of international trade is in private hands.”<sup>72</sup>

After the turn of the century, following nearly a decade of contraction, Russia’s economic performance turned sharply upwards. While the stabilization of a functioning market system and Putin’s tight fiscal policies played a role, this success was due largely to the run up in

<sup>64</sup> Peter Ferdinand, “Russia and China: Converging Responses to Globalization,” *International Affairs* 83, no. 4 (2007): 667.

<sup>65</sup> Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Vintage, 2016), 227. Putin’s efforts in this regard were aided by the fact that many of the oligarchs and the corporations they controlled had been weakened by the 1998 financial crisis.

<sup>66</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 204.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 197–206.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Rutland, “Post-Socialist States and the Evolution of a New Developmental Model: Russia and China Compared,” *Polis*, no. 3 (June 2009): 165–76. [In Russian. Accessed in English at <http://prutland.faculty.wesleyan.edu/files/2015/07/Rutland-China-Russia-Compared.pdf>. Quote from p. 10.]

<sup>69</sup> Michael Ellman, “Russia’s Current Economic System: From Delusion to *Glasnost*,” *Comparative Economic Studies* 57 (2015): 693–94.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.

<sup>71</sup> Ferdinand, “Russia and China,” 670.

<sup>72</sup> Ellman, “Russia’s Current Economic System,” 699 (emphasis added).

energy prices that began soon after he took office. Putin used the resulting windfall to pay off Russia's debts and bolster its international position, but he made no attempt to use the country's newfound prosperity, or his own growing popularity, to strengthen the institutions of democracy. To the contrary, from his first days in office, the new president began systematically to isolate, weaken, and destroy potential sources of opposition and to solidify his own grip on power. Oligarchs who chafed at the new "rules of the game" were arrested or driven into exile and their assets confiscated. Television and other national media outlets were brought under Kremlin control. Several highly regarded print journalists who persisted in writing articles critical of the government died in mysterious accidents or were murdered by "unknown assailants." Police, prosecutors, and courts could be relied upon to do the regime's bidding, covering up its crimes and persecuting its enemies. Opposition political parties continued to function, but supporters and potential contributors were intimidated by threats of tax audits and other legal proceedings. Human rights campaigners were harassed and new laws passed that expanded the definition of "extremism" and subversive "anti-state" activities while clamping down on the operations of NGOs.<sup>73</sup>

Although the forms of electoral democracy remained, by the end of Putin's first term, if not before, it had become clear that they no longer had substance or meaning. With most of his potential rivals demoralized or intimidated, the president ran virtually unopposed in 2004, winning reelection with 71 percent of the vote. In 2008, in keeping with a constitutional provision limiting presidents to two consecutive terms, Putin stepped aside, exchanging posts with Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev. But four years later, he was back, defying public protests and allegations of electoral fraud to coast to victory with an only slightly less impressive 63 percent share of the votes cast.<sup>74</sup> While these figures were no doubt inflated, there is little question of Putin's popularity, especially among the poorer voters in more rural areas who provided the base of his support.<sup>75</sup>

How best to characterize the Russian political system? While Putin and his colleagues prefer the term "managed" or "guided" democracy,<sup>76</sup> Western observers have described his regime variously as "the re-emergence of Russian autocracy,"<sup>77</sup> "a typical postrevolutionary dictatorship,"<sup>78</sup> a "kleptocratic tribute system,"<sup>79</sup> "part oligarchy . . . [part] feudal system,"<sup>80</sup> and an example of "competitive authoritarianism."<sup>81</sup> In contrast to fully authoritarian systems (like China's), this last category of regimes retains the fiction that they permit organized opposition, free elections, and free speech. In practice, however, those in power use a variety of legal and

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<sup>73</sup> For overviews of this process see Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 25–111; Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, 83–132.

<sup>74</sup> Myers, *The New Tsar*, 244–54, 401–7.

<sup>75</sup> Michael McFaul, "We Can't Let Trump Go Down Putin's Path," *Washington Post*, February 6, 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Ferdinand, "Russia and China," 674.

<sup>77</sup> Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner, "Putin's Flawed Model," *Hoover Digest*, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>78</sup> Åslund, "Why Market Reform Succeeded," 16.

<sup>79</sup> Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Kasparov, *Winter is Coming*, 160.

<sup>81</sup> Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 3–36.

extra-legal methods to suppress dissent and tilt the political playing field decisively in their favor.<sup>82</sup> While this description is accurate, as far as it goes, at this point it would be misleading to suggest that the Russian system is in any sense competitive and, indeed, the authors of the concept have concluded that by 2008, Russia had made the transition to full authoritarianism.<sup>83</sup>

In the course of consolidating his personal power Vladimir Putin, like Xi Jinping, has been the author of some notable ideological innovations. Unlike Xi, however, who added his own amendments and extensions to a vast and continuous corpus of official pronouncements stretching back over many decades, Putin began with what was essentially a blank sheet. Following the Soviet collapse, Russia's new leaders explicitly rejected Marxism-Leninism and, at least in theory, embraced market economics and democratic politics, but they remained wary of formal doctrines. Eager to differentiate himself from former Communist Party members seeking to return to power, Putin declared in his 1999 Millennium message, "I am against the restoration of an official state ideology in Russia in any form."<sup>84</sup>

During the subsequent presidential campaign, Putin cast himself as a Russian patriot; as an advocate for national unity, social cohesion, and a strong Russian state; but above all, as a non-ideological, even anti-ideological, pragmatist.<sup>85</sup> Putin's initial moves were justified largely in terms of the need to establish "law and order" by reining in oligarchs and common criminals, crushing terrorists, and defeating separatist forces in Chechnya. Things began to change after the 2004 "Orange Revolution," which saw the defeat of Russia's preferred candidate for president of the Ukraine following mass demonstrations and allegations of election fraud. These events, which have been described as "Russia's 9/11,"<sup>86</sup> were interpreted by Moscow both as a geopolitical setback and as evidence of a growing threat of penetration and subversion by the West. In order to meet this alleged danger, and to justify its increasing authoritarianism, Putin's regime required "a legitimizing ideological foundation"<sup>87</sup> capable of countering Western democracy promotion efforts and filling what one top adviser now saw as a dangerous "ideological vacuum."<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 371. Some analysts have gone a step further. Alexander Motyl argues that Putin stands at the head of what can now best be described as a fascist regime. Like other fully authoritarian systems, of which they are a sub-type, fascist governments impose strict limits on freedoms of the press, speech and assembly; they embrace capitalism but seek to retain control over the economy; they "engage in targeted violence against regime opponents and widespread coercion against the population in general." In such systems too "electoral outcomes are preordained, parliaments are rubber-stamp institutions, and judiciaries do what the leader tells them." What distinguishes fascist regimes from their authoritarian brethren is that they are led by charismatic "strong men," dictators who surround themselves with the trappings of a personality cult but appear nevertheless to enjoy genuine, widespread popular support. Alexander J. Motyl, "Putin's Russia as a Fascist Political System," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49 (2016): 30.

<sup>84</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Russia at the Turn of the Millennium," *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (December 30, 1999). Translated in Putin's 2000 autobiography, *First Person*, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/Putin.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> Mark Galeotti and Andrew S. Bowen, "Putin's Empire of the Mind: How Russia's President Morphed from Realist to Ideologue—And What He'll Do Next," *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/04/21/putins-empire-of-the-mind/>.

<sup>86</sup> Vitali Silitski, "'Survival of the Fittest: Domestic and International Dimensions of the Authoritarian Reaction in the Former Soviet Union Following the Colored Revolutions," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43 (2010): 344.

<sup>87</sup> Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudny, "Russia and the Colour Revolutions," *Democratization* 19, no. 1 (2012): 27.

<sup>88</sup> Sergei Markov, quoted in Lucas, *The New Cold War*, 133.

Beginning in 2006, Moscow launched “a powerful ideological offensive against the West,” centered initially on the concept of “sovereign democracy.”<sup>89</sup> As the label suggests, the essential idea here was that Russia, like any other nation, was entitled to create its own form of rule, one in harmony with its unique history, culture, and traditions. Thus, while the liberal West stressed the importance of individual liberty, Russia preferred arrangements that reflected its experiences with collectivism and a strong state.<sup>90</sup> In itself, this formulation might have amounted to little more than an appeal for tolerance and diversity, but from the start it was coupled with ugly allegations about the rapacious character and hostile intentions of the Western nations, led by the United States. In a series of speeches, Putin referred to the Americans, in particular, as “Comrade Wolf,” comparing them to old-fashioned, pith-helmet-wearing colonialists and even to the Nazis.<sup>91</sup> This emotional language was deliberately inflammatory and it was aimed above all at a domestic audience. As Vladimir Shlapentokh explains, the Kremlin had come to see xenophobia as “the best way to legitimize its regime and avert the dangers posed by domestic oppositional forces.”<sup>92</sup> Writing in 2007, Lilia Shevtsova concluded similarly that “searching for enemies and casting the West in the role of the principal foe has turned out to be the most successful method for rallying the people . . . Anti-Western sentiment has become the new national idea.”<sup>93</sup>

Putin’s illiberal, anti-Western ideological stance has hardened further since his resumption of the role of president in 2012. In the wake of the public demonstrations that marred his return to office, Putin saw the need to refresh his connection to the Russian public (and especially his “base”) by advancing “a unifying set of ideas that would appeal to the maximum number of people.”<sup>94</sup> Deploying concepts and language first developed in the 1990s and early 2000s by some conservative intellectuals, Putin began to advance the view that Russia was a “state-civilization,” a “distinct cultural entity, not just a sovereign power,” bound together largely (though not exclusively) by shared ethnicity and a common religion.<sup>95</sup> Not only were Russia’s distinctive economic and political institutions under attack, so too were its culture and its deepest moral values. In Putin’s formulation, the “Euro-Atlantic” states have rejected their own “Christian roots” and are now committed to a program of “political correctness” in which all traditional forms of identity, “national, religious, cultural, and even gender . . . are being denied or relativized.” Christian holidays are being abolished, belief in God made “equal to faith in Satan” and children systematically exposed to “the propaganda of paedophilia.” With the West in a deep “demographic and moral crisis,” Russia has no choice but to

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<sup>89</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Perceptions of Foreign Threats to the Regime from Lenin to Putin,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 42 (2009): 317.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>91</sup> Lucas, *The New Cold War*, 134.

<sup>92</sup> Shlapentokh, “Perceptions of Foreign Threats,” 316.

<sup>93</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, “Anti-Westernism Is the New National Idea,” *Moscow Times*, April 7, 2007. (Accessed at the website of the Carnegie Moscow Center, <http://carnegie.ru/2007/08/07/anti-westernism-is-new-national-idea-pub-19480>.)

<sup>94</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 254.

<sup>95</sup> See Andrei Tsygankov, “Crafting the State-Civilization: Vladimir Putin’s Turn to Distinct Values,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 63 (2016): 146–58. In the interest of preserving unity among the various ethnic and religious groups that make it up, Putin has never embraced the vision of a purely Russian, Christian nation.

take whatever steps necessary, both at home and along its frontiers, to “defend and preserve” its “Christian moral values.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Putin Criticizes Western Countries for Abandoning Christian Roots,” *Free Republic*, December 28, 2016, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/3508713/posts>.



# Chapter 2

## Drivers

## Chapter 2: Drivers

Over the course of the past decade, both Russia and China have begun to behave more assertively toward their immediate neighbors and, to varying degrees, toward the United States and the other advanced industrial democracies as well. What can explain this pattern and what is the connection (if any) between the evolution of the Russian and Chinese domestic political systems and their more aggressive external postures? Before addressing these issues it is necessary to acknowledge two potential objections.

While the characterization of Russian behavior as assertive or aggressive is relatively uncontroversial, at least in the early part of the 2010s some American analysts challenged the notion that China's actions answered to the same description. Such claims have become more difficult to sustain with the passage of time, and especially since the rise of Xi Jinping. To take only the most obvious example, China's declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea at the end of 2013 and its construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea starting in 2014 are widely considered by observers in the region to mark a new phase in Beijing's prosecution of its long-standing maritime disputes. Many Chinese commentators agree and, in recent years, some have even argued that their leaders were not being assertive *enough* in defending the nation's interests.<sup>97</sup>

Assuming that Chinese and Russian behavior has, in fact, become more assertive, it is possible that this shift can be explained primarily with reference to geopolitical factors, namely changes in relative material power and considerations of physical security that have little or nothing to do with domestic politics or ideology. Some adherents of the so-called "realist" school of international relations theory would go so far as to argue that these internal factors are essentially irrelevant and that any state in roughly the same circumstances would have behaved in similar fashion, regardless of regime type. It is, of course, impossible to know with certainty how Russia and China would have acted if each had possessed liberal democratic rather than authoritarian capitalist institutions. On close inspection, however, it seems clear that the policies of both states were determined by a combination of internal and external factors rather than by one set of factors alone. In other words, while Russian and Chinese behavior has undoubtedly been shaped by geopolitical considerations, the way in which the leaders of each state weighed shifts in relative power, assessed threats, and defined interests and objectives was heavily influenced by the character of their respective regimes.

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<sup>97</sup> Regarding the Western debate over Chinese assertiveness, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 7–48; Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Explaining Beijing's Assertiveness," *Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 133–50. Regarding the discussion inside China, see Jinghan Zeng, Yuefan Xiao, and Shaun Breslin, "Securing China's Core Interests: The State of the Debate in China," *International Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2015): 245–66.



## *Resentment*

Chinese and Russian leaders frequently express resentment, both at the humiliations inflicted on their countries in the past and at the contemporary inequities that they see as deriving directly from those earlier injustices. Are these sentiments genuine or are they manufactured for purposes of mobilizing domestic support and perhaps also to gain a psychological edge in exchanges with foreign interlocutors? In the end, the answer to this question probably does not matter very much; sincere or otherwise, these themes dominate official discourse in both countries. Still, while the emotional language used to discuss the past is clearly meant to shape the thoughts and stir the feelings of their own people, there is little reason to doubt that these leaders too share many of the sentiments to which they give voice.

This seems especially likely to be true of Russia's elites, for whom the disastrous events of the 1980s and 1990s were formative life experiences. The inefficiency, declining living standards, and foreign policy defeats of the late Soviet period were embarrassing enough, but at least these could be regarded as self-inflicted wounds. In retrospect, however, the Soviet Union's loss of its East European empire and its own collapse and fragmentation have come to be seen as outcomes imposed on Russia by a victorious and vindictive foe. The enforced geographical division of the Russian people and their unaccustomed role as ethnic minorities in newly created states is especially galling. Vladimir Putin's 2005 comment that the Soviet collapse was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" and a "genuine tragedy" for Russia make clear his rejection of the moral basis for the post-Cold War map of Europe.<sup>98</sup> Putin's subsequent statements, including a 2014 speech to the Russian parliament, have elaborated on the precise nature of that tragedy: "Millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders."<sup>99</sup>

The decade of impoverishment and disorder that followed the Soviet collapse is a further source of humiliation and resentment, especially to the extent that these misfortunes can be blamed on the mistaken (and perhaps nefarious) advice of Western experts. Moscow's inability to prevent the eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union, the West's perceived role in fomenting the "Color Revolutions" and, most recently, its imposition of tough sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea and its intervention in the Ukraine have all added insult to injury. In Moscow's view, the United States and its allies are conspiring to keep Russia down and are reverting to the methods of the Cold War in order to do so. As Putin explained in his 2014 state of the union address to the Russian people, "The policy of containment was

<sup>98</sup> "Putin: Soviet Collapse a 'Genuine Tragedy,'" *NBC News*, April 25, 2005, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7632057/ns/world\\_news/t/putin-soviet-collapse-genuine-tragedy/#.V-IBJMcTvWY](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7632057/ns/world_news/t/putin-soviet-collapse-genuine-tragedy/#.V-IBJMcTvWY).

<sup>99</sup> "Transcript: Putin Says Russia Will Protect the Rights of Russians Abroad," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-says-russia-will-protect-the-rights-of-russians-abroad/2014/03/18/432a1e60-ae99-11e3-a49e-76adc9210f19\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-says-russia-will-protect-the-rights-of-russians-abroad/2014/03/18/432a1e60-ae99-11e3-a49e-76adc9210f19_story.html).

not invented yesterday. It has been carried out against our country for many years. Whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use.”<sup>100</sup>

Beyond the nation’s immediate frontiers, despite their often-vociferous objections, successive Russian governments have been powerless to block U.S.-led interventions in the Balkans and the Middle East. The freewheeling, unconstrained use of force by the United States is seen as the most troubling and dangerous consequence of an unbalanced, unipolar world in which there is “one master, one sovereign.” Arrogant and emboldened, Washington has “overstepped its national borders in every way,” “plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts.”<sup>101</sup> These displays of American power have also, of course, provided the occasion for repeated and humiliating demonstrations of Russian impotence.

Last but not least, since the end of the Cold War, the United States and the West more generally are seen to have adopted a posture of condescension and moral superiority toward Moscow. In addition to treating it as a second-class state, over the last twenty-five years the Western nations have lectured Russia incessantly about the inadequacies of its economic and political systems, its harsh and sometimes murderous treatment of dissidents, and more recently, about the brutality of its foreign policy adventures in Syria and the Ukraine. This steady stream of invective is presented to the Russian people as hypocritical in light of the West’s own crimes and abuses, but also as part of a continuing effort to keep them in a position of inferiority and subservience. As Putin complained in a 2007 speech, “We are constantly being taught about democracy. But for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves.”<sup>102</sup>

In sum, Russia today is a dissatisfied power whose leaders resent and object to the lack of respect and deference with which they are treated, the borders that have been drawn along their frontiers, the regional institutions that intrude into what they regard as their sphere of influence, the overbearing global power of the United States, and the entire American-designed, Western-led, post-Cold War order, which they now openly denounce as undemocratic and unjust.<sup>103</sup>

As we have seen, the CCP’s legitimating narrative places great emphasis on the harm done to China before most people living today were born. Nevertheless, while the “century of humiliation” may have ended in 1949 with the founding of the People’s Republic, official resentment at China’s perceived mistreatment by other powers, and dissatisfaction with the international order that emerged at the end of the Second World War, did not. To the contrary, China’s leaders have never accepted the legitimacy of that order, regarding it from the start

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<sup>100</sup> James Marson and Andrey Ostroukh, “Russia’s Putin Accuses West of Provoking Ukraine,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 4, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Putin’s speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, as quoted in Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 147.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> See “Lavrov Calls for ‘Post-West’ World Order; Dismisses NATO as Cold War Relic,” *Deutsche Welle*, February 18, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/lavrov-calls-for-post-west-world-order-dismisses-nato-as-cold-war-relic/a-37614099>.

as “a rigged system set up by the imperial victors of the last round of bloodshed to perpetuate the power of its winners.”<sup>104</sup>

With the onset of the Cold War, U.S. officials refused even to acknowledge the existence of the People’s Republic. On one widely reported occasion, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles went so far as to refuse to shake the hand of his Chinese counterpart, Chou En-lai, on encountering him at a peace conference in Geneva. This was a slight to which Chou would refer repeatedly over fifteen years later, in his first meetings with President Richard Nixon.<sup>105</sup> More serious than such gestures was the fact that, for the better part of a quarter-century, the United States waged all-out economic warfare against China, doing everything possible to deny it capital, technology, and access to international markets in an attempt to stunt its growth and destabilize its regime.<sup>106</sup> With a similar purpose in mind, Washington also provided aid and encouragement throughout much of this period to groups seeking to conduct covert operations and even to wage guerrilla warfare on Chinese-controlled territory.<sup>107</sup>

As part of its policy of containment, the United States entered into military alliances with countries across North and Southeast Asia, including Japan, the hated perpetrator of recent aggression against China, and Taiwan, regarded by Beijing as a breakaway province, but which the Americans insisted on treating as the rightful seat of Chinese sovereignty. America’s power, and its alliances, thus prevented the final reunification of the Chinese people, prolonging the effects of the century of humiliation and making the United States, in effect, an accessory after the fact in the historic crimes of others. The resumption of contact between Washington and Beijing in the early 1970s, the subsequent establishment of formal diplomatic relations at the end of the decade, and the start of U.S. and Western investment and technology transfer to China eased things somewhat, but they did not remove this fundamental source of resentment. Even as it “de-recognized” the government in Taipei, removed its forces from the island, and ended formal defense ties, the United States continued to provide Taiwan with military backing and it insisted on maintaining alliances and forward bases elsewhere in the region, which, in Beijing’s view, were aimed at least as much at containing China as they were at balancing the Soviet Union.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the dramatic acceleration of trade and investment that began in the 1990s, the remarkable expansion of China’s own wealth and power, and the broadening and deepening of its engagement with the West across all fronts, official expressions of resentment have grown more varied and, in certain respects, even more vociferous since the end of the Cold War. Old affronts still rankle and, with China’s growing power and rising expectations, new ones have now been

<sup>104</sup> T. Greer, “China Does Not Want Your Rules Based Order,” *Scholars Stage*, <http://scholars-stage.blogspot.com/2016/06/china-does-not-want-your-rules-based.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Margaret Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007), 30, 110.

<sup>106</sup> See Shu Guang Zhang, *Economic Cold War: America’s Embargo against China and the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949–1963* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999).

<sup>108</sup> Regarding the United States and Taiwan, see Alan D. Romberg, *Rein in at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy Toward Taiwan and U.S.-PRC Relations* (Washington DC: Henry Stimson Center, 2003).

added to the list. Annoyance at U.S. support for Taiwan continues, peaking periodically when American interference in China's "internal affairs" is perceived to have been especially brazen and egregious. As China's own capabilities for power projection have grown, so too have its objections to the longstanding American practice of conducting air and naval patrols up and down its coasts.<sup>109</sup> Since the turn of the century, the Chinese government has become increasingly outspoken in accusing the United States of violating its unique interpretation of the international law of the sea, under which it claims that no foreign military vessel can operate within 200 miles of China's coasts without first requesting permission.<sup>110</sup> When it was weaker, Beijing had no choice but to suffer in silence; now that its strength has grown, it feels able, and perhaps even compelled, to react more forcefully.

U.S. alliances, once dismissed as relics of the Cold War, have more recently been described as active and dangerous contributors to regional instability.<sup>111</sup> Washington is portrayed in official statements and semi-official commentary as the not-so-hidden hand behind the efforts of various smaller and weaker powers to stand up to China in disputes over maritime issues. Whereas at one time the U.S.-Japan alliance might have been seen as a "cork in the bottle," restraining resurgent Japanese militarism, now the United States appears to be aiding and abetting Tokyo's reemergence as a "normal power" eager to check China's ambitions. Since the 1990s, Chinese commentators have accused the United States of trying to stoke the fears of regional states by promulgating the "so-called China Threat Theory."<sup>112</sup> Recent talk of an American "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia has been met with accusations that the United States never abandoned its intention to contain China, block its rise, and envelop it in a "C-shaped encirclement" extending from the Korean peninsula to the Indian Ocean.<sup>113</sup>

Like their Russian counterparts, Chinese officials resent and have dwindling patience for the condescending moralizing and active meddling to which they believe they have been subjected by the United States and its democratic allies. Even after the Clinton administration abandoned its initial attempts to link trade to China's performance on human rights issues, American diplomats and political figures continued to harangue Beijing about its shortcomings and abuses. Sanctions were replaced by less tangible but still infuriating and humiliating rituals in which the United States, other Western countries, and even NGOs sought to challenge China's moral standing, including the publication of annual reports on human rights conditions, regular visits between political leaders and the Dalai Lama, and the awarding of prizes and honors to noteworthy and visible dissidents. On political as well as economic issues, China was portrayed as

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<sup>109</sup> See Robert C. O'Brien, "China's Rising Navy Is Increasingly 'Assertive' At Sea," *E-International Relations*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/11/16/china's-rising-navy-is-increasingly-assertive-at-sea/>.

<sup>110</sup> See Jeff M. Smith, Joshua Eisenman, "China and America Clash on the High Seas: The EEZ Challenge," *National Interest*, May 22, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-america-clash-the-high-seas-the-eez-challenge-10513>.

<sup>111</sup> Shi Jiangtao, "China Takes Veiled Shot at 'Destabilising' U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific," *South China Morning Post*, June 5, 2016.

<sup>112</sup> "Beijing Battles U.S. 'China Threat' Theory," *CNN*, March 6, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/east/03/06/willylam.china.threat/>.

<sup>113</sup> Huang Yingxu, "On the C-Shaped Encirclement by the U.S.," *Chinascopes*, July 26, 2010, <http://chinascopes.org/archives/6313/92>.

the laggard pupil of the West, a nation which, notwithstanding its stunning material success, was, as Bill Clinton publicly scolded Jiang Zemin, “on the wrong side of history.”<sup>114</sup>

Like Russia, China too has become more open in expressing its dissatisfaction, not only with specific features of the contemporary international system but with the very principles on which it is based. As described by Chinese officials, the existing system is fundamentally unfair, it was created to serve the interests and reflect the values of the United States and its democratic allies when those countries were at the peak of their power, and it has been imposed by them for far too long on the rest of the world. But times are changing, power is diffusing, and China no longer has to accept a subordinate role as a “rule-taker” rather than a “rule-maker.” As former Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying acknowledged in a 2016 speech, China has “never fully embraced” an order based, among other things, on “American or Western values” and U.S.-led alliances. To the contrary, “China has long been alienated politically by the western world” and, in ways that are as yet unspecified, it now seeks to play a role in “re-shap[ing] the order structure.”<sup>115</sup>

## *Ambition*

Respect is a salve for resentment and prestige can be an antidote for humiliation. Whatever material ends Moscow and Beijing may pursue, they are also clearly motivated by the desire for less tangible goods: for status, recognition, and acknowledgment of what they see as their proper standing in the world. The leaders of both countries appear genuinely to believe that they have been mistreated and disrespected by the West. This is certainly what they tell their people. To compensate for past periods of weakness, they seek opportunities to demonstrate their renewed power; to alleviate the sting of past slights, they demand displays of deference from those whom they accuse of having done them wrong.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to their shared desire for respect, Moscow and Beijing have more concrete goals that are also broadly similar. While they are cautious about saying so directly, both the Russian and Chinese regimes seek to establish their countries as the preponderant power in their respective regions; both also wish to be acknowledged as “great powers” or “poles” in a multipolar world, with global as well as regional interests; and both seek changes in what they regard as an unjust, Western-dominated international system.

Russian and Chinese attitudes toward the prevailing order have already been touched upon briefly above. While neither nation has yet laid out a detailed program for reforming existing

<sup>114</sup> William Neikirk and David S. Cloud, “Clinton: Abuses Put China ‘On Wrong Side of History,’” *Chicago Tribune*, October 30, 1997.

<sup>115</sup> “Full Text: Fu Ying’s speech at Chatham House in London,” *China Daily*, July 8, 2016, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn\\_eu/2016-07/08/content\\_26021696.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn_eu/2016-07/08/content_26021696.htm).

<sup>116</sup> See Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, “Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 63–95; Olga Malinova, “Obsession with Status and Ressentiment: Historical Backgrounds of the Russian Discursive Identity Construction” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (2014): 291–303.

rules and institutions, both have expressed dissatisfaction with arrangements that they see as having been designed by, and for the benefit of, the Western powers, led by the United States. As regards their desire for great power status, Moscow and Beijing's preferences are readily apparent in their critiques of "unipolarity" and their expressions of enthusiasm for the more "democratic," multipolar world that they now see emerging. As the Kremlin's 2016 foreign policy concept paper explains, "The world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system. Global power," it asserts, is becoming increasingly decentralized, thereby "eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers." In the face of these trends, unnamed nations are nevertheless attempting to preserve their privileged positions "by imposing their point of view on global processes" and seeking "to contain alternative centres of power." This is an approach that can only lead to "growing turbulence on the global and regional levels." In response, the Russian Federation must strive "to consolidate [its] position as a centre of influence in today's world."<sup>117</sup>

Chinese officials use strikingly similar language to describe the current situation. According to the 2015 defense white paper, "global trends toward multi-polarity" are "intensifying," leading to "historic changes in the balance of power [and] global governance structure." While the general direction of events is favorable, new threats are emerging from the forces of "hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionism" (i.e., from the United States and its allies). These challenges make it all the more important for China to complete its "modernization drive," enhancing all elements of its comprehensive national power in order to realize the "Chinese Dream."<sup>118</sup>

For Russians who remember the Cold War, the idea that their country should be a great power on par with the United States does not appear far-fetched or unreasonable, even if it has sometimes been difficult to see how such a position of parity could be regained. From the start of the post-Cold War period, Russian spokesmen have held fast to the view that, as then Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov declared in 1992, "Russia has been and remains a great power, and its policy toward the outside world should correspond to that status."<sup>119</sup> On taking office in 1999, Vladimir Putin echoed these sentiments using virtually identical words when he declared that "Russia was and will remain a great power."<sup>120</sup> Since the mid-2000s, and especially since his return to the presidency in 2012, many of Putin's foreign policy initiatives, including his interventions in Syria and Ukraine, have been widely interpreted as motivated at least in part by a desire to assert Russia's great power status, notwithstanding its continued weakness on many

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<sup>117</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 20, 2016)," December 1, 2016, [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248).

<sup>118</sup> "Full Text: China's Military Strategy," *Xinhua*, May 26, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c\\_134271001.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c_134271001.htm).

<sup>119</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 97.

<sup>120</sup> Ingmar Oldberg, "Russia's Great Power Ambitions and Policy Under Putin," in *Russia: An Emerging Great Power*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 13.

measures of material power.<sup>121</sup>

For Beijing, on the other hand, the situation is reversed. Despite the increasingly obvious cumulative effects of their own rapid growth, until quite recently Chinese commentators have been reluctant even to acknowledge the possibility that their power might someday approximate that of the United States. To openly express such views was seen as arrogant and, because it might provoke alarm and stimulate an American counter-reaction, potentially dangerous.

Here too, as in other areas of rhetoric and policy, Xi Jinping's rise has brought significant change. Even before he was elevated to the top positions in the Party-state, Xi advanced the notion that China should seek to build a "new type of great power relationship" with the United States. This phrase has since become a central theme in his foreign policy proclamations. At a minimum, the offer of a "new type" of relationship appears designed to gain tacit American acceptance of the fact that the two Pacific powers are now, if not entirely equal, then at least head and shoulders above every other nation in the international system.<sup>122</sup> Chinese commentators have explained, more concretely, that a "new type" of relationship would be one in which each party would acknowledge, respect, and refrain from infringing upon the "core interests" of the other.<sup>123</sup> Because the precise content of the concept of "core interests" remains ill-defined, it is not entirely clear what this would mean in practice, but as one American analyst suggests, it appears likely that what Beijing seeks ultimately is "U.S. recognition of a privileged Chinese sphere in Asia and assurance that Washington will not intervene in the region—politically and militarily—contrary to China's interests."<sup>124</sup>

This last point brings us back to the question of how China and Russia define their goals within their respective regions. Albeit to varying degrees, Chinese and Russian officials have been circumspect on this issue, not least because to acknowledge a desire for preponderance would run counter to the claim that they prefer a more "democratic" international order. While a democratic system at the global level may perhaps be acceptable, both Moscow and Beijing clearly believe that within the major regions of the world, hierarchy is the proper order of things. In the multipolar world that both say they seek, each power (or, in the Russian phrase, each "center of influence") would naturally be surrounded by its own sphere, an area in which it would exert a dominant voice, even if it could not exercise absolute control.

China's vision for itself emerges obliquely from the notion that achieving the "China Dream"

<sup>121</sup> For an upbeat assessment of Moscow's success in this regard, see "Time to Admit: Russia Is the 'Great Power That Refuses to Go Away,'" *Sputnik International*, April 22, 2016, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201604221038430135-russia-great-power/>. For a more sober appreciation, see Kathleen J. Hancock, "Russia: Great Power Image Versus Economic Reality," *Asian Perspective* 31, no. 4 (2007): 71–98.

<sup>122</sup> For interpretations, see Jinghan Zeng and Shaun Breslin, "China's 'New Type of Great Power Relations': A G2 with Chinese Characteristics," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (July 2016): 773–94; Andrew S. Erickson and Adam P. Liff, "Not-So-Empty Talk: The Danger of China's 'New Type of Great-Power Relations' Slogan," *Foreign Affairs*, October 9, 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Caitlin Campbell and Craig Murray, "China Seeks a 'New Type of Major-Country Relationship with the United States,'" Staff Research Backgrounder, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, June 25, 2013.

<sup>124</sup> Paul Mancinelli, "Conceptualizing 'New Type Great Power Relations': The Sino-Russian Model," *China Brief* 14, no. 9 (May 7, 2014), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=42332&no\\_cache=1#V3P\\_U8da7WY](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42332&no_cache=1#V3P_U8da7WY).

requires the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” As Zheng Wang points out, rejuvenation or renewal suggests that China is “regain[ing] . . . lost international status and power rather than obtaining something entirely new.” Moreover, in this context, the recovery of what was lost suggests a return to the proper order of things. Thus, “the Chinese consider the process of rejuvenation as a restoration of fairness instead of a gain of advantages over others.”<sup>125</sup> China is not simply getting richer and stronger; it is being restored to its rightful place in the world. How should that place be defined? Prior to intrusions by the West, China was for many centuries the preponderant power in East Asia, the “Middle Kingdom.” At a minimum, rejuvenation would seem to require the recovery of that central position. While government officials are rarely this blunt, some well-connected commentators are not as reticent. Thus, according to Shi Yinong, counselor of the State Council and professor at Renmin University, Xi Jinping’s goal is “for China to take on a dominant role in the Asia and Western Pacific area,” weakening and “ultimately abolish[ing] U.S. dominance in the region.”<sup>126</sup> Former CIA analyst Christopher Johnson reaches a similar conclusion: “The great rejuvenation means that the PRC by 2049 intends to restore itself to a regional positional of primacy.”<sup>127</sup>

China seeks the restoration of a regional order that is historically distant, shrouded in myth, and hence rather vaguely defined. For Russia, on the other hand, the past is close at hand, the outlines of an earlier order are readily discernible and, in part for that reason, the country’s leaders have tended to be blunter in stating which parts of it they wish to restore. While Russian strategists would no doubt like to regain some of their past influence in Eastern Europe, none seriously entertains the thought that the former members of the Warsaw Pact will ever be reintegrated into a post-Soviet empire. Closer to home, however, Moscow’s ambitions are greater, even though they have only been partially fulfilled to this point.

Before the dust from the Soviet collapse had even settled, Russians of all persuasions had begun to argue that, despite the redrawing of the map, their newly diminished nation was still entitled to play a dominant role in what came to be referred to as the “near-abroad”—the fourteen former Soviet republics that overnight had also become independent states. At least initially, as Angela Stent explains, most Russians did not even consider these to be “real foreign countries,” but saw them instead as fragments of a larger organic whole. Reflecting this view, the first post-Soviet ambassador to the United States remarked that relations between Russia and the former republics “should be treated as identical to those between New York and New Jersey.”<sup>128</sup>

While this kind of thinking has faded with the passage of time, successive Russian regimes have nevertheless held to the view that, especially along its western frontier, their country is entitled to a sphere of influence by virtue of its size, history, and cultural connections.<sup>129</sup> Moscow has

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<sup>125</sup> Zheng Wang, “The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context,” 9.

<sup>126</sup> Shi Yinong, “The Latest Transfer in China’s Foreign Strategy: from ‘Military Strategy’ to ‘Economic Strategy,’” *China International Relations* 25, no. 2 (March/April 2015): 52.

<sup>127</sup> Christopher Johnson, “Decoding China’s Emerging ‘Great Power’ Strategy in Asia,” 17.

<sup>128</sup> Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 18–19.

<sup>129</sup> See Allen C. Lynch, “The Influence of Regime Type on Russian Foreign Policy toward ‘the West,’ 1992–2015,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29 (2016): 101–11.



been willing to use both “soft” and “hard” power in pursuit of this objective. The desire to solidify its position in the near abroad drove Russian proposals to strengthen commercial and political ties among the Commonwealth of Independent States in the 1990s and, more recently, to encourage the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Russia failed to prevent the former Baltic republics from moving out of its orbit and into that of the West. But it has been willing to use force to prevent similar developments elsewhere along its frontiers, including in Georgia in 2008 and most recently in Ukraine in 2014. Aside from the more elaborate, and more diplomatically palatable, justifications offered by Moscow, the underlying rationale for these interventions was accurately conveyed in the wake of the conflict in Georgia by then president Dmitry Medvedev: “Russia, just like other countries in the world, has regions where it has privileged interests.”<sup>130</sup>

Russia and China are revisionist powers, discontented, ambitious, and eager for change. But this has been true for the better part of two decades. What can account for the increased assertiveness that has been evident from both over the last several years? The answer in each case involves a mix of opportunism and insecurity. The latter factor will be discussed at greater length in the next section. With regard to the first, during the second half of the first decade of the twenty-first century, both Moscow and Beijing reached the conclusion that their national power was increasing while that of the United States and its allies was in decline. These perceived favorable trends enhanced both countries’ freedom of action and presented them with opportunities to pursue their longer-term ambitions, which they then sought to exploit.

In the Russian case, the decisive factor was the dramatic run-up in energy prices that began after the turn of the century and continued for the better part of a decade. Increased global demand for energy put Moscow in a better position to exert leverage over its customers in Europe, boosted Russia’s overall growth rate, and because the state owned some of the biggest producers and was well positioned to tax the rest, caused cash to pour into the Kremlin’s coffers. Putin used these funds to pay down the great mass of external debt that Russia had taken on since the Soviet collapse, to finance a major buildup in its military capabilities, and to accumulate reserves of hard currency that could be used to shield itself from external economic shocks (such as the one that hit in 2008) and buy influence in foreign countries.

By 2006, Russia had erased its debts and freed itself from obligations to foreign powers and international lending institutions. Hill and Gaddy maintain that “from Putin’s perspective” this was a moment of great significance and marked “the point when Russia’s resurgence really began.”<sup>131</sup> With the United States seemingly on the brink of disaster in Iraq, the tides of history seemed to be shifting. Following a reassessment of existing policies, Moscow began to move toward a tougher, more confrontational stance, a posture signaled in no uncertain terms by Putin’s speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference.<sup>132</sup> Russia, concluded one veteran

<sup>130</sup> Paul Reynolds, “New Russian World Order: The Five Principles,” *BBC*, September 1, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7591610.stm>.

<sup>131</sup> Hilly and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 317.

<sup>132</sup> Regarding the reassessment, see Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 136.

Kremlin-watcher at the time, had “left the West.”<sup>133</sup>

One year later, in the summer of 2008, Moscow invaded Georgia, ostensibly to protect pro-Russian populations in two breakaway provinces, but with the larger aim of preventing the country from proceeding down the path toward NATO membership and full integration with the West. After a decade and a half of drift, Russia had taken decisive action to prevent a further loss of control over events in its “near-abroad.” While the operation was unimpressive from a purely military standpoint, it did achieve its larger strategic objectives. According to one post-war analysis, “Moscow was able to use military force to thwart Tbilisi’s attempt to regain control over the breakaway South Ossetia region, massively damage the Georgian armed forces, break the momentum of NATO enlargement in the Caucasus, and humiliate a close U.S. ally with virtual impunity.”<sup>134</sup> The Obama administration’s subsequent decision to pursue a “reset” with Russia only a few months after the invasion did nothing to alter Moscow’s assessment of U.S. resolve. To the contrary, this move was evidently interpreted as an acknowledgment by the Americans that their policies were to blame for the sharp deterioration in relations.<sup>135</sup>

China’s appreciation of its future prospects began to shift in 2008–2009 with the onset of the global financial crisis. Once it became clear that China would be able to navigate the worst effects of the crisis, sustaining demand with a dramatic expansion in public spending, Chinese analysts began to focus on the lingering damage that the crisis had inflicted on the West. Most quickly reached the conclusion that the near-collapse of the advanced industrial economies marked a significant acceleration in the long-term trends that for some time had been pointing toward the emergence of a more “democratic,” multipolar international system. Henceforth, China would be able to rise even faster than had been anticipated at the turn of the century, while the relative power of the West—and of the United States in particular—would decline more quickly than most observers had thought possible. “The global financial crisis of 2008 let China’s international status rise rapidly,” concluded one Chinese scholar in 2010.<sup>136</sup> In the aftermath of the crisis, wrote another, “China has made a historic leap in comprehensive national power and international influence and has become a target for other countries to rely upon and cozy up to.”<sup>137</sup> Suisheng Zhao observes that the 2008 crisis boosted the self-regard of China’s leaders while reducing the once haughty West (led by the always arrogant Americans) to a “gratifying target for pent-up contempt.”<sup>138</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Dmitri Trenin, “Russia Leaves the West,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 87–96.

<sup>134</sup> R. Craig Nation, “Results of the ‘Reset’ in US-Russian Relations,” (Paris: IFRI, July 2010), 5.

<sup>135</sup> “From the Russian point of view, the Obama reset was an American course correction, an admission that the American side was responsible for the deterioration in bilateral ties.” Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 212.

<sup>136</sup> Zhao Kejin, “Zhongguo duiwai zhanlüe de zhuanxing he tiaozheng” [China’s foreign strategy’s transformation and adjustment ], *Xuexi Shibao* [Study times], August 30, 2010, <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/12583015.html>.

<sup>137</sup> Pan Zhongqi, “Cong ‘suishi’ dao ‘moushi’—Youguan Zhongguo jinyibu heping fazhan de zhanüe sikao” [From ‘tide-surfing’ to ‘tide-making’—some thoughts related to China’s strategy for further peaceful development], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World economy and politics], no. 2 (2010).

<sup>138</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “Chinese Foreign Policy as a Rising Power to Find its Rightful Place,” *Perceptions* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 104. Taken in combination with China’s recent success at the 2008 Beijing Olympic games, the Wall Street collapse and its aftermath created what one Western analyst describes as “a perfect storm of geopolitical symbolism,” feeding the sense that China’s was now unstoppable. Christopher A. Ford, *China*

In addition to its purely psychological effects, the global financial crisis set the stage for significant changes in the theory and practice of China's grand strategy. At the purely theoretical level, Chinese scholars and officials engaged in a prolonged debate over whether the time had finally come to abandon Deng Xiaoping's cautious "24-character strategy"<sup>139</sup> in favor of something more forward-leaning and assertive. While these arguments were not resolved during the remainder of Hu Jintao's time in office, once Xi came to power he quickly embraced the idea that, instead of "hiding and biding," China should henceforth advance more boldly under the banner of "striving for achievement."<sup>140</sup>

In terms of the actual substance of foreign policy, starting in 2009–2010, Beijing began to adopt a more confrontational stance, most notably in its maritime disputes in both the South and East China Seas. These actions provoked an American counter-reaction in the form of the Obama administration's much-touted "pivot." While uncertainty over the full extent of the likely U.S. response may have induced some initial caution, many Chinese analysts appear to have assessed that, whatever its intentions, the Obama administration likely lacked the resources, and the resolve, to follow through fully on its promises. In any event, Xi Jinping evidently concluded that it was better to push ahead than to back off, and his rise was accompanied by a notable stiffening in China's posture and an escalation in its policies.

## *Insecurity*

Russian and Chinese leaders describe their countries as being confronted by very similar threats. In the Chinese case, these assessments are of long standing and have changed relatively little since the end of the Cold War. Russian views, on the other hand, have evolved over time, hardening markedly with the accession of Vladimir Putin and his consolidation of domestic political power. Since the turn of the century Chinese and Russian threat perceptions have tended to converge, with the latter coming into alignment with the former.

Both Moscow and Beijing see themselves as struggling to survive in an international environment that is profoundly hostile and potentially dangerous. The threats they face are both geopolitical and ideological in nature; they are deeply rooted in the character of the contemporary international system, which in turn reflects the overweening power and selfish interests of the United States. The U.S. and its allies are perceived to be working hard to contain and even to encircle Russia and China, limiting the growth of their power, constricting their rightful

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*Looks at the West: Identity, Global Ambitions, and the Future of Sino-American Relations* (Lexington KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 343.

<sup>139</sup> During the summer of 1991 Deng Xiaoping circulated a memo to top Party colleagues in which he advised that, given its position of isolation and relative weakness, China should 'hide its capabilities and bide its time.' This dictum is generally believed to have provided the basis for Chinese grand strategy from the early 1990s until the emergence of Xi Jinping in 2012–2013. For background see Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, "Lying Low No More?: China's New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy," *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (September 2011): 195–216.

<sup>140</sup> For an overview of this debate by one of the leading proponents of activism, see Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement."

spheres of influence, and building positions of strength along their borders and off their coasts from which to conduct espionage, support subversion, and even, in the event of war, to impose blockades and launch attacks on their territory.

As we have seen, in describing this aspect of the threat from the West, Putin harkens back to the Cold War and even, on occasion, to the 1941 Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. The expansion of NATO and the deepening animosity of the United States and its allies toward Russia are portrayed as having once again brought the threat of war to Russia's doorstep. Similarly, Chinese spokesmen refer to American alliances and forward-based forces as reflections of a "Cold War mentality" and a continuation of the policy of containment. Especially when discussing Japan, America's most important regional ally, Beijing makes frequent reference to the horrors of the Second World War, implying—even when it does not say so in so many words—that without sufficient vigilance similar crimes could once again be committed against the Chinese people. Chinese commentators also cite more distant historical events to convey the seriousness of the present danger, including of course the depredations of the imperial powers during the "century of humiliation" and, perhaps most revealing, the internecine warfare of the "Warring States" era. There are many lessons to be drawn from this succession of bloody conflicts, of which the most important is that the dominant power or hegemon in any period will naturally do whatever it can to crush potential challengers before they can grow too strong. Little imagination is required to discern who plays what role in the modern remake of this ancient drama.<sup>141</sup>

Threats that derive primarily from calculations of power politics are made more complex and more dangerous by differences in ideology. Thus, the United States and its liberal democratic partners seek not only to counter and contain Russian and Chinese power from without but to undermine their regimes from within. Claiming that their own systems are based on universal values, the Americans and their Western allies do not truly accept the legitimacy and equality of governments that espouse different principles, whether "socialism with Chinese characteristics" or Russia's distinctive brand of "sovereign democracy." Western arrogance in this regard is philosophically objectionable but also strategically menacing. Despite espousing the virtues of "tolerance" and "diversity," the West presumes to sit in judgment on those who dare to take a different path. Worse still, with the United States in the lead, the Western powers believe they have the right, and perhaps even the obligation, to try to change those forms of government that do not conform to their views.

Since the late 1980s, if not before, China's leaders have been convinced that the West was attempting to promote the "peaceful evolution" of their political system. Despite its benign-sounding label, in official parlance, this term refers to a process of infiltration aimed at weakening and eventually bringing about the downfall of the Chinese Communist Party. Needless to say, such a catastrophe would have devastating, and possibly even fatal, consequences for top CCP figures and their families. The threat of "peaceful evolution" is thus a very personal one

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<sup>141</sup> See Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 107–44.

to China's rulers.

Whereas during the Cold War the democracies sought to weaken China by isolating it and bombarding it with propaganda, in recent decades they have adopted a more subtle and insidious approach. As Deng warned, when China joined the global economy, it opened the window to “flies” in the form of seductive ideas and corrupting influences. What he did not say, but knew very well, was that economic growth and engagement with the West could also change the Chinese people, causing them eventually to demand political rights commensurate with the freedoms they had learned to enjoy in the economic realm. Far from concealing their intentions, the post-Cold War rhetoric of America presidents made clear that this was precisely what they had in mind. “Soft” subversion aside, since Tiananmen, Beijing has also feared that the Western powers would use “active measures,” providing aid and encouragement to dissidents and “anti-regime elements” in order to destabilize China and weaken CCP rule.

China started out closed and proceeded to open cautiously, and partially, to the West. At the end of the Cold War, Russia began by dramatically lowering virtually all barriers, economic and political, and has since become progressively more suspicious and repressive. Under Yeltsin, and even at the start of Putin's reign, Moscow's official position was that it sought not merely to trade with the West but to join it fully by embracing “supra-national universal values” including, as Putin put it in 1999, “freedom of expression, freedom to travel abroad and other fundamental political rights and human liberties.”<sup>142</sup> The regime's fears of subversion, and its search for an alternative ideology, grew more intense and urgent over time as it became increasingly alienated from the West, triggering a downward spiral of mutual animosity and mistrust. As Putin tightened his grip, arresting oligarchs and stifling the press, he faced mounting criticism from foreign governments, which in turn heightened his suspicions about their intentions. The “Color Revolutions” of 2003–2005, the Bush administration's implementation of regime change in Iraq, and its subsequent commitment to a “freedom agenda,” under which it pledged to promote the spread of democracy around the world, combined to raise these fears to new heights.<sup>143</sup> The overthrow and subsequent execution of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011 and the anti-Kremlin, pro-democracy protests that took place in Moscow later that year hardened Putin's conviction that Western-led subversion threatened his regime and even his life.<sup>144</sup>

As is true of their expressions of outrage and resentment over past humiliations, the concerns about encirclement and subversion to which Russian and Chinese leaders give voice are both sincere and instrumental. There is little doubt that Moscow and Beijing see the United States and its allies maneuvering against them externally, and none whatsoever that they are fearful of efforts to weaken them from within. But public warnings about these dangers also serve a useful purpose. The claim that there are “enemies within” who must be rooted out before they can implement their evil plans provides a justification for stepped-up surveillance, crackdowns on

<sup>142</sup> See Putin's 1999 speech, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium.”

<sup>143</sup> Regarding the impact of these events, see Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 97–123.

<sup>144</sup> These events are discussed in Evan Osnos, David Remnick, and Joshua Yaffa, “Trump, Putin, and the New Cold War,” *New Yorker*, March 6, 2017.

NGOs, arrests of dissidents, and other harsh repressive measures. Confrontations with foreign foes can be used to rally popular support, even from portions of the populace that might not otherwise be enthusiastic backers of a regime whose policies they cannot control.

Recent increases in both Russian and Chinese assertiveness appear to have been driven by a heightened sense of internal and external threat, as well as by underlying ambitions and perceptions of strategic opportunity. This is not as paradoxical as it might seem at first glance. In the case of Russia, during the second half of the 2000s, growing confidence about the nation's economy and strategic autonomy went hand in hand with rising fears of encirclement and subversion. Events in Georgia provided the occasion for Russia to lash out, administering a lesson to a wayward former republic and reasserting its dominance in the "near abroad." But the decision to use force was also clearly motivated by fear that, if something was not done, Georgia would move more firmly into the Western camp, perhaps even joining NATO, a development that would have put a democratic American ally directly on Russia's southern border.<sup>145</sup>

Six years later, the boom in energy prices was clearly over and Russia's economic growth had slowed to a crawl. On the other hand, following significant post-Georgia reforms and budget increases, the nation's political leaders likely had more faith in the military capabilities available to them.<sup>146</sup> After four and a half years of observing and dealing with the Obama administration, Moscow may also have been confident that measured aggression on its part would not provoke a forceful response.<sup>147</sup> As in Georgia so too in Ukraine, the proximate cause for Russia's actions was fear of loss. The ouster of a pro-Russian leader following mass protests was troubling enough. The prospect that, with his departure, Ukraine would move irrevocably out of Russia's sphere of influence, joining the European Union rather than Putin's proposed EEU and in all likelihood eventually becoming a NATO member, made things even worse.<sup>148</sup>

China's increased assertiveness over the course of the last decade is also linked to heightened concerns about a combination of perceived internal threats and external challenges, as well as growing optimism about the nation's future trajectory. The impact of the financial crisis on Chinese assessments of the shifting global balance of power has already been discussed. In

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<sup>145</sup> The possibility of Georgia's accession to the alliance, together with the Ukraine, had been actively discussed and agreed upon in principle at a summit meeting of member countries four months before the Russian invasion. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 163–76.

<sup>146</sup> See "Russia Raises Military Clout With Reforms After Georgian War," *Reuters*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.voanews.com/a/reu-russia-raises-military-clout-with-reforms-after-georgian-war-/1860737.html>. Athena Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War," *Demokratizatsiya* 21, no. 3 (2013): 340–68.

<sup>147</sup> See Julia Joffe, "How Russia Saw the 'Red Line' Crisis," *Atlantic*, March 11, 2016. Some analysts have suggested that Russia's decision to intervene in Ukraine was influenced by the fact that, a few months before, President Obama had refrained from retaliating with force when the Syrian government crossed a U.S. "red line" by using chemical weapons against its own people. Joffe quotes several Russian to the effect that, in themselves, the events in Syria had little impact on Putin. But she concludes by pointing out that, by this time, "no one in the Kremlin had any illusions about how [Obama] saw the world. His decision in Syria was not exactly shocking or out of character for the Russians, especially after the hesitation he showed in Libya."

<sup>148</sup> These events are discussed in detail in Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

addition to boosting Beijing's confidence about its long-term prospects, however, the events of 2008–2009 also aroused considerable anxiety about China's economic performance and social stability in the near to medium term. As global demand contracted and exports dropped, the nation's leaders braced for a dramatic increase in unemployment and widespread social unrest.<sup>149</sup> In the event, a massive injection of state spending enabled Beijing to avoid the worst effects of the crisis. But it did nothing to address the fact that the nation's growth model, with its heavy reliance on state-directed investments and exports, was unsustainable.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, if anything, the government's response actually exacerbated these problems.

As it wrestled with the potentially destabilizing effects of slower growth, the CCP leadership was confronted by a series of other events that seemed to highlight China's vulnerability to subversion and internal unrest: ethnic riots in Xinjiang in 2009, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to a prominent dissident in 2010, the 2011 "Arab Spring," and, in 2012, the eruption of a scandal that drew public attention to corruption at the highest levels of the Party. As we have seen, Beijing responded to these developments with a domestic crackdown that intensified when Xi Jinping replaced Hu Jintao at the end of 2012. At the same time, the regime also took a series of visible and highly publicized steps that escalated its ongoing disputes in the East and South China Seas. Here too, Xi expanded upon and intensified the measures initiated by his predecessor.

This ratcheting up of tensions appears to have been motivated in part by a desire to deflect popular attention and frustration outward, at alleged foreign foes. Despite its obvious preoccupation with domestic security concerns, the CCP regime certainly did not shrink from taking steps that led to a marked deterioration in relations with several of its neighbors and ultimately with the United States as well. To the contrary, particularly under Xi Jinping, Beijing has seemed to deliberately cultivate a sense of perpetual urgency and simmering crisis, both at home and abroad. Assertiveness and repression are mutually supporting elements in Xi's strategy for regime survival.

Provided that they can navigate pressing challenges at home, China's leaders have reason to feel that their external position will grow stronger with the passage of time. Still, at least in the years immediately following the onset of the global financial crisis, they may also have believed that their maritime claims, and their prospects for eventually gaining control over most of the islands, waters, and resources within the so-called "first island chain," were under

<sup>149</sup> To make matters worse, the financial crisis was preceded by a series of other unsettling events, including riots in Tibet, a devastating earthquake, a scandal over tainted milk, and the publication of a manifesto by dissidents calling for democratic reforms. The combined effects of all this, plus the expected increase in unemployment, were so serious that, according to one observer, "The Chinese government lived through 2009 in a panic of worrying about the next explosion of social instability." Guoguang Wu, "China 2009: Muddling Through Crises," *Asian Survey* 50, no. 1 (January/February 2010): 30.

<sup>150</sup> In a widely noted 2007, speech Premier Wen Jiabao had described China's economic model as "unsteady, unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable." Michael Pettis, "China's Troubled Transition to a More Balanced Growth Model," *NewAmerica.org*, March 1, 2011, <https://www.newamerica.org/economic-growth/chinas-troubled-transition-to-a-more-balanced-growth-model/>.

increased challenge from other countries.<sup>151</sup> For this reason, some observers have suggested that China's behavior can best be characterized as "reactive" or "reactive assertive," rather than purely assertive.<sup>152</sup> Whatever the label, or the precise mix of causal factors, the fact remains that Beijing's actions in recent years, like Moscow's, have been motivated by anxiety as well as ambition.

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<sup>151</sup> Thus, for example, the initial ratcheting up of China's rhetoric and behavior regarding territorial disputes in the South China Sea followed the publication in 2009 of extensive competing claims by Malaysia and Vietnam. Michael D. Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Assertive Behavior, Part Two: The Maritime Periphery," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35 (2011): 3. See also M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Strategy in the South China Sea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 3 (December 2011): 300.

<sup>152</sup> Derek Pham, "Gone Rogue?: China's Assertiveness in the South China Sea," *Journal of Politics and Society* 22, no. 1 (2011).



# Chapter 3

## Strategies

## Chapter 3: Strategies

Today's Russian and Chinese leaders want, above all, to survive, to preserve their grip on political power, and to maintain their present form of government in the face of Western efforts to promote liberalization and democratization. This is the master key, the single factor that goes furthest in explaining virtually every aspect of Moscow and Beijing's behavior both at home and abroad. The other external objectives of both regimes are, to a considerable degree, subordinate to and derivative of this overarching goal. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping seek prestige, status and a degree of deference for their countries because they think it is justly deserved, but also because they believe that gaining the respect of foreign powers will enhance their standing with their own people. Regardless of how they were ruled, a rising China and a resurgent Russia would no doubt seek to expand their influence and perhaps to establish themselves as the preponderant power in their respective regions. As nationalistic authoritarian capitalists in a world still dominated by liberal democracies, both also have an additional motive, rooted in ideology, to want to push the West and its contaminating influence back from their frontiers and to control events around their peripheries.

In pursuit of these objectives, Russia and China have developed strategies that contain a mix of six components, each of which is discussed in turn below.

### *1. Exploit the Economic Openness of the West*

The central element in Chinese and Russian strategy has been to gain and, if at all possible, to preserve access to the economies of the advanced industrial nations. The benefits to both states of having been permitted to join the Western trading system after the end of the Cold War are so large as to be virtually incalculable. Certainly, if Russia and China had remained confined to the periphery of that system, they would not have been able to mount anything like the challenge to it that they currently pose. The West's decision in the early 1990s to try to incorporate its former foes, and their ability to seize the opportunity that this provided, were decisive in determining the subsequent course of events.

Without access to Western capital, technology, and markets, China would never have developed into the global manufacturing powerhouse that it is today. The lowering of Western barriers on technology exports and energy imports also helped Russia recover from its post-Cold War malaise and for a time seemed to be propelling it into the top ranks of the "emerging economies."<sup>153</sup> The rapid growth that Russia experienced in the 2000s, and that China enjoyed until the mid-2010s, made it easier for both to sustain domestic support while at the same time

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<sup>153</sup> In the early 2000s, optimistic assessments of Russia's growth potential caused some analysts to include it along with Brazil, India, and China among the so-called BRICs. Among other factors, Russia's continuing heavy reliance on energy exports, and its failure to invest sufficiently in industrial modernization, have caused many observers to downgrade their assessments.

modernizing and expanding their military capabilities. Although residual mistrust prevented the removal of all Western restrictions on technology transfer, the loosening of many previous regulations also enabled China, in particular, to improve the quality of its weapons and other military systems far more rapidly than would otherwise have been possible.

Deepening economic interdependence with the West has also had less tangible, but nonetheless highly significant political benefits for both Moscow and Beijing. Just as the 19th century liberal theorists of free trade would have predicted, commerce has helped to create interest groups in the West that profit from, and therefore vigorously support, the preservation of good relations with the authoritarian capitalist powers, almost regardless of how aggressively those countries behave or how poorly they treat their own people. Indeed, the advocates of “engagement” argue that the remedy for such troublesome behavior is, conveniently enough, more engagement. Throughout the post-Cold War period, an influential coalition of business executives, academic experts, and former (and current) government officials has consistently claimed that stronger economic ties would give both Russia and China a bigger stake in the stability of the existing international system. Because trade accelerates growth, which enables the emergence of a strong middle class, and because the middle class has historically been the standard-bearer for political liberalization, it was widely expected that economic integration would also promote the emergence of stable democratic governments.

The existence of active, influential pro-engagement lobbies in the West has tended to blur perceptions of internal developments in both Russia and China and to dampen and delay a strong collective response to their increasingly repressive and aggressive behavior. This tendency has not gone unremarked. Writing in 2007, James Mann observed that “there are huge and growing financial incentives for prominent Americans to support the status quo in China.”<sup>154</sup> And in a book first published in 2008, journalist Edward Lucas pointed out, similarly, that “Western trade and investment in Russia has created a powerful pro-Kremlin lobby that distorts the outside view of what is happening inside the country.”<sup>155</sup> Despite such warnings, and notwithstanding numerous developments that have helped shake optimistic predictions about where both countries are headed, the presumed benefits of economic interdependence continue to provide a strong rationale for trying to maintain the best possible relations with Russia and China.

Eager to preserve continued access to the Western economies, Russia and China have, for their part, tried to avoid actions that would be so egregious as to provoke a reexamination or even a reversal of the policy of engagement. The precise location of the line which, if crossed, would trigger such a response is difficult to discern in advance. At least in the case of China, however, the bar appears to be set quite high and to have risen with the passage of time. Since the early post-Tiananmen period, as its wealth, power, and confidence have grown, the CCP regime has become much less concerned about being sanctioned for its treatment of dissidents, its predatory trade policies, or its aggressive actions in cyberspace. To judge from recent events in the

<sup>154</sup> James Mann, *The China Fantasy* (New York: Viking, 2007), 59.

<sup>155</sup> Lucas, *The New Cold War*, 122.

maritime domain, Beijing evidently believes that it can also engage in quite risky and provocative military and paramilitary behavior without suffering serious economic consequences.

Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine finally succeeded in triggering at least a temporary interruption in its economic relations with the West. This reaction was slow in coming, however, and in part because of the costs it imposes on Western actors, it is unlikely to persist. Even after it invaded and annexed Crimea in the spring of 2014, Russia faced only limited sanctions from the West, mostly targeted against individuals thought to have had some direct involvement in the invasion. It was only several months later, after separatist forces in Ukraine used a Russian missile to shoot down a civilian airliner, that the United States, the EU, and others took steps that dramatically constricted trade and financial flows. Although nothing on the ground had changed, by 2016 some European governments had come under heavy pressure from domestic interest groups urging that sanctions be lifted and normal business relations be restored.<sup>156</sup> As has since become apparent, various "friends of Russia" were also working behind the scenes to bring about a similar relaxation in U.S. policy.

## ***2. Defend against Penetration and Subversion***

Like their illiberal predecessors, today's authoritarian regimes face the familiar challenge of maintaining control over people who have been denied the right to choose their own leaders. In contrast to their Communist forebears, however, Russia and China have not sought simply to cut themselves off from the liberal democratic world; to the contrary, as has been suggested, both wish to continue to enjoy the benefits of deep economic engagement with the West, even as they defend themselves against its potentially deadly political consequences. This balancing act has been made all the more difficult by the enabling impact of technological change on cross-border flows of information and ideas. As in other areas, the Russian and Chinese approaches to this problem have tended to converge over time, with Beijing generally in the lead and Moscow following behind. Both regimes are now attempting to implement what amounts to a system of layered defense: controlling inward flows of information, squelching dissent before it can take root, and inoculating their populations to make them less susceptible to dangerous ideas.

The correlation between the collapse of the Soviet empire and the explosive growth of the Internet caused many Western observers to conclude that, in the information age, authoritarianism had become unsustainable. Surely, as President Bill Clinton famously put it, trying to control the Internet would prove to be as futile as "trying to nail Jell-O to the wall."<sup>157</sup> One of the more striking and surprising features of the post-Cold War era, unfortunately, has been just how hard authoritarian regimes have worked at this seemingly impossible task, how many resources they have invested in it, and the degree to which they have actually been successful.

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<sup>156</sup> "Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Germany Says EU Sanctions Against Kremlin Could Be Lifted," *International Business Times*, May 27, 2016.

<sup>157</sup> "Full Text of Clinton's Speech on China Trade Bill," *New York Times*, March 9, 2000.

China has been the world leader in this regard, spending lavishly in order to construct a “Great Firewall” that insulates its national network from the rest of the worldwide web and deploying “an army of cyber-police, hardware engineers, software developers, web monitors and paid online propagandists to watch, filter, censor and guide Chinese Internet users.”<sup>158</sup>

Russia began the twenty-first century with comparatively limited restrictions on Internet access and content and as recently as 2008 it was largely uncensored.<sup>159</sup> Following the events of 2011, however, Moscow began to take a series of steps to tighten its control, first insisting that service providers block access to websites deemed offensive by the regime.<sup>160</sup> Even more stringent controls were implemented in the wake of the Ukraine crisis and, according to Freedom House, by 2015 Russia had gone from an Internet freedom rating of “partly free” to the lowest category of “not free.”<sup>161</sup> In 2016, the Putin regime promulgated a new “information security doctrine” and joined with Beijing in promoting the concept of “Internet sovereignty” under which all governments claim the right to regulate the use of the Internet within their geographic boundaries.<sup>162</sup> Moscow also publicly declared its intention to cooperate more closely with China, harnessing what one official described as that country’s acknowledged “expertise in Internet management” in order “to gain further control over Russia’s Internet.”<sup>163</sup>

Surveillance and repression are the sturdy standbys of all authoritarian regimes and both Russia and China employ these extensively, using both traditional and more modern techniques. Beijing flaunts its ability to mobilize tens of thousands of monitors and informants to keep tabs on citizens, especially in areas deemed susceptible to unrest where, according to an official slogan, “everyone is a watchman.”<sup>164</sup> Under the guise of fighting crime and preventing terrorism, both regimes have expanded their ability to monitor all forms of electronic communication taking place within as well as across their physical borders. To ensure ready access by the authorities, both now require that information collected on citizens by websites and service providers be stored in servers on their territory.<sup>165</sup> China is also pioneering the use of “big data” for “mass surveillance,” collecting information on virtually every recordable act and transaction of every citizen to compile what are euphemistically referred to as “social credit” scores.<sup>166</sup> According to

<sup>158</sup> “China’s Internet: A Giant Cage,” *Economist*, April 6, 2013.

<sup>159</sup> Lucas, *The New Cold War*, 55.

<sup>160</sup> See Miriam Elder, “Russia Adopts Stringent Internet Controls Amid Censorship Concerns,” *Guardian*, July 11, 2012.

<sup>161</sup> See the country profile in “Freedom on the Net 2016,” Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN%202016%20Russia.pdf>.

<sup>162</sup> Sergey Sukhankin, “Russia’s New Information Security Doctrine: Fencing Russia from the ‘Outside World?’” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, December 16, 2016.

<sup>163</sup> These are the words of Russia’s chief Internet censor, Konstantin Malofeev. Mark C. Eades, “China and Russia Join Hands for Internet Censorship,” Foreign Policy Association, May 2, 2016.

<sup>164</sup> Tania Branigan, “Chinese Police Chief Boasts of Recruiting One in 33 Residents as Informants,” *Guardian*, February 10, 2010; “China: No End to Tibet Surveillance Program,” Human Rights Watch, January 18, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/18/china-no-end-tibet-surveillance-program>.

<sup>165</sup> Chris Mirasola, “Understanding China’s Cybersecurity Law,” Lawfare, November 8, 2016, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/understanding-chinas-cybersecurity-law>; “Putin Brings China’s Great Firewall to Russia in Cybersecurity Pact,” Texas A&M Cybersecurity Center, November 29, 2016, <https://cybersecurity.tamu.edu/putin-tightens-internet-control/>.

<sup>166</sup> “Big data, meet Big Brother: China invents the digital totalitarian state,” *Economist*, December 17, 2016.

the government, these will be used to build “a culture of sincerity.”<sup>167</sup>

In addition to possible exposure to flows of news and information, expanded engagement with the West has brought with it new ideas, social practices, and forms of organization. Thus, in both Russia and China, the 1990s saw increased activity by a growing number of lawyers, civil society advocacy groups, and NGOs, including some that received money from foundations based in other countries. Among their other activities, these individuals and groups offered protection and support for those with grievances, including grievances against the state. Not surprisingly, over the course of the past decade, lawyers, NGOs, and activists have become high-priority targets for repression by Moscow and Beijing.<sup>168</sup> Having recognized the potential danger that they pose, both regimes have gone to great lengths to neutralize or eliminate these possible focal points for opposition, further atomizing their societies and making sure that dissidents and potential “troublemakers” remain isolated and weak.

Propaganda and ideological indoctrination are the authoritarians’ last line of defense. Today’s Chinese and Russian regimes know that, no matter how hard they try, in the modern, wired world they will not be able entirely to shield their people from subversive influences. They have therefore attempted to inoculate their citizens by providing them with a countervailing set of ideas, an alternative way of looking at the world that will make them less susceptible to the appeal of Western, liberal ideology with its claims of “universal values” and its alluring emphasis on individual freedom. Moscow and Beijing have each set about to construct a distinctive belief system, supposedly rooted in their unique national histories and cultures and thus better suited to their circumstances. Not coincidentally, unlike liberalism, these ideological programs support rather than subvert the regime’s preferred form of rule by emphasizing the primacy of the collective—nation and state in the case of Russia, nation and party in the case of China—over the individual.

Not content to remain entirely on the defensive, both regimes have also become increasingly vociferous and categorical in their critiques of liberal democracy. Both stress the West’s arrogance, past crimes, and current failings; both accuse it of seeking to bring chaos and suffering to those who have the temerity to pursue a different path. Since the financial crisis, Beijing has highlighted the mismanagement of the American economy, as well as the apparent deadlock, instability, and general dysfunction of its much-vaunted democratic political system. For its part, Moscow has preferred to play up the West’s decadence, social decay, and its alleged abandonment of “traditional values.” The underlying message in both cases is the same: despite their pretensions and regardless of their past achievements, the nations of the West have little to teach and nothing to offer.

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<sup>167</sup> “China’s ‘Social Credit’ System: Turning Big Data into Mass Surveillance,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 21, 2016.

<sup>168</sup> For details, see the country reports in Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2017*, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world\\_report\\_download/wr2017-web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2017-web.pdf); and U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016*, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>.

### ***3. Deter Intervention***

The Cold War may have ended with a whimper rather than a bang, but its conclusion was nonetheless preceded by a major military victory. At the beginning of 1991, a coalition led by the United States inflicted an overwhelming defeat on large Iraqi forces, equipped with Soviet-designed weaponry, that had invaded and occupied Kuwait. The rout of the Iraqi army was achieved in part through the first large-scale American use of precision-guided conventional munitions and it was followed within a matter of months by the collapse of the Soviet Union. These events signaled the arrival of a new era in global politics. The United States now stood head and shoulders above any potential competitor. In the military domain, in particular, it evidently had the capacity to project power virtually anywhere in the world that it chose, and to defeat whatever enemies it encountered at minimal cost to its own forces.

Since the end of the Cold War, defense planners in China and Russia have had to wrestle with the question of how to counter America's overwhelming military superiority. For both powers, the most pressing danger is not so much that the United States will attack them directly (although that is also a concern) but that it will project power along their peripheries, defending those whom they might seek to attack or coerce, blocking their efforts to attain regional preponderance, and confronting them with the prospect of humiliating defeat in their own backyards. The challenge confronting both regimes has therefore been to find ways of deterring, and if necessary defeating, U.S. intervention in areas close to them, neutralizing the threat America's power projection capabilities pose to their national interests and, conceivably, to their survival. While they differ in their starting points and in the degree of emphasis that they place on nuclear as opposed to conventional forces, the Chinese and Russian approaches to this shared strategic problem have converged markedly in the past decade.

As they studied the first Gulf War (and somewhat later, the U.S.-led intervention in Kosovo), People's Liberation Army (PLA) planners were drawn to a simple conclusion: the best, and indeed the only, feasible way for China to counter America's evolving complex of reconnaissance and conventional precision strike forces was by building a comparable capability of its own. Events had shown that if the Americans were permitted to draw within range of their targets and to land the first blow they would likely leave an opponent blind, deaf, and in disarray. To prevent such a fate from befalling it, China needed to develop the capacity to disrupt enemy command, control, and intelligence systems; to detect, track, and target hostile aircraft, surface ships, and submarines operating off its coasts; and to bombard the relatively small number of fixed air and naval bases throughout the Western Pacific on which the U.S. depended to project and sustain its forces in the region.<sup>169</sup>

By the mid-1990s, Beijing was investing heavily in developing and deploying the elements of what would come to be referred to as an "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD) capability,

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<sup>169</sup> See Aaron L. Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle: The Debate Over US Military Strategy in Asia* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014).

including satellites and other surveillance systems, land-based ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles deployed on aircraft, surface ships, and submarines, as well as on land. This was a conventional (i.e., non-nuclear) response to what was seen primarily as a growing conventional threat. Although Chinese strategists occasionally hinted that a sufficiently destructive strike of any kind on their territory could provoke nuclear retaliation, Beijing did not deviate from its official policy of promising never to be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into a conflict.<sup>170</sup>

While they remained focused on strengthening their non-nuclear capabilities, Chinese planners also took steps to modernize and gradually to expand their nuclear forces. Starting in the mid-2000s, Beijing began to deploy land-mobile solid-fuel missiles and to push ahead with improved submarine-launched ballistic missiles.<sup>171</sup> The generally accepted interpretation of these developments is that they were intended to ensure that, even in the event of an American first strike, China would retain the capacity to deliver a devastating nuclear blow in response. Thus, even as they worked to improve their capacity to deter the United States and its allies from using conventional force against them, Chinese planners also sought to reduce the likelihood that, if faced with failure or defeat, the Americans might escalate to the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>172</sup>

Approaching the problem from the opposite angle, Russia too has moved toward a mixed strategy for deterring American intervention. In the early 1990s, with its economy in steep decline, Moscow lacked the resources needed to maintain, still less to modernize and improve the vast military machine it had inherited from the Soviet Union. Watching with apprehension as their own capabilities eroded while NATO advanced to the east and the United States flexed its muscles in Iraq and Kosovo, Russian military planners settled on what seemed at the time like the only feasible way of defending their nation's security. In 1993, Russia's new leaders formally abandoned the no-first-use pledge made by their Soviet counterparts at the height of the Cold War.<sup>173</sup> In its 1997 National Security Concept paper, the Yeltsin administration made clear that it reserved the right to resort to nuclear weapons if "armed aggression creates a threat to the very existence of the Russian Federation as an independent sovereign state." Three years later, Vladimir Putin's new government relaxed this provision significantly, warning that Russia might use nuclear weapons, perhaps in limited numbers, even in smaller conflicts where national survival was not immediately at stake.<sup>174</sup>

As part of the post-Cold War drawdown of its forces, the United States drastically reduced its

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<sup>170</sup> For one such suggestion, see Yu Jixun, ed., *The Science of Second Artillery Campaigns* (Beijing: PLA Press, 2004), 223.

<sup>171</sup> See Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Chinese Nuclear Forces, 2016," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 72, No. 4 (2016): 205–11.

<sup>172</sup> See M. Taylor Fravel and Evan S. Medeiros, "China's Search for Assured Retaliation," *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 48–87.

<sup>173</sup> Serge Schememann, "Russia Drops Pledge of No First Use of Atom Arms," *New York Times*, November 4, 1993.

<sup>174</sup> Nikolai Sokov, "Russia's Nuclear Doctrine," Nuclear Threat Initiative, August 1, 2004, 3–4, <http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/russias-nuclear-doctrine/>. More recent public statements of Russian doctrine appear to have backed off from this very aggressive stance and again specify a conventional threat of existential scope as a possible trigger for escalation to nuclear weapons. See a report by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Science and Technology Committee, "Russian Military Modernization," March 24, 2015, 4.



stockpile of lower-yield, shorter-range “tactical” nuclear weapons.<sup>175</sup> Russia, on the other hand, maintained a sizeable number of older systems while at the same time investing in new types of very-low-yield warheads. A CIA analysis circulated in 2000 concluded that the development of such devices “would be consistent with Russia’s increasing reliance on nuclear weapons to deter conventional as well as nuclear attacks, especially given widespread perceptions of a heightened threat from NATO and reduced capabilities of Russian conventional forces.” The fact that Russia was thought to have “no prospect of restoring its military capabilities in the foreseeable future,” and that it lagged behind in the development of advanced precision conventional weapons, made its situation even more precarious.<sup>176</sup>

Since the early 2000s, Russia has continued to stress the role of nuclear weapons in its defense policy. Major military exercises are often brought to a close with simulated nuclear attacks, sending a signal of preparedness and resolve to those watching in the West. Officials speak menacingly, if somewhat vaguely, about the possibility that if pressed too hard they might have to “escalate to de-escalate,” using limited nuclear strikes to head off impending conventional defeat and to shock an opponent into coming to terms.<sup>177</sup>

While nuclear force modernization continues to take top priority, since 2008 Moscow has also made significant investments aimed at improving its conventional capabilities.<sup>178</sup> In addition to upgrading weapons that could be used in traditional cross-border warfare—tanks, planes, and artillery pieces—Russia has been installing and improving its own version of an A2/AD network. By deploying extended range, land-based anti-aircraft and anti-ship missile systems in Murmansk, Kaliningrad, the Crimean Peninsula, and now Syria, Moscow has constructed what one of the former commanders of U.S. naval forces in Europe recently described as “an arc of steel” that now extends from the Arctic, down through the Baltic and the Black Sea, to the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>179</sup> According to one top NATO official, these A2/AD systems are “the things that worry us most” as they could have the effect of “impeding and complicating . . . reinforcements and other . . . operations.”<sup>180</sup> Rather than rely solely on the threat of nuclear escalation, Moscow, like Beijing, also seeks “deterrence by denial” through the deployment of precision conventional weapons systems intended to multiply the likely cost and complexity of any attempt to intervene along its frontiers.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>175</sup> See Hans M. Kristensen, *U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe* (Washington: Natural Resources Defense Council, February 2005).

<sup>176</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Transnational Issues, “Evidence of Russian Development of New Subkiloton Nuclear Warheads,” August 30, 2000, 7, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0001260463.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001260463.pdf).

<sup>177</sup> See Mark B. Schneider, “Escalate to De-escalate,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 143/2/1,368 (February 2017).

<sup>178</sup> For an overview, see the section on “Russian Forces” in the Third Report of the House of Commons Defence Committee, “Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two-NATO,” July 22, 2014, <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmdfence/358/35805.htm>.

<sup>179</sup> Sydney Freedberg, “Russia Builds ‘Arc of Steel’: Adm. Ferguson,” *Breaking Defense*, October 6, 2015. For an overview of these deployments, see Loic Burton, “Bubble Trouble: Russia’s A2/AD Capabilities,” *Foreign Policy Blogs*, October 25, 2016, <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2016/10/25/bubble-trouble-russia-a2-ad/>.

<sup>180</sup> Matthew Bodner, “NATO Deputy SecGen: Russia’s Anti-Access/Area-Denial Build-Up Is Biggest Worry,” *Defense News*, February 13, 2016.

<sup>181</sup> For the possible role of Russia’s A2/AD capabilities in enabling action against the Baltic states, see Stephan

## 4. *Reshape the Periphery*

If Russia and China were status quo powers, they might be content to have created a situation of mutual deterrence, one in which the United States and its allies would fear the consequences of using force against them directly or in areas immediately adjacent to their territory, but in which they too would continue to be constrained. As we have seen, however, the authoritarian capitalist powers have more ambitious goals than the mere maintenance of stability. Both seek to push outward, to assert control over territory, to expand their spheres of influence, and to demonstrate a willingness and ability to defy the West, both to their own people and to the wider world. The challenge confronting strategists of both countries in recent years has been to find ways of doing these things while at the same time controlling the risks of direct military confrontation, escalation, and war.

Moscow's approach to this problem is embodied in the concept of "new generation warfare" (NGW), as symbolized by the use of "little green men," the Russian special forces troops in unmarked uniforms who helped seize control of Crimea in 2014. The tenets of NGW grow out of an ongoing effort by senior officers and military theorists to derive general lessons from recent conflicts, especially those surrounding the so-called "color revolutions." These popular uprisings originated around the edges of the former Soviet empire in the early 2000s, spread across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, and by 2014 they appeared once again to pose a threat to the stability of states on Russia's doorstep and perhaps to Russia herself.

As portrayed by Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov, these events signal the arrival of a new phase in the history of warfare, one in which "the very 'rules of war' have changed" and in which "the role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals have grown and, in many cases, have exceeded the power of . . . weapons in their effectiveness."<sup>182</sup> The principal threat, as always, comes from the United States. Whereas at the turn of the century Washington had achieved regime change through brute force, invading its targets after first finding a suitable pretext (human rights violations in Kosovo, terrorism in Afghanistan, weapons of mass destruction in Iraq), with time and experience, its methods have grown subtler. As they did in Libya, in a future conflict the Americans and their allies will start by using propaganda, social media, and NGOs to foment unrest in a target country. Once fighting is underway, they will offer support to armed regime opponents through various means, including the covert insertion of special forces and military contractors. As conflict escalates and conditions worsen, the West will impose economic and political sanctions, possibly going so far as to establish no-fly zones and defended sanctuaries within the borders of their intended victim. At this point, and only if necessary, regular forces may be dispatched to bring a conflict

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Frühling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge," *Survival* 58, no. 2 (April–May 2016): 95–116; Alexander Lanoszka and Michael A. Hunzeker, "Confronting the Anti-Access/Area Denial and Precision Strike Challenge in the Baltic Region," *RUSI Journal* 161, no. 5 (October/November 2016): 12–18.

<sup>182</sup> Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations," *Military Review* (January–February 2016): 24.

to its inevitable conclusion. When the target regime finally collapses, the United States and its allies will support the deployment of “peacekeepers” to restore order and install a friendly, pro-Western government.<sup>183</sup>

Moscow’s response to this emerging threat has been to devise similar techniques and to be prepared to use them swiftly, and if possible preemptively, to counter an enemy’s initiatives. As described by Dmitry Adamsky, Russian strategists conceive of NGW as “an amalgamation of hard and soft power” that aims to achieve its ends “through skillful application of coordinated military, diplomatic, and economic tools.”<sup>184</sup> NGW “targets the adversary’s perception and is more about affecting the opponent’s will and manipulating his strategic choices” than destroying traditional economic and military targets.<sup>185</sup> An ideal NGW campaign would place heavy emphasis on “the informational-psychological struggle,” starting with “a massive deception and disinformation campaign” to paralyze the opponent’s decision-makers. Under the deterrent umbrella of its nuclear and conventional precision strike capabilities, Russian special forces would then conduct “subversion-reconnaissance activities” against a target state to be followed, if needed, by kinetic strikes against its political, economic, and military infrastructure and, finally, by territorial occupation.<sup>186</sup> This is essentially the playbook that Moscow followed in seizing Crimea, supporting separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine and preventing what it saw as the impending danger of that country’s full absorption into the Western order. The question now is whether, and if so where and when, Russia might try to use similar techniques to “create facts” and reassert control around its periphery, whether in a non-NATO country like Georgia or perhaps even against the Baltic states.<sup>187</sup>

China, too, wants to change the status quo, especially along its maritime frontiers. Here, in addition to achieving “reunification” with Taiwan, Beijing seeks to compel other states to recognize it as the rightful owner of islands in the East China Sea that are currently occupied by Japan and to acknowledge its claim to control most of the waters, surface features, and resources of the South China Sea. Like their Russian counterparts, Chinese strategists have been hard at work devising techniques that they hope will enable them to achieve these revisionist aims without triggering a large-scale armed clash. Their preferred approach also involves a mix of “hard” and “soft” measures, albeit one that has thus far relied more on the implicit threat of force than its actual use.

<sup>183</sup> See Charles K. Bartels, “Getting Gerasimov Right,” *Military Review* (January–February 2016): 30–38. See also the summary of a briefing by Gerasimov in Anthony H. Cordesman, “Russia and the ‘Color Revolution,’” May 28, 2014, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/140529\\_Russia\\_Color\\_Revolution\\_Full.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/140529_Russia_Color_Revolution_Full.pdf).

<sup>184</sup> Dmitry Adamsky, *Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy* (Paris: Institute Français des Relations Internationales, November 2015), 23.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>187</sup> See Michael Kofman, “The Moscow School of Hard Knocks: Key Pillars of Russian Strategy,” *War on the Rocks*, January 17, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/01/the-moscow-school-of-hard-knocks-key-pillars-of-russian-strategy/>; Phillip Karber and Joshua Thibeault, “Russia’s New Generation Warfare,” *The Potomac Foundation*, May 13, 2016, <http://www.thepotomacfoundation.org/russias-new-generation-warfare-2/>; Alexander Lanoszka, “Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe,” *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (2016): 175–95.

Since 2003, when the concept was formally approved by the Central Military Commission, Chinese analysts and planners have been exploring the possible application of what are referred to as the “three warfares.” According to the U.S. Defense Department, these are seen as “force enablers” that can help to “undermine the spirit and ideological commitment of the adversary.” Psychological warfare operations are designed to deter, shock, and demoralize, rendering an enemy less willing or able to fight. Media warfare targets domestic and international audiences in order to build support for China’s position in a crisis or impending conflict while undermining support for its adversaries. And legal warfare seeks to use international and domestic law “to claim the legal high ground . . . [and] hamstring an adversary’s operational freedom.”<sup>188</sup>

While the three warfares may originally have been conceived as an adjunct to actual armed combat, more recent writings describe them as having achieved a “breakthrough” that renders them relevant to every aspect of strategic interaction.<sup>189</sup> This is especially evident in the maritime domain, where Beijing has used an assortment of instruments from the three warfares toolkit in an attempt to expand its sphere of influence and control. Over the course of the past decade, the regime has been engaged in an ongoing media campaign, aimed at both foreign and domestic audiences, that is intended to highlight the historical basis and hence the supposed legitimacy of its extensive claims in the East and South China Seas. The Chinese authorities have sought to further bolster their position by offering their own distinctive interpretation of the international law of the sea and by passing domestic legislation and issuing decrees that they then use as the basis for asserting jurisdiction over disputed areas.<sup>190</sup>

Beijing has also been engaged in a form of psychological warfare, combining words with a variety of gestures which, while they do not involve actual violence, are designed to intimidate others and weaken their will to resist by signaling its own resolve and displaying its growing power. Thus, for example, the declaration of an ADIZ over the East China Sea was not followed by active efforts to interdict the aircraft of other countries. But it sent a clear message that Beijing believes it has the right to take such steps, and might be willing to act in the future, whether in the skies over the East China Sea or perhaps after declaring another ADIZ over disputed portions of the South China Sea.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, the creation and militarization of new

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<sup>188</sup> Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2011* (Washington: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011), 26. See also three essays by Dean Chang, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Legal Warfare,” *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, no. 2692 (May 18, 2012), <http://www.heritage.org/asia/report/winning-without-fighting-chinese-legal-warfare>; “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response,” *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, no. 2745 (November 21, 2012), [http://thf\\_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/pdf/bg2745.pdf](http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/pdf/bg2745.pdf); “Winning Without Fighting: The Chinese Psychological Warfare Challenge,” *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, no. 2821 (July 12, 2013), <http://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/winning-without-fighting-the-chinese-psychological-warfare-challenge>.

<sup>189</sup> Quote from 2014 manual used to instruct officers at the National Defense University. For a discussion of this and other recent Chinese writings on the topic, see Elsa Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares,” *China Brief* 16, no. 13 (August 2016).

<sup>190</sup> Austin Ramzy, “China’s Newest City Raises Threat of Conflict in South China Sea,” *Time*, July 24, 2012. See Geoffrey Till, “China, the “Three Warfares” and the South and East China Sea,” and Justin Nankivell, “China’s Use of Lawfare in the South China Sea Dispute,” both in *The Three Warfares*, ed. Stefan Halper (Washington DC: Office of Net Assessment, 2013), 381–411 and 427–49.

<sup>191</sup> Michael Pilger, “ADIZ Update: Enforcement in the East China Sea, Prospects for the South China Sea, and

surface features in the South China Sea has not been followed by attempts to regulate the flow of commercial shipping through adjacent waters, but it has raised the prospect that China could eventually take such action, while strengthening its ability to do so.<sup>192</sup> Russia has employed “little green men” to try to keep its aggressive actions below the threshold of direct military engagement. With a similar end in view, China has made extensive use of coast guard rather than naval vessels to enforce its claims, as well as its own “little blue men,” a maritime militia of civilian fishermen who are nevertheless trained to take part in the surveillance and harassment of hostile forces and the support and resupply of friendly ones.<sup>193</sup>

## ***5. Prevent Effective Counterbalancing***

As they press outwards against the limits and boundaries that they believe have been unfairly imposed upon them by a hostile and suspicious West, Moscow and Beijing have inevitably encountered resistance. In keeping with a veritable iron law of international politics, their increasing strength and assertiveness have inspired fear in neighboring countries and beyond, including in the United States. If the liberal democracies can coordinate and synchronize their policies, they should have more than ample resources with which to check even the most ambitious schemes of the resurgent authoritarian capitalist regimes. If they are to achieve their objectives, the revisionist powers must therefore find ways of delaying or reducing the efficiency of the West’s attempts to balance against them.

Even without any deliberate efforts on the part of the authoritarians, a desire to preserve the benefits of economic engagement with them would no doubt have acted as a brake on the balancing tendencies of the Western powers. Neither Moscow nor Beijing has been content to depend entirely on the emollient effects of commerce, however, and especially as their actions have generated more resistance, both have taken additional steps to try to prevent the consolidation of a countervailing coalition. While their goals are similar, and while each involves the use of a mix of instruments and approaches, the overall character of these two influence campaigns has been markedly different. Where Russia has chosen to rely primarily on threats and attempts at subversion, China has, at least until quite recently, generally sought to ease the anxieties of potential opponents through soothing rhetoric and the offer of inducements.

Russia’s targets are arrayed in concentric rings extending westward to include the nations of its “near abroad,” the newest members of the NATO alliance, the established democracies of “old

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Implications for the United States,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Staff Research Report, March 2, 2016, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ADIZ%20Update\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ADIZ%20Update_0.pdf).

<sup>192</sup> For an overview of the possible military implications, see Ben Dolven, Jennifer K. Elsea, Susan V. Lawrence, Ronald O’Rourke and Ian E. Rinehart, *Chinese Land Reclamation in the South China Sea: Implications and Policy Options* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, June 18, 2015), 7–12.

<sup>193</sup> See Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “Meet the Chinese Maritime Militia Waging a ‘People’s War at Sea,’” *Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 2015; and “Directing China’s ‘Little Blue Men’: Uncovering the Maritime Militia Command Structure,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, September 11, 2015, <https://ami.csis.org/directing-chinas-little-blue-men-uncovering-the-maritime-militia-command-structure/>.

Europe,” and, across the Atlantic, the United States. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, when energy prices were soaring, Moscow made repeated attempts to influence the policies of its neighbors by threatening to suspend or limit natural gas exports, doing so on at least two occasions to put pressure on Ukraine. While these incidents were nominally triggered by disputes over pricing, they also carried a clear geopolitical message: if the Central and Western European nations went too far in opposing Russia’s ambitions, they might find themselves facing severe energy shortages.<sup>194</sup>

Falling prices for oil and natural gas and deliberate efforts by the EU to diversify its sources of supply have caused Russia’s “energy weapon” to lose whatever efficacy it might once have had.<sup>195</sup> In compensation, Moscow has made increasing use of military threats against U.S. allies in Europe, a technique familiar from the Soviet era. Through a combination of official and unofficial statements, military exercises, displays of force, and weapons deployments, the Russian government has repeatedly raised the specter of a “hot war” between East and West, perhaps one that would involve the use of nuclear weapons.

While some of Moscow’s threatening declarations and gestures are general and omnidirectional in nature, most are aimed at America’s NATO allies, as well as some nominally nonaligned nations that may be contemplating closer affiliation with the West. As during the Cold War, the not-so-subtle message here is that these countries will be caught in between, and risk suffering terrible damage if they side with the United States in any future conflict. Thus, to take only a few recent examples, at the start of 2017 Russia deployed a new intermediate-range, nuclear-armed cruise missile capable of striking targets across much of Central and Western Europe.<sup>196</sup> Several months earlier, it moved shorter-range nuclear-capable ballistic missiles to the enclave of Kaliningrad, from which they can reach the Baltic republics, most of Poland, and west to the outskirts of Berlin.<sup>197</sup> At around the same time, the Russian defense ministry announced the development of a new, intercontinental-range missile known as the “Satan 2.” This weapon is capable, as the state news outlet Sputnik helpfully pointed out, of “wiping out parts of the earth the size of Texas or France.”<sup>198</sup> In 2015, Russian state TV broadcast portions of a meeting between Putin and senior military officials in which one officer was seen perusing supposedly secret plans for an unmanned submarine packed with radioactive material and capable of inflicting “unacceptable damage to a country’s territory by creating areas of wide radioactive contamination.”<sup>199</sup> Russian aircraft recently conducted mock bombing raids directed at Sweden,

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<sup>194</sup> Russia took similar steps after the 2014 Ukraine crisis. For an overview see Jakub M. Godzimirski, “European Energy Security in the Wake of the Russia-Ukraine Crisis,” *Strategic File* (Polish Institute of International Affairs) 27, no. 63 (December 2014), [https://www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=18874](https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=18874).

<sup>195</sup> Tim Boersma, “The End of the Russian Energy Weapon (That Arguably Was Never There),” Brookings Institution, March 5, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2015/03/05/the-end-of-the-russian-energy-weapon-that-arguably-was-never-there/>.

<sup>196</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “This Is the Ground-Launched Cruise Missile that Russia Has Reportedly Just Deployed,” *Washington Post*, February 15, 2017.

<sup>197</sup> “Russia Transfers Nuclear-Capable Missiles to Kaliningrad,” *Guardian*, October 8, 2016.

<sup>198</sup> Sebastian Shukla and Laura Smith-Spark, “Russia Unveils ‘Satan 2 Missile, Could Wipe Out France or Texas, Report Says,” *CNN*, October 27, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/26/europe/russia-nuclear-missile-satan-2/>.

<sup>199</sup> Matthew Bodner, “Russia Leaks Dirty-Bomb Submarine Drone in State TV Broadcast” *Defense News*, November 13, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/submarines/2015/11/13/russia-leaks-dirty-bomb-submarine-drone-state-tv-broadcast/75710806/>.

and Foreign Ministry Sergey Lavrov subsequently warned that if the country joined NATO, it would face unspecified military consequences.<sup>200</sup>

Not content simply to intimidate other nations, Moscow has also been seeking to infiltrate, weaken, and where possible, to change their governments, bringing to power leaders who will be more favorably disposed toward Russia and less inclined to cooperate against it. The focus of these efforts has shifted westward with the passage of time. Russia's first targets were the recently minted and, in some cases, quite fragile democracies of Eastern and Central Europe, including Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. Here, Moscow has taken advantage of the local need for investment capital, weak or underdeveloped mechanisms for the control of corruption, and the presence of "prominent pro-Russian businessmen-turned-politicians" to gain influence and weaken democratic institutions.<sup>201</sup>

Especially since the 2008 financial crisis, the Kremlin has expanded its influence operations in Western Europe, forming relationships with anti-EU, generally right-wing or populist political parties in Germany, France, and the UK, among other countries, and assisting them with a mix of direct financial support and elaborate disinformation campaigns aimed primarily at discrediting their opponents and boosting their electoral prospects. According to a recent report, the purpose of this activity is "to cultivate a network of organizations and individuals that support Russian economic and geopolitical interests, denounce the EU and European integration, propagate a narrative of Western decline, and vote against EU policies on Russia (most notably sanctions)." In the long run, Moscow aims to "[weaken] transatlantic institutions and [undermine] liberal values."<sup>202</sup>

As has now been widely reported, the Russian security services have recently sought to apply some of the same techniques that they had developed in Europe to the American political process. According to a subsequent assessment by the U.S. intelligence community, in 2016 President Putin ordered an influence campaign intended to "undermine public faith in the US democratic process," damaging the Democratic candidate and assisting her Republican opponent. Russian military intelligence also conducted cyber operations against the Democratic National Committee, releasing damaging information through WikiLeaks. In addition, the Russian government used "state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or 'trolls'" to circulate stories intended to shape the perceptions and influence

<sup>200</sup> Damien Sharkov, "Russia Practiced Nuclear Strike on Sweden: NATO Report," *Newsweek*, February 4, 2016; Michael Winiarski, "Russia Issues NATO Warning to Sweden," *Dagens Nyheter*, April 29, 2016.

<sup>201</sup> Heather A. Conley, James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov, and Martin Vladimirov, *The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2016), 7.

<sup>202</sup> Alina Polyakova, Marlene Laruelle, Stefan Meister, and Neil Barnett, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses: Russian Influence in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom* (Washington DC: Atlantic Council, November 2016), 6. Regarding Moscow's disinformation campaigns, see Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian 'Firehose of Falsehood' Propaganda Model* (Santa Monica CA: RAND, 2016). On its support for populist parties, see Dalibor Rohac, Edit Zgut, and Lorant Gyori, *Populism in Europe and Its Russian Love Affair* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2016).

the choices of American voters.<sup>203</sup> The evident intent of all this activity was either to weaken a potential president deemed likely to take a hostile stance toward Russia or to help elect one who might be more favorably disposed and perhaps, as a result, less likely to rally a balancing coalition against it.

While China has engaged in extensive cyberespionage for strategic and economic purposes, so far as is known it has not attempted to use such techniques to directly influence the electoral processes of the United States or any other major power. Beijing's information operations have been aimed more at shaping the perceptions of foreign governments and publics, primarily (though not exclusively) for purposes of reassuring them about its capabilities and intentions. Where Russia seeks to pressure and intimidate its neighbors in order to discourage them from balancing too vigorously against it, at least until quite recently China has generally aimed to persuade others that it is not really a serious threat.

Like Russia, China has a long history of engaging in political warfare, which its leaders conceive as comprising activities intended to “influence the emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a matter favorable to one's own objectives.”<sup>204</sup> The targets of Chinese influence operations may be thought of as comprising a pyramid. At the pinnacle are “old friends,” or “sympathetic counterpart[s],” current or former senior diplomats, political leaders, business executives, and military officers with whom it seeks, in the words of Richard Solomon, to “cultivate a personal relationship, a sense of ‘friendship’ (*you-yi*) and obligation” and then to “manipulate feelings of good will, obligation, guilt, or dependence” in order to achieve its objectives.<sup>205</sup> Since the start of its process of “reform and opening up,” China has been able to rely on an assortment of “old friends” to explain away its troubling behavior, smooth over differences, and deliver reassuring messages about its intentions to Washington and other capitals.

Moving down from the peak of the influence pyramid, the last several decades have been marked by a rapid proliferation of venues for engagement and exchange between Chinese and Western scholars and policy analysts. None of these people carries the same weight as a top business executive or former high-ranking government official, but they collectively play an important role in interpreting events and setting the terms of discussion and debate in their respective countries. Experts exchange visits to conduct interviews and research, attend bilateral and multilateral conferences on various topics, and participate in joint research projects.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Background to ‘Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections’: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution,” January 6, 2017, ii, [https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA\\_2017\\_01.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf).

<sup>204</sup> Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” Project 2049 Institute, October 14, 2013, 4.

<sup>205</sup> Richard H. Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior: Pursuing Interests Through ‘Old Friends’* (Washington DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1999), 4. Regarding the CCP's long-standing policy of “using foreign strength to promote China,” see Anne-Marie Brady, “China's Propaganda and Perception Management Efforts, Its Intelligence Activities that Target the United States, and the Resulting Impacts on U.S. National Security” (testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission), April 30, 2009.

<sup>206</sup> See, for example, Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust* (Washington DC: Brookings, March 2012).



From Beijing's perspective, the purpose of all this activity is once again to reinforce favorable perceptions of China's intentions, to dispel "strategic distrust," and to highlight the possibilities for cooperation.

Finally, at the base of the pyramid are activities aimed at shaping mass opinion in other countries. Since the 1990s, Beijing has greatly increased its investment in media directed at foreign audiences and has sought to increase the subtlety and sophistication of its message. The regime now regularly hires Western public relations firms and, according to scholar Anne-Marie Brady, deploys "many of the methods of public opinion management which originated in modern industrialized societies such as the United States."<sup>207</sup> Another new weapon in Beijing's expanding political warfare arsenal is the network of so-called Confucius Institutes that have sprung up around the world since the early 2000s. Notwithstanding their ostensibly non-political mission of introducing foreigners to China's ancient language and culture, the growing network of government-funded institutes has been described by one high-ranking CCP official as "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up."<sup>208</sup> In addition to conveying a generally favorable image of China and, at least implicitly, a soothing message about its intentions, the Institutes have also allegedly been involved in attempts to restrict discussion of certain sensitive topics (including human rights, Tibet, and religious freedom) at events they sponsor.<sup>209</sup>

Professions of peaceful intent are central to China's message to the United States and the wider world. There is nothing especially remarkable about this; only a handful of countries today would describe their intentions differently. More noteworthy than the basic message itself are the lengths to which the regime goes to transmit and reinforce it and the variety of arguments and channels through which it seeks to do so.

Chinese analysts are at pains to denounce and refute what they refer to as the "so-called China threat theory," a term used to refer to any suggestion that their growing wealth and power could legitimately be seen as a danger by other countries.<sup>210</sup> Scholars and policymakers maintain, moreover, that their country is not only peace-loving and nonaggressive *at present*, but that it always has been and always will be. As former State Counselor Dai Bingguo put it in one widely quoted 2010 article, "China has no culture or tradition of seeking expansion or hegemony. Throughout our history of thousands of years, benevolence and harmony are at the heart of our political and cultural tradition, which values harmony, good-neighborliness and friendship with all." Even at the peak of its power, when it "accounted for 30 percent of the world's GDP," China "never sought expansion or hegemony." This, of course, is in marked contrast to other nations, which in recent memory regularly engaged in "invasion, plundering, war [and]

<sup>207</sup> Brady, "China's Propaganda and Perception Management Efforts," 6.

<sup>208</sup> Li Changchun, member of the Politburo Standing Committee, quoted in "A Message from Confucius: New Ways of Projecting Soft Power," *Economist*, October 22, 2009, <http://www.economist.com/node/14678507>.

<sup>209</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth Redden, "Censorship at China Studies Meeting," *Inside Higher Ed*, August 6, 2014, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/08/06/accounts-confucius-institute-ordered-censorship-chinese-studies-conference>.

<sup>210</sup> See, for example, Li Yang, "'China Threat' Theory Is Absurd," *China Daily*, September 2, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-09/02/content\\_20852997.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-09/02/content_20852997.htm).

expansion.” China does not “seek hegemony and will never compete with other countries for leadership in our region, seek so-called joint hegemony or follow so-called Monroe Doctrine . . . We do not export our social system or development model and we respect the choices of the people of other countries.”<sup>211</sup> In short, China’s neighbors have nothing to fear from the growth of its power.

Although China’s information operations are still heavily focused on the transmission of reassuring messages, there have been some subtle shifts in recent years, especially as regards its interactions with several neighboring countries that happen also to be U.S. friends and allies. Official statements continue to emphasize the fact that China poses no threat and, to the contrary, that its growing economy presents ever-expanding opportunities for “win-win cooperation” with all countries, and especially those around its continental and maritime peripheries. This is the central theme of the rhetoric surrounding the so-called “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative, an ambitious program of infrastructure investment projects that will be discussed more fully below.

At the same time, however, as China’s economy has grown in size, and as its relative importance as a trade and investment partner for its neighbors has increased, Beijing has begun to look for ways to convert market clout into diplomatic influence. While generally careful not to pose the alternatives in stark, binary terms, Chinese spokesmen have done little to discourage the notion that, at some point, Asian countries will have to choose between continued, close security relations with the United States and expanding trade and investment ties with China. This sometimes involves a kind of rhetorical sleight of hand, with Chinese officials highlighting the contradiction between the trade and security ties of third parties even as they deny the necessity of choosing between the two. Thus, for example, during a recent visit to Australia, Premier Li Keqiang reassured an audience of businessmen and parliamentarians that “we respect your choices in your foreign policy,” but he went on to say that “we don’t want to see [Australia] taking sides, as happened during the Cold War.” Of course, given that Australia is already a treaty ally of the United States, “not taking sides” would mean, in effect, distancing or even eventually detaching itself from Washington in order to maintain its strong commercial ties to China.<sup>212</sup>

Along with the other steps it has taken recently to assert its claims and defend its “core interests,” Beijing has begun to experiment with various means of deploying its market power to impose costs on U.S. allies. In 2010, following the initial escalation of tensions over the Senkakus, the Chinese authorities evidently imposed a temporary restriction on exports of rare earth minerals to Japan.<sup>213</sup> Two years later, as part of its campaign to assert control over islands in the South

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<sup>211</sup> Dai Bingguo, “Stick to the Path of Peaceful Development,” *China Daily*, December 13, 2010, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-12/13/content\\_11689670.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-12/13/content_11689670.htm).

<sup>212</sup> Jonathan Pearlman, “Canberra Need Not Fear a ‘China Choice’, Says Li,” *Straits Times*, March 25, 2017. For more on the necessity of choice, see an interview with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, “Singapore Could Face Choice between US or China, PM says,” *BBC*, February 28, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39103774>.

<sup>213</sup> Keith Bradsher, “Amid Tension, China Blocks Vital Exports to Japan,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2010.

China Sea, Beijing effectively blocked imports of bananas from the Philippines.<sup>214</sup> Neither of these actions was aimed directly at the target country's alliance with the United States. Nevertheless, both incidents served to highlight the fact that, despite the U.S. commitment to come to their defense in the event of a physical attack, if they took actions that displeased Beijing, Americas' allies could still find themselves vulnerable to economic coercion.

China's recent actions constricting trade with South Korea offer a more direct example of the linkage between balancing behavior and economic pressure. In retaliation for Seoul's decision to host elements of an advanced U.S. missile defense system, which it sees as aimed at its own nuclear forces rather than North Korea's, Beijing has taken a series of gradually escalating steps: barring visits by "K-pop" bands, blocking charter flights, banning imports of cosmetics, and shutting down the outlets of a major South Korean retail chain.<sup>215</sup> None of these measures has been sufficient, in itself, to cause Seoul to rethink its position, and the effort to compel it to do so may ultimately fail and could even backfire, at least in the short run. But the message being sent is clear enough: those who defy Beijing's wishes and give priority to security relations with Washington will end up paying a heavy economic price.

## ***6. Build an Alternative, Illiberal Order***

Despite their increased assertiveness and recent successes, the authoritarian capitalist powers still feel themselves to be embattled, threatened, and encircled. At least for the foreseeable future, they must continue to live in a world in which the United States remains the preponderant power and in which, as they see it, the most important international institutions and the most widely accepted rules and norms were crafted to reflect its values and serve its interests. Even if they wanted to, the authoritarian capitalists are not yet strong enough to make a frontal assault aimed at overthrowing the existing international system. Instead, as we have seen, they have sought to take maximum advantage of the opportunities that the current order provides while defending themselves as best they can against the dangers that it poses. In addition to hardening their own societies against subversion, deterring intervention, pushing outwards around their peripheries, and seeking to slow the formation of counterbalancing coalitions, both Moscow and Beijing have also set about to build new multilateral mechanisms of various kinds that they believe will help to ensure the survival of their illiberal regimes. These structures are regional rather than global in scope, but they have already begun to extend across much of Eurasia and could eventually provide the foundation for an integrated authoritarian subsystem, nested within the larger liberal international order.

Whether there will be one reasonably cohesive subsystem or perhaps two contending ones

<sup>214</sup> Jane Perlez, "Dispute Between China and Philippines Over Island Becomes More Heated," *New York Times*, May 11, 2012.

<sup>215</sup> Kim Tae-woo, "Beijing's Korea Bashing over THAAD: Is It Someone Else's Problem for Washington?" *PacNet*, no. 25 (March 23, 2017), <http://us8.campaign-archive2.com/?u=fd9b07c6818bebcd9951d95&id=e53d1b18c9&e=f288bada2a>.

will depend on the state of relations between Moscow and Beijing. At least for the moment, these appear to be quite good. China and Russia have been collaborating on energy, technology transfer, and arms sales since the early 1990s, and in 2001, the two nations signed a twenty-year Treaty of Friendship. The sense that the two authoritarian powers face a common ideological threat was heightened by the color revolutions of 2003–2005 and the Bush administration’s proclaimed commitment to spreading democracy under its “freedom agenda.” Bilateral cooperation has grown even deeper and more intense since 2014, as Western sanctions have pushed Moscow closer to Beijing. The Russian and Chinese governments have recently agreed to an assortment of new energy and infrastructure development projects and they have also initiated a series of bilateral military exercises of unprecedented scope and complexity. While Moscow and Beijing are not bound by any formal commitment, and while they continue to eye one another with a degree of mutual suspicion, especially as regards their overlapping interests in Central Asia, some analysts describe their emerging relationship as having evolved to the point where it constitutes a “soft alliance.”<sup>216</sup>

Russia and China are still heavily reliant on trade and investment with the advanced industrial economies and certainly would prefer to preserve their access for as long as possible. In recent years, however, both Moscow and Beijing have begun to consider ways in which they might be able to reduce their dependence on and vulnerability to the West. In addition to seeking expanded trade with China, since 2014 Moscow has also intensified its ongoing efforts to integrate Russia’s immediate neighbors into a Eurasian Economic Union. The EEU’s current membership includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as Russia, but President Putin has declared his desire to expand it to include all the former Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic states.<sup>217</sup> As Lilia Shevtsova explains, the EEU’s functions are strategic as well as economic: Moscow’s goal is to “preside over a bloc that will counterbalance the EU,” thereby helping to ensure the survival of personalized, authoritarian rule in all the member states.<sup>218</sup> Closer to home, at Putin’s direction, Russia has also raised tariffs in order to encourage the development of domestic industry and reduce dependence on imports.<sup>219</sup> The goal of these initiatives, in the words of Hill and Gaddy, is “to make Russia and [Putin’s] regime robust in the face of global challenges.”<sup>220</sup>

Beijing’s efforts in this regard are even more ambitious and extensive. The Chinese government has recently introduced an array of new measures intended to encourage the “indigenous

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<sup>216</sup> See Alexander Gabuev, “A ‘Soft Alliance’? Russia-China Relations After the Ukraine Crisis,” European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief 126 (February 2015), [http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/a-soft-alliance-russia-china-relations-after-the-ukraine-crisis\\_alexander-gabuev.pdf](http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/a-soft-alliance-russia-china-relations-after-the-ukraine-crisis_alexander-gabuev.pdf). Also Charles Clover, “Russia and China Learn From Each Other as Military Ties Deepen,” *Financial Times*, June 21, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/a3e35348-2962-11e6-8b18-91555f2f4fde>.

<sup>217</sup> Andrew Rettman, “Armenia to Join Russia Trade Bloc, Surprises EU,” *EUObserver*, September 3, 2013, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/121304>.

<sup>218</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past in Russia,” in *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy* ed. Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner and Christopher Walker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 44.

<sup>219</sup> Laura Solanko, “Opening Up or Closing the Door for Foreign Trade—Russia and China Compared,” Bank of Finland/Institute for Economies in Transition, *Policy Brief* (August 2016): 6.

<sup>220</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 247.

innovation” of cutting-edge technologies and to diminish dependence on information and communications technology systems designed and built in the West.<sup>221</sup> In 2013, Xi Jinping also launched the aforementioned One Belt, One Road initiative, a set of costly infrastructure development projects which, if completed, would link much of Eurasia through a massive network of railroads, highways, pipelines, and fiber optic cables. In addition to extending its influence, this initiative is evidently designed to diversify China’s access to markets and resources and to reduce its vulnerability to Western trade sanctions or naval blockades.<sup>222</sup> In conjunction with these more tangible projects, Beijing has also begun to promote the wider use of its own currency and has established a variety of mechanisms for enabling cross-border financial transactions. These bypass existing, Western-dominated institutions, thereby reducing the susceptibility of China and its regional trading partners to scrutiny and possible sanctions.<sup>223</sup>

To help finance the OBOR, Beijing created the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2014, and a year later played a leading role in establishing the New Development Bank (NDB). These entities, both of which are headquartered in Beijing, are widely seen as providing alternatives to the World Bank or other Western-controlled sources of funding. In contrast to those Western sources, these new institutions will not impose governance conditions, such as requiring proof of progress on improving transparency and countering corruption in return for loans. Together with its own direct investments, Beijing evidently intends to use these new mechanisms not only to fund infrastructure projects and promote economic development but also to help the other poorer, weaker autocratic regimes around its periphery resist Western pressures for political reform.

Separately and together, Russia and China have taken a variety of other steps to enhance the security of their own borders by strengthening cooperation with their authoritarian neighbors. In 2001, Beijing launched the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) together with Russia and four Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), through which they have sought to counter the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Beijing evidently hopes to expand the SCO’s activities, presumably to help protect some of its planned investment in Central Asian infrastructure and resources under the OBOR initiative. A few months after OBOR was announced, China hosted the SCO’s largest joint military exercise to date.<sup>224</sup> For its part, Moscow has been trying to breathe new life into its Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Originally intended to bind the former Soviet republics in a collective defense structure that would mirror NATO, the CSTO has lost members since its founding in 1992, but still provides a venue for security cooperation with Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>221</sup> McGregor, “China’s Drive for ‘Indigenous Innovation.’”

<sup>222</sup> See Nadège Rolland, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer?” *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2017): 127–43.

<sup>223</sup> See the discussion in Nadège Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Seattle WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017).

<sup>224</sup> “SCO Exercise Peace Mission 2014 to Involve 7,000 Troops,” *TASS*, August 19, 2014.

<sup>225</sup> See “Russian-Led CSTO Alliance Vows to Face Down Threats, From Europe to Central Asia,” *Sputnik*, October 16, 2016.

Working through the EEU, SCO, and CSTO, Russia and China have helped local rulers retain their grip on domestic political power by, among other measures, exchanging information on dissidents and regime opponents, sharing “techniques of political control,” and promoting “state cooperation in refoulement of exiles and the cross-border abduction of individuals targeted by security agencies.”<sup>226</sup> Outside the realm of hard, coercive power, Moscow and Beijing have also intensified efforts to construct and spread what Alexander Cooley refers to as authoritarian “counternorms and counterpractices.” Thus, as they have done at home, the authoritarian big powers have encouraged others to use appeals to “civilizational diversity” and calls for the defense of “traditional values” to rally support from their own people and to defend themselves against “liberal democracy’s universalism—its claim to be the sole legitimate form of human governance.”<sup>227</sup> According to Carl Gershman, the president of the National Endowment for Democracy, the goal of these efforts is “to replace established norms contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international covenants with alternative norms based on unrestricted state sovereignty and justifying harsh measures against political and ethnic dissidents, who are often called terrorists.” As we have seen, Moscow and Beijing have been especially eager to gain wider acceptance for the concept of “Internet sovereignty” and are becoming “more assertive internationally and regionally [in] promoting cybersecurity policies that emphasize concepts of state security at the expense of human rights.”<sup>228</sup>

Both Russia and China appear to envision a regional system of like-minded states extending across much of Eurasia. United in a regional economy encompassing a significant fraction of the world’s population and linked together by a network of roads, railways, pipelines, and fiber optic cables, its members would cooperate in policing their populations, defending their frontiers (physical and virtual) against encroachment by democratic forces and ideals, and regulating their interactions with the wider global economy.

Moscow and Beijing would prefer that such a bloc have semi-permeable boundaries; in addition to trading with one another, its members would ideally be free to export whatever they wanted to the rest of the world and to import whatever they needed, including capital, technology, and natural resources. The authoritarians would be able to reach into the societies and political systems of the democracies at will in order to manipulate their behavior, but they would retain sufficient control of their own boundaries to block competitive goods, unfiltered information, and dangerous ideas.

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<sup>226</sup> Carl Gershman, “A Strategy for Democratic Renewal,” National Endowment for Democracy, May 27, 2016, <http://www.ned.org/a-strategy-for-democratic-renewal/>.

<sup>227</sup> Alexander Cooley, “Countering Democratic Norms,” in *Authoritarianism Goes Global*, ed. Diamond et al., 118–21. See also David Lewis, “The ‘Moscow Consensus’: Constructing Autocracy in Post-Soviet Eurasia,” *Open Democracy*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/david-lewis/moscow-consensus-constructing-autocracy-in-post-soviet-eurasia>.

<sup>228</sup> Gershman, “A Strategy for Democratic Renewal.” See also Mark C. Eades, “China and Russia Join Hands for Internet Censorship,” *Foreign Policy Blogs*, May 2, 2016, <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2016/05/02/china-and-russia-join-hands-for-internet-censorship/>.

# Conclusion

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## *Contrasts*

Despite their different evolutionary trajectories, Russia and China are members of the same species; their political systems, economic structures, and ideological programs are similar to one another in important respects and they differ markedly in each dimension from other regime types and, in particular, from the liberal democracies. Both Putin and Xi Jinping are “strongman” rulers, with considerable authority and decision-making power, who preside over political systems that go to great lengths to crush dissent and do not permit open debate or free elections. Both also deploy rhetoric that attacks the supposed universalism of “Western values,” fuels historic grievances and warns of foreign threats to national identity and survival.

In addition to their notable similarities, however, the two main exemplars of nationalist authoritarian capitalism also have a number of clear differences in anatomy and behavior. Russia’s economy is obviously smaller and less diverse than China’s, its ideology is more flexible and improvisational, and its regime appears to be more brittle. Xi Jinping sits atop a massive, heavily bureaucratic party-state apparatus whose structures penetrate down through every level of society and the economy. Putin, by contrast, presides over a system that is far less thoroughly institutionalized and in which he is not only the key player but, on many issues, the sole decision-maker. Everyone in positions of authority was put there by Putin on the basis of their personal connections and their loyalty to him. As Hill and Gaddy put it, Putin’s Russia is run not by an “old-boy network” but by a “one-boy network” in which “there are only vertical links up to Putin . . . and no real horizontal ties. Everyone, no matter who, needs to check back with Putin or refer back to Putin to legitimate his own positions, ideas, or general standing.”<sup>229</sup> If Putin were to drop dead tomorrow, it is uncertain how his successor would be selected, still less who it might be, and it is by no means obvious how the current regime would reconstitute itself or whether it could even survive. The same cannot be said of China.

Although it has proven to be quite effective at killing, jailing, or exiling highly visible opponents, Putin’s regime also appears less well-equipped than its Chinese counterpart to exert control over the country’s population as a whole. While it owns or has a tight grip on the major television networks and newspapers, Moscow’s ability to restrict the free flow of information over the Internet lags behind Beijing’s. The content of Putin’s ideological program has also evolved in ways that may have strengthened its appeal to poorer, older, and more socially conservative Russians while exerting less of a hold over the rising generation. Recent, widespread demonstrations give some indication that this may be the case, but they also illustrate the comparative weakness of Russia’s institutions of social control.<sup>230</sup> China may experience

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<sup>229</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 219.

<sup>230</sup> David Filipov, “Russian Police Arrest Anti-corruption Leader Navalny, Hundreds More in Nationwide Rallies,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2017.



dozens or even hundreds of scattered protests each day, mostly in response to local grievances. But there is virtually no chance that, as happened in Russia, a vocal regime critic could use YouTube and social media to turn out thousands of people to demonstrate against official corruption in dozens of cities across the country. Indeed, in the wake of Tiananmen, this is precisely the scenario that the nation's extensive network of surveillance and its finely honed tools of targeted repression were built to prevent.

As we have seen, the Russian and Chinese regimes are both motivated by mixtures of resentment, ambition, and anxiety. The blend is different in each instance, however: resentment and insecurity are the dominant elements in the Russian case, insecurity and ambition in the case of China. In addition to encouraging such sentiments among the Russian people, Vladimir Putin and his colleagues do seem to harbor visceral feelings of hostility toward the West, reflecting their own formative life experiences and presumably also their continuing frustrations over Russia's persistent weakness. China's leaders too resent the West for its arrogance and its past wrongdoing, but their ritualistic invocations of history seem increasingly to be more instrumental than heartfelt and they are clearly intended primarily for public consumption.

While Russian and Chinese leaders share a fear of encirclement and subversion, in recent years those concerns have appeared to be especially intense and immediate in the Kremlin. To a considerable degree, Vladimir Putin now seems to define his objectives largely in defensive terms: he wants to remain in power and to prevent the West from making further encroachments in Russia's "near abroad." Xi Jinping has similar concerns, of course, but his ambitions are loftier than mere personal survival and border security. While he must take care to fend off proximate threats, Xi has a broad vision of himself as the steward of a Party and a system that he must preserve and pass on to his successors, and as a leader with the historic responsibility of guiding his nation toward its eventual reemergence as Asia's preponderant state and as a global power second to none.

Some of the differences in Chinese and Russian strategy and policy have already been touched upon. Of the two, Moscow has been notably more acceptant of risk, more willing to use force and threats of violence, and more brazen and aggressive in its efforts to divide and destabilize the West. While Beijing's behavior has become less cautious since Xi took power in 2013, China continues to take care to calibrate its actions so as to avoid actual armed confrontation, even with the smaller and weaker powers along its periphery; its threats are still largely implicit and involve the possible use of economic leverage as well as military action. Beijing appears content for the moment to rely primarily on propaganda or "political warfare" to shape the perceptions and policies of those who might oppose it rather than the "active measures" designed to influence or undermine democratic political processes of the sort that Russia has deployed in recent years in Europe and the United States.

## *Implications*

The preceding analysis has a number of implications for the policies of the liberal democracies: First, to the extent that the aggressive behavior of these illiberal powers is driven largely by internal preoccupations and obsessions, attempts at appeasement or efforts to find common ground for cooperation are unlikely to succeed in persuading them to alter course. Russia and China are not merely great powers; they are great powers with a particular type of domestic political regime. While neither seeks war with the West, the rulers of both believe that tension and confrontation are necessary in order for them to maintain their grip on power. Moreover, because of their fears of encirclement, what Moscow and Beijing would regard as an acceptable rearrangement of the situation along their frontiers will involve changes in the status quo that are unlikely to be acceptable to the democracies. For as long as the United States and its allies remain opposed to Chinese domination of the South China Sea, or to Russia's reabsorption of the Baltic states, Georgia, and Ukraine into its sphere of influence, continued tension and friction are inevitable and open conflict will remain a real possibility.

Of the two big illiberal powers, Russia represents a more serious near-term threat to peace and stability, while China poses a greater long-term challenge to the continued viability of the Western-led international order. Moscow's Cold War-style "rocket-rattling" and threats of nuclear use, its provocative maneuvering of conventional forces near the territory of other countries, its development of capabilities for subversion and irregular warfare, its surprisingly open use of cyberspace for purposes of political destabilization, and its demonstrated willingness to engage in cross-border aggression, all carry with them the danger of miscalculation, accident, and escalation. China's activities in the East and South China Seas carry similar risks, but at least for the moment, Beijing appears to be exercising considerable caution in avoiding actions that would sharply raise the risk of a serious military engagement with another major power. At the same time, Beijing's actions in the maritime domain represent a clear challenge to prevailing interpretations of the international law of the sea and, if allowed to proceed unchecked, would put it in a position to regulate the use of one of the world's most important maritime thoroughfares. Meanwhile, along its continental frontier, Beijing has embarked on a massive infrastructure and investment program which, if successful, could bolster authoritarian regimes across Eurasia, linking them more closely to China and effectively insulating much of the continent from further Western efforts to promote economic and political liberalization.

If Russia is more prone to risky behavior, it is also, for reasons that have been suggested, more vulnerable to economic leverage and potentially to political pressure as well. Because of its lack of diversification and substantial dependence on European markets, Russia is more susceptible to sanctions than China, and while its energy exports give it some options, it has fewer means of inflicting retaliatory punishment on its Western trading partners. Despite Moscow's paranoia about "color revolutions," and its own egregious interference in the internal affairs of the democracies, the West has actually done very little in recent years to weaken the current regime or to assist those in Russia who favor political reform. One reason that Vladimir Putin has gone

to great lengths to cultivate an image of pugnacious unpredictability may be precisely because he fears and hopes to deter such “active measures” against him. With or without external pressure, the likelihood of meaningful political change over the course of the next decade appears to be greater in Russia than in China.

Russia and China are today pursuing similar, parallel strategies of modulated aggression toward the West. While it is possible that their policies could become more closely integrated and coordinated in the future, it is also conceivable that the two could diverge from one another, perhaps even lapsing into the kind of mutual suspicion and hostility that characterized their interactions during much of the Cold War. The question confronting Western strategists is what they can do to reduce the prospects for effective cooperation between the authoritarian powers and whether—and if so, how—they should seek to drive a wedge between them.

At least for the moment, closer cooperation between Russia and China is more likely than a new Sino-Russian split. China’s growing demand for energy and its continuing need to import at least some forms of military technology make it a natural trading partner for Russia. The two authoritarians may not have a common ideology, but they share a fear of, and an animosity toward, liberalism and Western claims of universal values. Both proclaim themselves to be dissatisfied with various aspects of the existing international order. Western resistance to their attempts to alter the geopolitical status quo along their respective peripheries is also propelling Moscow and Beijing toward one another rather than pushing them apart. Even if the democracies were to offer to take a more accommodating stance toward one or the other authoritarian power, it does not follow that this would necessarily put them at odds with one another. Lifting sanctions on Moscow and even accepting its claims to a dominant influence in Ukraine would not lessen its desire to sell energy and arms to China. Nor would backing away from territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas provide Beijing with any incentive to lessen cooperation with Moscow.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States took advantage of, but did not create, doctrinal disputes and strategic mistrust between China and the Soviet Union, leaning toward the weaker of the two in order to balance more effectively against the stronger. Something similar could happen again if, for example, Russia were to experience genuine political liberalization, opening up an ideological gap between Moscow and Beijing. Alternatively, most likely as a result of the continued growth of Chinese power and its accelerating, OBOR-driven encroachment into Central Asia and even Central Europe, areas once dominated by Russia, Moscow could come to see the greatest threats to its interests and security as emanating from the East rather than the West. In the meantime, even at the risk of encouraging further cooperation between them, the democracies have no choice but to do what they can to counter both Russian revanchism and Chinese revisionism.

**The Authoritarian Challenge:  
China, Russia and the Threat to the Liberal International Order**

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