

AXIS OF AUTHORITARIANS

Implications of China-Russia Cooperation

Edited by

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Chapter 1

The Strategic Context of China-Russia Relations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter places into historical and strategic perspective the known and potential significance to the United States of China-Russia strategic cooperation.

MAIN ARGUMENT

As authoritarian, nationalist powers, China and Russia share interests and cooperate to weaken the U.S. and the other democracies. The two regimes perceive strategic opportunities in the changing global and regional balances of power to enhance their influence abroad. They share interests in subverting many of the values and rules that are embedded in the post-World War II order, such as freedom of navigation and skies, the free flow of information across borders, international rule of law, and international institutions. As nations that covet different regions—Asia and Europe, respectively—China and Russia have complementary interests that form their major strategic challenges to the U.S. Yet the two countries also have interests that conflict, stemming from their histories, competition for influence in Eurasia, disputed borders, and the widening asymmetry in their relative power. Their autocratic histories and ideological propensities suggest that China's and Russia's alignment calculations are apt to change when international and domestic circumstances make realignment advantageous.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The perceived weakness of U.S. international leadership has encouraged Chinese and Russian aggression, which is often coordinated. Consequently, the fundamentals of U.S. and allied power, economic as well as military, require immediate and sustained attention.
- China-Russia strategic cooperation poses the worst-case threat to the U.S. due to the potential for the two to wage simultaneous wars in Asia and Europe, respectively. U.S. defense planners should make this scenario their top concern, both to mitigate this threat and to win the wars should mitigating policies, including deterrence, fail.
- Because Russian interests to align with China are mixed, and Russia exhibits major weaknesses that likely make it more susceptible to Western policies than China, there may be more opportunities to alter Russia's alignment calculations than China's.

The Strategic Context of China-Russia Relations

Richard J. Ellings

President Putin is the leader of a great country who is influential around the world...He is my best, most intimate friend...Myself and President Putin agreed, in the face of a complex international situation, that China and Russia will increase mutual support and coordination in international affairs, and deepen strategic cooperation.

—Xi Jinping

I see this as an acknowledgement and an evaluation of Russia's efforts to develop a comprehensive strategic partnership with China...This is an indication of the special attention and respect on which our mutual national interests are based, the interests of our peoples, and, of course, our personal friendship.

—Vladimir Putin

Most importantly...we [Putin and I] have things to talk about...everything from trade to military to missiles to nuclear to China...[and] our mutual friend President Xi.

—Donald Trump

These statements by Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump, made in the summer of 2018, are poignant reminders of the centrality of great-power relations in international affairs and the special nature and collaboration of the two leading authoritarian powers of our time.¹

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¹ The statements from Xi and Putin are quoted by Ben Blanchard and Denis Pinchuk, “China’s Xi Awards ‘Best Friend’ Putin Friendship Medal, Promises Support,” Reuters, June 8, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-russia/chinas-xi-awards-best-friend-putin-friendship-medal-promises-support-idUSKCN1J41RO>. The statement by Trump was made during opening remarks at the Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki on July 16, 2018. “Watch Trump and Putin Speak ahead of Summit,” CNN, July 16, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2018/07/16/trump-putin-helsinki-summit-one-on-one-full-comments-vpx.cnn>.

China and Russia loom large today indeed. The U.S. National Security Strategy released in December 2017 and National Defense Strategy released in January 2018 name them as the two greatest security challenges facing the United States. Neither strategy document, however, explores the issue of strategic alignment between these two U.S. rivals.² How best to understand the strategic alignment of China and Russia, its implications for the United States, and the options available to U.S. policymakers to respond are the topics of this volume.

We start with an examination of the background and context. Highlighting this context is the remarkable dynamism in the international system today, most notably China's meteoric rise and expanding influence and Russia's provocations and revanchism. There are historical antecedents. "The fundamental problem in international relations in the contemporary world," the late, eminent scholar Robert Gilpin wrote, "is the problem of peaceful adjustment to the consequences of uneven growth of power among states, just as it was in the past."³ Twenty-four centuries earlier Thucydides made the rise of Athens the focus of the first historical study—his recounting and analysis of the Peloponnesian War. The rise and fall of the great powers, their coalitions, and the seeming inevitability of war between them have consumed the attention of some of the best minds over the past two millennia. The fortunes of the great powers set the rhythm of history.

While leading nations seek to maximize their power by acting alone and by positioning themselves internationally, they invariably contest ideologies—ideas and ideals. Their ideologies and even perceptions of the international environment are shaped by historical and cultural legacies and the nature of their domestic political systems.⁴ Underlying the analyses in this volume is an appreciation for the impact of power on international relations, history, ideologies, and political systems. Combined, these forces make the struggle between nations especially dangerous, so very often resulting in war.

² White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; and U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge," January 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

³ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 230.

⁴ For further discussion, see Ashley J. Tellis, "Overview," in *Strategic Asia: 2017–18: Power, Ideas, and Military Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research [NBR], 2017), 3–16, 5–7. See also Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia: 2015–16: Foundations of National Power in the Asia-Pacific* (Seattle: NBR, 2015); Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia: 2016–17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific* (Seattle: NBR, 2016); and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

More than at any time since the Cold War, ideologies are at stake in great-power relations. The world's major industrial power today, China, is governed by Xi Jinping, the formidable leader of a Leninist party that is conducting an extraordinary totalitarian experiment by exploiting cutting-edge surveillance technology and data analytics.⁵ His purpose is to exert unprecedented control of the country's 1.4 billion people. Russia too is led by a powerful authoritarian, Vladimir Putin, who controls the Russian media, propaganda, and cyber operations to deceive, spread rumors, twist news, infiltrate databases, steal information, and disrupt and manipulate political institutions at home and abroad. As in China, the trend in Russia is toward further repression.

Inherently insecure and fearful, these authoritarians are threatened by foreign as well as domestic forces. Concepts and examples of freedom and democracy, especially examples located near their borders, pose dangers. After a careful analysis of their behavior, Aaron Friedberg concludes the following:

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...[their] behavior both at home and abroad....As nationalistic authoritarian capitalists in a world still dominated by liberal democracies, both 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.⁶

As Mark Katz observes about Russian leadership, "because [regime change] is what the Russian elite genuinely fears, its focus on the combined threat of the United States externally and a color revolution internally has understandably led to a more aggressive strategy."⁷ Eugene Rumer agrees. His assessment is that Russian foreign policy is the purview of Putin and a small cadre of elites that surrounds him, and serves first and foremost to ensure regime survival.⁸ Putin equates himself with Russian superiority, contriving and pouncing on evidence of the unscrupulous policies and aspects of

⁵ Louise Lucas and Emily Feng, "Inside China's Surveillance State," *Financial Times*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/2182eebe-8a17-11e8-bf9e-8771d5404543>; and Carl Minzner, *End of an Era: How China's Authoritarian Revival Is Undermining Its Rise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶ Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Authoritarian Challenge: China, Russia, and the Threat to the Liberal International Order," Sasakawa Peace Foundation, August 2017, 50. Friedberg has been a senior adviser to the NBR project that produced this volume since the project's inception in 2016.

⁷ Mark N. Katz, "Putin and Russia's Strategic Priorities," in Tellis et al., *Strategic Asia: 2017-18*, 55.

⁸ Eugene B. Rumer, "Russia's China Policy: This Bear Hug Is Real," in "Russia-China Relations: Assessing Common Ground and Strategic Fault Lines," NBR, NBR Special Report, no. 66, July 2017, 13-25.

the decadent West that threaten Russia and his own rule. He manifests an ideological zeal, the “additional motive” that Friedberg references.

China’s case is similar. According to Christopher Ford, the legitimacy of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders is underpinned by perceptions that they occupy the moral high ground and at the same time are powerful realists—hence, their continuous effort to portray themselves as successfully fighting evil forces at home and abroad:

[B]eing exposed as corrupt, selfish, and immoral—and as being incompetent or incapable enough so as to allow disorder and injustice to flourish in society—would drive directly at the core of the virtocratic legitimacy narrative of every Chinese regime, including the contemporary CCP. Such criticism strikes, in effect, at its “mandate of heaven.”⁹

As if it were not complex and unruly enough, given the diverse actors involved, the international contest over power and ideologies is especially difficult to predict and prone to war because actors’ capabilities can change rapidly. With this dynamism, uncertainty spreads among states. A practitioner no less enamored with history than the ancients and modern international relations theorists, Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson, framed the effects of uneven growth thusly: “Like popularity in politics, strategic advantage may be difficult to define, but when it shifts, those who gain it and those who lose it are bound to be sensitive to the change.” The inevitable ambiguities that result from evolving power relations tend to stimulate fear, investments in defense, and coalition behavior. In Senator Jackson’s assessment, the Soviet Union’s increasingly advantageous arsenal in the late 1970s and early 1980s enabled it “directly or by proxies, to expand its influence and power.” Consequently, he argued at the time, the United States lost much freedom of action, concluding that “the element of uncertainty in crisis situations is now more serious.” There was an opportunity, he pointed out, to better balance the Soviet Union and reduce strategic uncertainty through continued, careful development of the United States’ relations with another great nation that shared the Soviet threat, China.¹⁰

Four decades later, China-Russia-U.S. relations are again assuming enormous importance in human affairs. At stake are not just bilateral or trilateral diplomatic relations. Also in play are the fundamental organizing

⁹ Christopher A. Ford, “Realpolitik with Chinese Characteristics: Chinese Strategic Culture and the Modern Communist Party-State,” in Tellis et al., *Strategic Asia: 2016–17*, 60; and Christopher A. Ford, “Puncturing Beijing’s Propaganda Bubble: Seven Themes,” New Paradigms Forum, November 20, 2015, <http://www.newparadigmsforum.com/NPFtestsite/?p=1993>.

¹⁰ Henry M. Jackson, “Foreword,” in *The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective*, ed. Herbert J. Ellison (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), viii.

principles and regimes in the international system; the prospects for a world again divided into two or three hostile, competing zones of influence and political organization; and the prospects for war—in the worst-case scenario, an unimaginably horrific nuclear World War III. Once more it appears that the constant struggle over power and ideologies has reached a critical stage. Today, out of fear of weakening international leadership and the growth of Chinese and Russian influence, a loose collection of countries—Western nations, Japan, South Korea, India, and some lesser powers—are grappling internally and with each other over ways to respond. We again live in a period of polarization and heightened uncertainty, this time arguably more acute than at any point since the 1930s.

The period before World War I and the interwar period leading up to World War II are frequently seen as analogous to the international environment today.¹¹ The similarities start with balances of power that were in great flux—what might be characterized as “skewed multipolar balances.”¹² Twice in the twentieth century, rising, dissatisfied, authoritarian powers—primarily Germany and Japan—emerged and prepared to expand their influence dramatically, taking advantage of the two major potential impediments: the slower growing, and thus weakening, dominant political power, Great Britain, and the dominant economic power still deeply resistant to assuming international leadership, the United States. From a global perspective, a process of polarization ensued, as the ambitious and status quo powers alike expanded their military capacities—in the former cases to acquire influence and domination through intimidation and outright aggression, and in the latter cases simply to avoid or deter aggression and, as needed, defend themselves. Many formed alliances as best they could to maximize their positions. The development of extraordinary economic interdependence in the early twentieth century was hailed by some as the ultimate self-interest-based deterrent.¹³ But this trend failed to hold back other forces—notably, faltering global leadership and rising nationalism

¹¹ World War II and the preceding interwar period were in many ways a continuation of World War I and its prewar era.

¹² In 1992, Edward Olsen and I invoked the term “skewed multipolarity” to describe the balance of power unfolding and destined to persist in Asia for maybe two decades. That condition changes fundamentally with the polarization that takes place when the likelihood of war looms, as the principal rising and status quo powers accelerate military preparations and strengthen coalitions. The rise of China was probable then: “[B]etween 2000 and 2010 we may see a confident China turn its attention to regional affairs, feeling no special need to work closely with the United States. At that time Japan and the United States may once again have a clear strategic basis for cooperation.” Richard J. Ellings and Edward A. Olsen, “A New Pacific Profile,” *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1992–93, 116, 124–25; and Richard J. Ellings, “Preface,” in Tellis et al., *Strategic Asia: 2017–18*, viii.

¹³ The most famous case is Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power to National Advantage* (London: William Heinemann, 1909).

driven by industrialization and authoritarianism—from propelling the outbreak of World War I. Of special note were the enduring regional interests between the Axis powers that drove their strategic collaboration during World War II. Japan set its sights on Asia, and Germany on Europe. These enduring interests were complementary, not shared. Their shared interest was expedient: dividing the attention and forces of the Allied powers, and primarily of the United States, the great power that presented the biggest potential hurdle.

Today there are many features of international affairs that echo the first half of the last century. International economic integration is high, giving some caution to China but seemingly less to Russia. Some of the principal players are new; most are not. The two leading dissatisfied powers are once again authoritarian, with starkly different ideologies than the democracies, and covet, as they have for centuries, different parts of the globe. Russia covets Europe, while China covets Asia (and beyond). They fear democracy yet sense its declining position in international leadership, and they share an expedient interest in dividing and weakening their major external worry, the United States. They work together in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, coordinate in the United Nations, conduct joint military exercises, circumvent UN sanctions to support the North Korean economy,¹⁴ threaten Japanese airspace daily with armed aircraft, mount cyberattacks around the clock against Western institutions and companies, and leap on opportunities to divide the United States and its allies. This is just a sample. The details of their extraordinary cooperation are examined in subsequent chapters.

Unlike Germany and Japan, however, Russia and China are each other's primary neighbor, and they have a history of conflict and border disputes extending back to the mid-seventeenth century. Besides Europe, Russia's enduring interests include its near abroad to the south—Central Asia and the border regions with China and Mongolia. China too sees these regions to its north and west as enduring interests. Predating the Russian intrusions, the Great Wall was built and extended over the centuries to protect China from invaders from the north and west. Moreover, working to divide the two

¹⁴ See, for example, Ian Talley and Anatoly Kurmanaev, “Thousands of North Korean Workers Enter Russia despite UN Ban,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-is-issuing-north-korean-work-permits-despite-u-n-ban-1533216752>; Ian Talley, “UN Report Faults China, Russia for Subverting North Korea Sanctions,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-n-report-faults-china-russia-for-subverting-north-korea-sanctions-1517610153>; and Gardiner Harris, “New U.S. Sanctions Target Russia for Defying Rules on North Korea,” *New York Times*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/us/politics/new-us-sanctions-target-russia-for-defying-rules-on-north-korea.html>.

nations' interests today is the gross disparity in their economic, political, and military power—the sheer dominance of China.

The starting point for this volume is placing into historical and strategic perspective the known and potential significance of China-Russia relations. The chapter seeks to answer several questions. What are the relevant lessons from the post-World War II experience? How does the fast-changing Eurasian balance of power, which has turned upside down since the Cold War, with China now enjoying tremendous advantages, raise uncertainties and affect the strategic calculus from each power's perspective? What role do ideologies play in each nation's strategic behavior? What are these countries' interests, and how might their leaders' assessments of these interests change? Finally, what core strategic issues do China-Russia relations pose for the policies of the United States and its allies?

Sino-Soviet Relations after World War II

The record of Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War is one of distinctive authoritarians operating according to their interests, which were shaped by national and international circumstances and these leaders' insecurities, ideologies, and assessments. One side attacked the political legitimacy of the other, which led to a strategic miscalculation of historic proportions that both sides wish to avoid repeating today.

The Sino-Soviet Alliance

As World War II drew to a close, the Chinese civil war expanded, with Communist forces eventually victorious and Mao Zedong formally establishing the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. As he is said to have proclaimed, "The Chinese have stood up." Mao knew, in fact, that the CCP was standing on shaky ground. China's economy was devastated. Tibet and the vast border regions were floating free of control. And in the midst of it all, Chiang Kai-shek was plotting to retake the mainland and receiving U.S. support, as he had during the civil war. Under such trying conditions, Mao had good reason to "lean to one side"—the Soviet Union—and form tight relations with China's socialist "big brother."¹⁵

¹⁵ The official announcement came in the *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily] on July 1, 1949, three months before the founding of the PRC and well before the mutual security treaty of February 1950. Recently declassified archives suggest that Mao reached the decision sometime in the prior year. See Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945-1959: A New History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

For Joseph Stalin, the initial Soviet priority in China immediately after World War II was restoring tsarist rights lost in 1905 in Russia's war with Japan. Stalin at one point even counseled the Communists to accept the Nationalist government, offering to mediate a solution to the conflict, which Mao refused. Leading figures in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) noted that Stalin's ideological commitment to socialism was taking a backseat to other Soviet interests.¹⁶ However, as the Communists made significant gains in 1947, Stalin shifted to supporting Mao directly over Chiang. By the summer of 1948, he was supplying the CCP with arms.¹⁷

If a shared Communist ideology did not in and of itself prompt Stalin's military support for Mao, it also could not resolve all the sore points between the two leaders. In addition to conflicting interests over the Changchun Railway, the port at Dalian, Port Arthur, and the status of Outer Mongolia, questions lingered over whether the Soviets would insist on preserving the treaty signed with the Nationalists in 1945 or aid the PRC in capturing Taiwan. Stalin feared that Mao might be a nationalist at heart, like Tito in Yugoslavia, and did not want Mao insisting on independence from the Soviet-led movement.¹⁸ He knew as well that the United States was actively working to split the new "brothers" apart, and to prove this he relayed intelligence to the CCP. In the treaty negotiations, Mao gained points for conceding Outer Mongolian "independence," which Stalin pursued as a territorial buffer between the Soviet Union and China. Stalin followed with major concessions on the Changchun Railway, Port Arthur, and Dalian and a large loan for China, not simply in return for Mao's concession of Outer Mongolia but more importantly to fulfill his own grand strategic objective "to bring China into the socialist bloc headed by the Soviet Union in order to control the situation in Asia and confront the Americans."¹⁹ Even as the more powerful actor, Stalin yielded on specific issues for the sake of his broader mission. At this stage, the two sides' shared interests overrode their differences.

For the much weaker China, Mao's primary goal was party-state survival. Leaning to the Soviet side made sense ideologically as well

¹⁶ Shen and Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership*, 13.

¹⁷ Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 114–15; and Shen and Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership*, 15.

¹⁸ Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86–87.

¹⁹ Shen and Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership*, 58–59.

as practically.²⁰ Scholarship on Mao helps show the reinforcing roles that ideology and the requisites of authoritarian rule played. Mao is said to have subscribed to a rather voluntarist reading of Marxism, believing in the unlimited capacity of human beings to make things possible. Prudently exercising one's will meant distinguishing between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions—the former being between enemies and requiring armed struggle, and the latter being between friends or among the people and requiring noncoercive methods. With the threat of the United States actively present within and beyond China's borders, there could be “no doubt as to what constituted the principal contradiction in the postwar international system.”²¹ “Imperialism” threatened in every way the existence—and leaders—of socialism.

The Sino-Soviet Split

With twenty-twenty hindsight, one can trace the roots of the split between China and the Soviet Union back decades, well prior to World War II. Its first clear manifestation, however, was in the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956, three years after Stalin's death.²² It was then that the CPSU under Nikita Khrushchev proposed a new foreign policy of “peaceful coexistence, peaceful transition, and peaceful competition.” Peaceful coexistence meant that capitalist and socialist countries could live together without fighting. Peaceful transition meant that the evolution of the world from capitalism to socialism could be nonviolent. And peaceful competition meant that the two systems vying peacefully with one another would facilitate that evolution.²³ On the last day of the congress, Khrushchev delivered his secret speech “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,” in which he criticized Stalin's

²⁰ A recent comprehensive assessment of Chinese grand strategy from Mao to Xi Jinping contends that protecting China has been the primary aim of every generation of PRC leaders, all of whom have viewed the country as a “brittle entity, in a world that was fundamentally dangerous.” See Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), ii.

²¹ Samuel Kim, *China, the United Nations and World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 57, 60–62, 75.

²² See Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

²³ The CPSU's rationale may have been largely pragmatic. As Khrushchev would write in *Foreign Affairs* in 1959, “In our day there are only two ways: peaceful coexistence or the most destructive war in history. There is no third choice.” Nikita S. Khrushchev, “On Peaceful Coexistence,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 1959, 7.

mistakes in war and the 1930s Great Purge.²⁴ Importantly, he blamed Stalin's wrongdoings on personal and moral shortcomings rather than on features inherent to the Soviet apparatus.

Chinese state media acknowledged the possibility of peaceful coexistence, and the three principles were endorsed at the CCP's 8th National Congress later that year.²⁵ More offensive to Mao was de-Stalinization. Mao countered that Stalin had been 30% wrong and 70% right. A *People's Daily* editorial asked, "How could it be conceivable that a socialist state which was the first in the world to put the dictatorship of the proletariat into practice, which did not have the benefit of any precedent, should make no mistakes of one kind or another?" The editorial affirmed, however, the "forever invincible, great camp of peace and socialism, headed by the Soviet Union."²⁶ Despite this show of support from Mao, de-Stalinization prompted unintended confusion and rebellion in other Communist states, notably Poland and Hungary in 1956. In a sign of insecurity, Khrushchev turned to Mao for advice on both European incidents, and at the Moscow Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in 1957, Mao appeared to function "as the mentor and guide of the international Communist movement" by redefining "peaceful transition" and the acceptability of nuclear war.²⁷

Between 1958 and 1960, Mao provoked disputes with the Soviet Union either to quell domestic opposition to his programs²⁸ or to push what he termed continuous revolution.²⁹ In 1958, he turned down Khrushchev's offer of military cooperation and fooled him into endorsing a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, which China started by shelling and launching air attacks

²⁴ An English translation of this speech is available from the digital archives of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115995>.

²⁵ *Renmin Ribao*, April 5, 1956. In his report before the 8th Party Congress, Liu Shaoqi repeatedly emphasized peaceful coexistence. He also said that China was "not afraid to engage in peaceful competition with capitalist countries" and would "achieve socialism through state capitalism, which is a peaceful means of transition." See Liu Shaoqi, "The Political Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China," 8th National Congress of the CCP, September 15, 1956. In 1963, Deng Xiaoping would disavow that China had agreed with these principles, telling CPSU delegates at a bilateral meeting in Moscow: "We have always considered and still consider that the 20th Congress of the CPSU put forward positions on the issues of war and peace, peaceful coexistence and peaceful transition which went against Marxism-Leninism. Especially serious are two issues: the issue of the so called 'peaceful transition' and the issue of the full, groundless denunciation of Stalin under the pretext of the so called 'struggle with the cult of personality.'" An English translation of Deng's speech is available from the digital archives of the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111237>.

²⁶ *Renmin Ribao*, April 5, 1956.

²⁷ Shen and Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership*, 255.

²⁸ Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945–1963* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998).

²⁹ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

against islands controlled by the Republic of China (ROC) just twenty days after Khrushchev departed Beijing. Mao referred to Jinmen and Mazu, the bombarded islands, as “batons that keep Eisenhower and Khrushchev dancing, scurrying this way and that. Don’t you see how wonderful they are?”³⁰ Unhappy now with peaceful coexistence, Mao was becoming bolder. Khrushchev sent Andrei Gromyko to Beijing to defuse the crisis, but there is no evidence that he was effective. Tit-for-tat exchanges strained bilateral ties during and after Mao’s radical, economically devastating Great Leap Forward,³¹ but the evidence suggests that leaders on both sides continued to invest in the relationship because they “keenly understood that by quarrelling, the brothers could only weaken their strategic position vis-à-vis the United States.”³²

It was in the wake of the 22nd CPSU Congress in 1961 that the relationship fully unraveled, culminating in the CCP’s denunciation of Khrushchev in 1964.³³ The Soviets proposed the new concept of an “all people’s state,” meaning that before Communism was achieved, class would disappear in socialist societies—ending the dictatorship of the proletariat and leaving the state to manage only the administrative functions necessary to complete the evolution. The CCP vehemently disagreed, arguing that the dictatorship of the proletariat would endure until Communism’s final stages, and that to say otherwise invited a new class to replace it.³⁴ Khrushchev also again criticized Stalin, along with Enver Hoxha, whose Albanian Labor Party had grown closer to China in recent years. Mao did not like having his personal authority and solidarity with the Albanians undermined, and Chinese media launched a wave of propaganda against the 22nd Congress.³⁵

In 1962 the Soviet Union encouraged a mass exodus of ethnic minorities from Xinjiang (the Ita incident). During the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of that same year, China attacked India over their boundary dispute, Tibet,

³⁰ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 392. See also Michael M. Sheng, “Mao and China’s Relations with the Superpowers in the 1950s: A New Look at the Taiwan Strait Crises and the Sino-Soviet Split,” *Modern China* 34, no. 4 (2008): 477–507.

³¹ Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 137.

³² Dong Wang, “The Quarrelling Brothers: New Chinese Archives and a Reappraisal of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959–1962,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper Series, no. 49, 2005, 5, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/WP49DW_rev.pdf.

³³ *Ibid.*; and Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia, “Jockeying for Leadership: Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1961–July 1964,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 24–60.

³⁴ See Roger E. Kanet, “The Rise and Fall of the ‘All-People’s State’: Recent Changes in the Soviet Theory of the State,” *Soviet Studies* 20, no. 1 (1968): 81–93.

³⁵ Li and Xia, “Jockeying for Leadership,” 27–29.

and other issues. For years, Khrushchev had nurtured relations with India as well as China, and in the early days of the border war he portrayed Soviet policy as neutral. That changed in early November, two weeks into the war, when Soviet pronouncements began to side with India. U.S. policy was clearly on the side of India from the outset, and U.S. military forces were diverted toward India but not employed as China called a ceasefire. Khrushchev was playing a high-stakes long game to compete globally with the United States from the Caribbean to South Asia. At the same time, he and Mao were increasingly playing an interrelated high-stakes game, but 360 degrees around China's borders—in other words, where China's national interests (the threats to Mao and the CCP) were greatest. The CCP, not knowing that the United States had removed missiles from Turkey, criticized Khrushchev as weak for backing down in the missile crisis and railed at him for his explicit support for India.³⁶

At the CCP's National Foreign Affairs Conference at the end of November, the Chinese leadership called the 22nd CPSU decisions “a comprehensive manifestation of revisionism” and formulated a new division of the world into three groupings: imperialism, led by the United States; revisionism, led by the Soviet Union; and Marxism-Leninism, led by China (and Mao in particular). In July 1963, to Mao's further chagrin, Khrushchev signed a nuclear test ban treaty with the United States.³⁷ The following year, Chinese state media attacked Khrushchev by name, calling the Soviet leader a “phony communist”—putting the final nail in the coffin of the alliance.³⁸ Khrushchev lost power on October 14, 1964, with his mishandling of foreign affairs, including relations with China, being a major reason. In a timely demonstration of pride and strength, China detonated its first atomic bomb just two days later.

While the new Soviet leadership was consolidating its power, China was both recovering from the disastrous Great Leap Forward and succeeding in testing ballistic missiles as well as nuclear weapons. The United States, for its part, was focused on thwarting the Soviet Union while deepening involvement in the Vietnam War. Washington and Taipei seemed to have no appetite for adding to the agenda an invasion of China. At this point, even with Khrushchev gone, neither the CPSU nor CCP would relent. The fresh Soviet leadership needed to appear strong, while Mao felt emboldened by

³⁶ Original diplomatic documents dating from 1959 to 1964 are available from the digital archives of the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/71/sino-indian-border-war-1962>. See also Li and Xia, “Jockeying for Leadership,” 43–49.

³⁷ Kim, *China, the United Nations and World Order*, 76–77.

³⁸ Li and Xia, “Jockeying for Leadership,” 56.

China's weapons development, improved economy, and growing status in the Communist movement, together with the diminished prospect for U.S. intervention. He could strengthen his grip on the CCP through rejecting Soviet behavior and championing China and his "continuing revolution." The two leaderships' increasingly divergent Communist ideologies, which were grounded in their power struggles at home and fused with enduring national interests and international aspirations, drove bilateral relations toward confrontation.

Sino-U.S. Rapprochement

In no position to accommodate Mao, Leonid Brezhnev and his colleagues ratcheted up pressure with a buildup of military forces on the Chinese border. In 1965, the Soviet Union had 15 divisions along the border, and in 1966 it signed a mutual defense treaty with Mongolia that justified the stationing of Soviet forces there. In 1967, the Soviet Union deployed tactical nuclear weapons, and by 1969 the number of Soviet divisions along the Chinese border had grown to between 27 and 34. They were heavily armored and motorized, with helicopters and advanced aircraft, juxtaposed to the lightly armed but massive Chinese forces—59 divisions—on the other side.³⁹ Mao's xenophobic Cultural Revolution continued its ideological assault on the CPSU and the legitimacy of the new Soviet leadership. The CCP also castigated the Soviet Union for building up forces on the borders. Meanwhile, China made strides in developing its nuclear forces, both weapons and medium-range missiles—some of which seem to have been targeted at the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ As Jonathan Pollack concludes, Brezhnev and his colleagues assessed that a long-term competition with China was developing out of a host of issues: conflicting national security interests, a troublesome history, difficult personalities, and Mao's ideology.⁴¹

In November 1968, China proposed resuming ambassadorial talks with the United States in Warsaw, an offer president-elect Richard Nixon immediately accepted (through then president Lyndon Johnson).⁴²

³⁹ Michael S. Gerson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict: Deterrence, Escalation, and the Threat of Nuclear War in 1969," CNA, November 2010, 16–17.

⁴⁰ Thomas W. Robinson, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1970); and Thomas W. Robinson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes," *American Political Science Review* 66, no. 4 (1972): 1175–1202.

⁴¹ Jonathan D. Pollack, "China's Agonizing Reappraisal," in Ellison, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict*, 55.

⁴² Li Jie, "Changes in China's Domestic Situation in the 1960s and Sino-U.S. Relations," in *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954–1973*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 203, ed. Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 313.

One reason for this turn in CCP—and U.S.—policy, even amid the chaos of Mao’s Cultural Revolution, was the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the Brezhnev Doctrine in September that subsequently attempted to justify the invasion.⁴³ Scholars dispute the extent of the invasion’s impact on Mao’s decision-making. Some suggest that the PLA was stronger and had less to fear from Soviet conventional forces than the received wisdom assumes,⁴⁴ but intelligence estimates at the time indicate that the Soviet Union held a substantial advantage.⁴⁵

In March 1969, the former “brothers” came to blows. The border clash at Zhenbao Island lasted for months but did not escalate beyond skirmishes.⁴⁶ Evidence suggests that China, not the Soviet Union, initiated the fight—possibly to galvanize support for Mao’s stalling domestic revolution.⁴⁷ Whatever each side’s relative capabilities and intentions may have been, neither wanted to spark a full-scale war. To deter China, the Soviet Union indicated that if attacked by major forces it would use nuclear weapons.⁴⁸ Soviet leaders feared that a war would be exploited by their greatest foes, the United States and NATO, which could take advantage of the situation by supporting China and encouraging rebellious elements in Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. Mao was also weighing the likelihood of war with the Soviet Union against that with the United States. His team of trusted marshals, faithfully employing Maoist terminology, concluded that the United States was genuine in its desire for closer relations with China, creating an opening for the CCP to exploit. As Marshal Chen Yi explained, “Because of the strategic need for dealing with the Soviet revisionists, Nixon hopes to win over China. It is necessary for us to utilize the contradiction

⁴³ Brezhnev sent 235,000 Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia to suppress Alexander Dubček’s Prague Spring and reorganize the Czech Communist Party and government.

⁴⁴ Lyle J. Goldstein, “Return to Zhenbao Island: Who Started Shooting and Why It Matters,” *China Quarterly*, no. 168 (2001): 985–97.

⁴⁵ Letter from Allen S. Whiting to Henry Kissinger, August 16, 1969, enclosing report, “Sino-Soviet Hostilities and Implications for U.S. Policy,” <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/sino.sov.9.pdf>.

⁴⁶ A few years later the Soviet Union deployed as many as a million troops along the border.

⁴⁷ Goldstein, “Return to Zhenbao Island.” Indeed, amid domestic chaos and the lurking influence of the CPSU—as evidenced later by Lin Biao’s attempted escape to the Soviet Union in 1971—the split with Moscow provided Mao a rallying point to continue his revolution.

⁴⁸ William Burr, ed., “The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, 1969: U.S. Reactions and Diplomatic Maneuvers,” National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book, no. 49, June 12, 2001, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49>.

between the United States and the Soviet Union in a strategic sense, and pursue a breakthrough in Sino-American relations.⁴⁹

The fast-developing power of Japan was also a strategic issue for Mao and Zhou Enlai. In 1971, Nixon and Henry Kissinger “played on China’s concern,” Kenneth Pyle points out, by emphasizing that the United States’ alliance with Japan assisted in containing the Soviet Union and prevented Japan from remilitarizing. China’s concern then intensified with the “Nixon shocks” of 1971. Japan was taken aback by not being consulted by the United States in advance of U.S.-China rapprochement and by new U.S. foreign economic policies that seemed aimed at curbing the Japanese economy. Mao had so internalized the U.S. view by 1973 that he counseled Kissinger on how the United States needed to reassure Japan about the U.S. commitment to the alliance.⁵⁰

Mao was not thrilled about compromising with the “imperialists,” but for the sake of survival, he held his nose.⁵¹ Specific outcomes of rapprochement pleased him; others brought disappointment. In 1971, China replaced Taiwan in the United Nations, and over a dozen states soon switched their recognition to the PRC. Taking advantage of Nixon’s breakthrough with China, Japan normalized relations with the PRC in September 1972, and in spite of the “shocks” adhered to its moderate defense policy within the structure of the alliance. However, small Communist parties and countries, including Albania, were confused by what looked like an inexcusable abandonment of CCP principles.⁵² Most of all, U.S.-Soviet relations seemed to improve after the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, undermining the *raison d’être* of Mao’s compromise. In the years following Nixon’s visit to China, Washington and Moscow held many bilateral meetings and signed several

⁴⁹ Chen Yi, “Further Thoughts by Marshal Chen Yi on Sino-American Relations,” Document No. 12, Bulletin 11, Cold War International History Project, September 17, 1969, 170–71. See also Chen Yi et al., “Report by Four Chinese Marshals—Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Nie Rongzhen, and Xu Xiangqian—to the CCP Central Committee, ‘Our Views about the Current Situation’ (Excerpt),” Document No. 11, Bulletin 11, Cold War International History Project, September 17, 1969, 170.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Pyle, *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 320–22.

⁵¹ Mao’s ambivalence is evident in his repeated instructions to Zhou Enlai to include strong revolutionary language in the text of the Shanghai Communiqué. See Kuisong Yang and Yafeng Xia, “Vacillating between Revolution and Détente: Mao’s Changing Psyche and Policy toward the United States, 1969–1976,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 2 (2010): 395–423. John Garver, by contrast, argues that Mao willingly “leaned” toward the United States in order to sustain the Cultural Revolution, which he worried could be interrupted or derailed by collusion between the Soviet Union and Chinese domestic “reactionaries.” John W. Garver, *China’s Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁵² China’s Politburo and Foreign Ministry had to issue long and convoluted explanations for the sudden turn in policy. Yang and Xia, “Vacillating between Revolution and Détente,” 405–6, 409–10.

important treaties. The lean toward the United States soon became a thorn in Mao's side.⁵³

Mao's decisions on when and how to compromise—with respect to the international Communist movement, the Cultural Revolution, and China's national security—were informed by his self-interest and ideological views.⁵⁴ To properly understand Chinese policy at the outset of the rapprochement era, one must appreciate Mao's unique standing in the CCP, abiding insecurities, and radical notion of “permanent revolution.” After Mao's death, the interests and ideas of Deng Xiaoping and other leaders filled the political vacuum. China's foreign and domestic policies underwent tremendous transformation. Without Mao's charismatic hold on the reins, Deng and his colleagues continued to wrestle with the Soviet challenge but toned down the ideological attacks. In the wake of the catastrophic Cultural Revolution, any claim to political legitimacy by the CCP had to come from economic performance, the party's role in building the nation's overall strength, and social stability. To their credit, Deng and colleagues were practical ideologues who chose a path, blazed by Japan and the “tigers” of Asia (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan), that would prove successful economically almost beyond imagination. They introduced market forces, sought foreign capital and technology, opened the borders to carefully managed international trade, and sought foreign technical and business education. At the same time, they sustained the party's leadership by wielding ultimate control of the economy and its key state-owned enterprises and companies. They exerted political control, which became an acute issue in 1989, when the Soviet empire disintegrated and protests inside China culminated in the massacre at Tiananmen Square.

In comparison with the strong, economically savvy new Chinese leadership, Brezhnev and his successors overextended the Soviet Union's reach and failed to undertake economic reform through the remainder of the 1970s and the 1980s. The Soviet leaders underestimated the vitality and strategic leadership of the United States. They failed to appreciate the poverty of socialism in a wealth-producing, capitalist world.

⁵³ In 1973, Mao sought to protect himself by calling several meetings to criticize Zhou Enlai for the entire process, which he feared might fail, and began formulating a new kind of “united front” theory to resist the Soviet Union and United States simultaneously. Known as “the theory of the three worlds,” this new foreign policy framework was emblematic of Mao's ideological ambivalence toward Sino-U.S. rapprochement—emerging within just a year or two of his meeting with Nixon—and his efforts to shore up power and enshrine his legacy as the revolutionary who brought greatness, internationally as well as nationally, back to China.

⁵⁴ Garver, *China's Quest*.

Several pertinent lessons can be drawn from this history. The international policies of the first and second generations of Communist leaders are explained by their struggles to retain power and by the ideologies—the fusion of historical and cultural legacies, national interests and aspirations, and variants of Communist ideology—that guided them. Second, authoritarians are always threatened by democratic ideals and the most powerful and committed purveyors of these ideals. Third, authoritarians are insecure generally and are constantly threatened by their domestic rivals, even cronies, and people who communicate and organize politically. Fourth, authoritarians are threatened by foreign authoritarians—including Communists being threatened by foreign Communists—when their legitimacy, national interests, and aspects of their ideologies are challenged. Fifth, authoritarians cooperate strategically even with hated and feared democracies when their regimes are sufficiently threatened—for example, Stalin with Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill and Mao with Nixon. Sixth, some authoritarians, such as Deng and his successors, engage democracies in a carefully controlled, yet vigorous, fashion economically and diplomatically when they assess that such engagement will strengthen their power at home and abroad.

The Contemporary Strategic Context

The Distribution of Power

The Deng era's successes, in combination with the Soviet empire's collapse and Russia's economic failures since, define the core strategic reality today. Since Mao's death and Deng's reforms, over 500 million Chinese have escaped poverty, and China has largely urbanized.⁵⁵ The Chinese market has expanded exponentially to equal approximately that of the United States. China has gone from accounting for a tiny fraction of world trade to assuming the mantle of world leader, and its industrial sector has grown to over 1.5 times the output of the United States, which had led the world since the late nineteenth century. China has matched its economic growth with investments in its military, one of the "four modernizations." The PLA's progress has been extraordinary. U.S. fleets, bases, and allies in the region are increasingly vulnerable to Chinese attack, which has caused U.S. strategists

⁵⁵ See, generally, Barry J. Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Adaptation and Growth*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018); and Loren Brandt and Thomas G. Rawski, eds., *China's Great Economic Transformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

to rethink military contingencies and responses and to call for expanded investments by the United States and its allies in new weapons systems.⁵⁶

Depending on how one measures GDP (purchasing power parity versus current prices), China's economy ranks either first or second in the world and is, according to the latter measure, 8.5 times the size of Russia's. China also ranks second to only the United States in military expenditures. In terms of national GDP and military expenditures, there is not a close third, and given expected growth rates, the disparity between China and its regional competitors, with the exception of India, should widen. A glance at the distribution of global GDP and military expenditure, arrayed roughly geographically, reveals two poles (see **Figures 1** and **2**).

The integration of the major powers into the world economy is another structural factor affecting their calculations and behavior. Trade accounts for a significant portion of China's GDP—38% in 2017—giving the country a much greater stake in sustaining robust trade relations than was ever the case for the United States (for which trade accounts for 27% of GDP today).⁵⁷ China's export stake slightly exceeds that of Britain and Germany on the eve of World War I.⁵⁸

Russia has also benefited from global trade—in its case, through energy sales to Europe and international flows of capital and goods—but it is not nearly as integrated as China into the world economy. Russian products do not flood world markets; in fact, an American is hard-pressed to name a single Russian-made item in one's possession, or for that matter ever purchased, except perhaps vodka. Russia is not critical in global supply chains. Nonetheless, trade makes up 47% of its economy.⁵⁹ Petroleum and natural gas constitute approximately 68% of Russian exports and even more

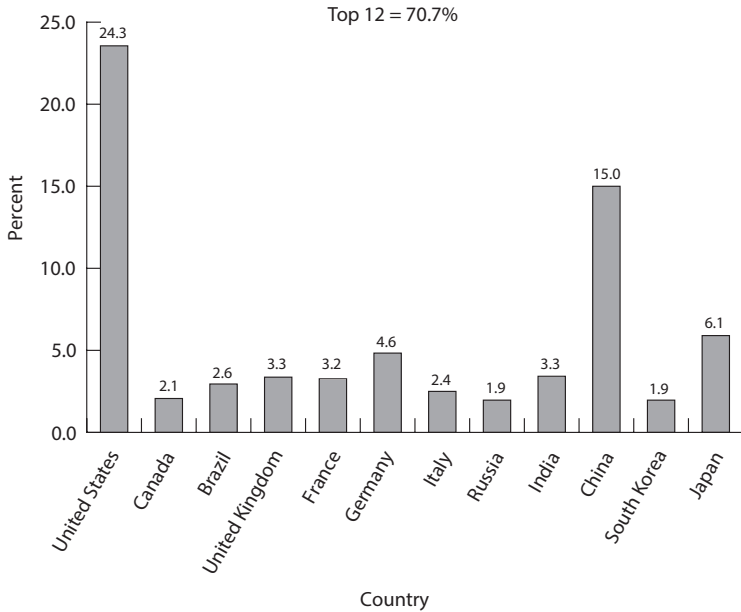
⁵⁶ See the debate over air-sea battle in Aaron L. Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle: The Debate over U.S. Military Strategy in Asia*, Adelphi Book 444 (New York: Routledge, 2014); and U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America."

⁵⁷ "Trade (% of GDP)," World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS>.

⁵⁸ China's merchandise exports were 18.4% of GDP in 2017, whereas Britain's and Germany's before World War I were 18% and 16% of GDP, respectively. "Trade (% of GDP)," World Bank; "Merchandise Exports (Current US\$)," World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.MRCH.CD.WT?locations=CN>; and "GDP (Current US\$)," World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>. See also Ana Swanson, "The World Today Looks Ominously Like It Did before World War I," *Washington Post*, December 29, 2016. For a chart comparing exports as a percentage of GDP for key countries between 1870 and 1913, see "Merchandise Exports as a % of GDP," Deutsche Asset Management, available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-the-world-looks-a-bit-like-it-did-before-world-war-i>.

⁵⁹ "Trade (% of GDP)," World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS>.

FIGURE 1 Share of global GDP (current prices, 2017)



SOURCE: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2018.

NOTE: Values are based on GDP in national currency converted to U.S. dollars using market exchange rates (yearly average). European nations are listed individually to reflect their separate political decision-making and defense and foreign policies.

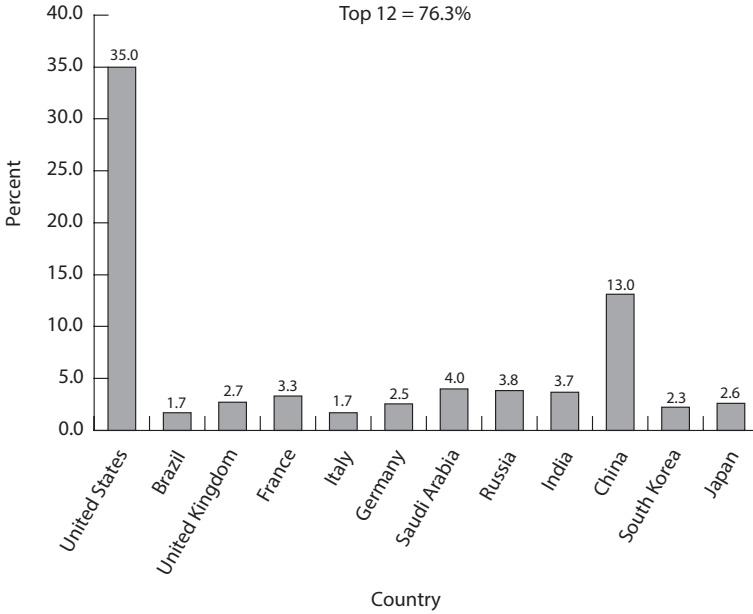
importantly exceed 50% of Russian government revenues.⁶⁰ In short, the fortunes of the Russian economy and state rest on pipelines and the prices of oil and gas. In understanding the strategic environment of China-Russia relations, few facts stand out so remarkably.

The military balance between the two has changed no less. China spends far more on its defense today, and, like Russia, maintains substantial forces, including nuclear-capable missiles, to protect the border regions.⁶¹

⁶⁰ “Russia,” Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2016, <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/rus>.

⁶¹ For analysis of the border defense, see Peter Wood, “Strategic Assessment: China’s Northern Theater Command,” Jamestown Foundation, May 15, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/strategic-assessment-chinas-northern-theater-command>.

FIGURE 2 Share of global defense expenditures



SOURCE: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, May 2, 2018, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/styles/body_embedded/public/2018-05/fs_1805_figure_2_eps-01.jpg?itok=k-LE7TUK.

Figure 2 underreports Chinese—and probably Russian—spending.⁶² In contrast with the Cold War, China’s forces are now not only more numerous but also more powerful than Russia’s. In 2015 the priority of China’s Northern Theater Command was downgraded from first to fourth most important, presumably reflecting the diminution of the threat from Russia and higher priorities given to the Eastern, Southern,

⁶² The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) relies on official and open-source materials. According to SIPRI, “if extra- or off-budget sources of military spending exist...it is not possible to obtain figures or reasonable estimates for these.” See “Frequently Asked Questions,” SIPRI, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex/frequently-asked-questions#5-where-does-your>. In fact, both countries’ official military expenditures are not credible in view of their known histories, interests in secrecy and underreporting, and lack of public accountability due to controlled presses and nondemocratic budgeting procedures.

and Western Theater Commands.⁶³ Russia has been upgrading recently its nuclear-capable missile forces along the border with China, but seemingly only for deterrence, as Russian conventional forces are now badly outgunned.

Given China's strides in defense technology, partly as a result of reverse engineering from Russian systems, Russia now sells China fewer items overall but more sophisticated systems, notably its premier jet fighter, the Su-35. Chinese imports of Russian arms are likely to continue to dwindle unless Russia somehow innovates faster than China.⁶⁴

In sum, today the economic and conventional military preponderance of China, combined with the growth trajectories of its economy and military power, constitutes the salient strategic feature of Asia. Xi and his colleagues, as well as their counterparts abroad, know this. At the same time, China benefits enormously from its trade with the world's commercial centers: East Asia, North America, and Europe, with its risks quite diversified. Worth noting are China's financial and broader economic fragilities, which, in a word, are complex. They stem from political and other nonmarket influences, with bad debt being the leading concern. These factors are difficult to gauge and are of strong concern to the regime, whose legitimacy depends on economic success.⁶⁵

Despite the PRC's advantages, Chinese leaders cannot act recklessly, given the proliferation of nuclear weapons throughout the region, their hostility-prone neighborhood, and domestic political and economic vulnerabilities. They need to avoid provoking the formation of new alliances against them and to continue encouraging Russia to lean toward China to divide U.S. strategic attention. Chinese leaders also have huge stakes in the international economy, but their country's structural advantages do give them the upper hand in their neighborhood. Putin needs Xi more than Xi needs Putin.

⁶³ As Richard Weitz underscores in his chapter, the border region today gives China and Russia "a de facto secure 'strategic rear'—a sphere where they do not perceive a threat from each other and that lies beyond the reach of the U.S. military." See also Artyom Lukin, "Why the Russian Far East Is So Important to China," *Huffington Post*, January 12, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/artiom-lukin/russian-far-east-china_b_6452618.html.

⁶⁴ Richard Weitz, "Sino-Russian Security Ties," in "Russia-China Relations."

⁶⁵ See Minzner, *End of an Era*. As Minxin Pei describes, corruption is systematically embedded into China's political economy, with officials and business leaders seizing state assets for the purpose of personal enrichment and political leverage. Minxin Pei, *China's Crony Capitalism: The Dynamics of Regime Decay* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Narratives (Ideologies) and Power

Another step in understanding the “drivers” and “brakes” in bilateral relations between China and Russia is examining the narratives that the leaders of these two states have constructed to capture their nations’ international glory, grievances, and goals.⁶⁶ Ideology motivates both Xi and Putin, who draw on legacies of “greatness” and empire. They recast periods of “humiliation” to provide the foundation for resentment and point to current international circumstances that are tilted unfairly to their rivals’ advantage. Because of the threat posed to their regimes, the two leaders mock and deride Western liberalism.⁶⁷ They portray themselves as embodying the virtues of their civilizations and as best equipped to fight their nations’ foes and achieve national vindication and dreams.

Russia. Historical legacies pervade Russian international behavior. As Isabelle Facon shows in her penetrating assessment of Russian strategic culture, contemporary foreign and military policies reflect a deep-seated drive for status as an exceptional great power.⁶⁸ The elements of this culture go back centuries, were exacerbated by Communist ideology through the Soviet period, and persist today, heightened by the humiliation of the Soviet Union’s collapse and by the re-emergence of authoritarian leadership under Putin.

A crucial element is Russia’s dual identity of both greatness and vulnerability. The history of Russia is one of expansion and contraction, victory and defeat, international success and failure, resulting in extreme ambivalence about the country’s relationship to the outside world. Tsarist empire-building was extraordinary, but it came to an ignominious conclusion, first at the hands of the Japanese navy in 1905 and then by the disaster of World War I and the Russian Revolution. From the ashes, Stalin built another empire in a world wracked by disorder, followed by World War II. Propelled by nationalism and ideological and imperial ambitions, all grounded in his paranoid, extreme dictatorship, he negotiated spheres

⁶⁶ For a discussion of these drivers and brakes, see Robert Sutter’s chapter for this volume.

⁶⁷ Gilbert Rozman argues that Xi’s and Putin’s common “regime self-images” are a driving force behind their strategic cooperation. These images are a melding of ideology and nationalism, of leftover Communist ideas, especially “anti-imperialism,” plus “Russocentrism” and “Sinocentrism,” and the bilateral relationship is thus more resilient than if it were based on simple calculations of interests. See Gilbert Rozman, “Asia for the Asians: Why Chinese-Russian Friendship Is Here to Stay,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 29, 2014; and Gilbert Rozman, “The Sino-Russia Partnership Is Stronger Than the West Thinks,” *Huffington Post*, January 11, 2015. This thesis is not utilized here due to examples of autocrats with similar, shared self-images in the past parting strategic ways. In fact, many, if not most, wars have been fought between nations led by autocrats.

⁶⁸ Isabelle Facon, “Russian Strategic Culture in the 21st Century: Redefining the West-East Balance,” in Tellis et al., *Strategic Asia 2016–17*, 63–89.

of domination at the Yalta Conference and inserted Soviet forces wherever he could to push the boundaries of his empire as far out from the core of the country as possible. In nearly all ways, the Soviet empire was more impressive than anything the tsars had assembled, but this period of “greatness” lasted less than three-quarters of a century, succumbing to a surge in competitive pressure from the United States in the context of Soviet economic malaise and political fragility.

The bases for feelings of humiliation in the wake of the Soviet collapse are stark. The Russia that is left over from the Soviet Union is roughly half the population (290 million in 1990 versus 144 million today) and three-quarters the area. At its peak, the Soviet economy was by a clear margin the world’s second-largest; it fails to make even the top ten today. Except in nuclear military capacity, geography, and ambition, Russia is now a lesser, middle-sized power.

Despite the Soviet collapse and diminution of Russia by almost any measure, NATO not only persisted but expanded, incorporating key states that had been part of the Soviet empire and that feared Russian revanchism. NATO expansion was not universally endorsed in the United States. Fifty leading American specialists and practitioners, including scholars and former cabinet members, ambassadors, and senators, expressed their opposition from the outset in 1997 in an open letter to President Bill Clinton.⁶⁹ Since then other specialists have argued that NATO expansion did indeed play a role in Russia’s efforts to reassert influence in its periphery.⁷⁰ In *The Clash of Civilizations*, published in 1996, Samuel Huntington reached a different conclusion, arguing that Russian revanchism was simply inevitable, a natural product of Russian civilization and historical national interest. As he put it, the country would seek to establish “a bloc with an Orthodox heartland under its leadership...from which it will attempt to exclude the influence of other powers. Russia expects the world to accept and to approve this system.”⁷¹

A new Russian dictatorship eventually emerged out of the remnants of the Communist system and fragile experiments with democracy. The 1990s were wrenching for the Russians. In the uncertainty that swept the country

⁶⁹ “Opposition to NATO Expansion,” Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, June 26, 1997, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997_06-07/natolet.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Stephen F. Cohen, “Have 20 Years of NATO Expansion Made Anyone Safer?” *Nation*, October 18, 2017; and J. Stapleton Roy, “Sino-Russian Relations in a Global Context: Implications for the United States,” in “Russia-China Relations,” 40.

⁷¹ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 164. Huntington noted that Ukraine would be a critical and difficult issue for Russia, which would want to reincorporate the country into its bloc. The major difficulty, he predicted, would stem from the strong national identity in western Ukraine.

as the Soviet system unraveled, Russians experienced residual statism, high unemployment, lawlessness, health crises, and the transition to a corrupt private economy dominated by monopoly capitalists known as the oligarchs. Putin, an ambitious, young KGB officer stationed in East Germany who observed the destruction of the Berlin Wall, came to power by political guile, charisma, nationalist fervor, and ruthlessness. He rose to control the military and its domestic component and successor to the KGB, the Federal Security Service (FSB). Through his command of Russia's organized means of violence, Putin manipulated the legal system as well as the media and civil organizations. He neutralized competitors and brought politically ambitious oligarchs to heel. It is an old recipe, but not one concocted of ingredients that give such leaders comfortable nights of sleep.

According to Michael McFaul, the factor that hardened Putin's harsh feelings and approach to the West was the palpable threat to his leadership.⁷² The weak showing of his United Russia party in the December 2011 parliamentary elections and the associated massive demonstrations that began in December—the largest political demonstrations since 1991—shocked Putin. Already on edge due to the rapid demise of leaders from the Arab Spring revolutions and suspicious of U.S. meddling, he “needed to defuse these popular protests and restore his standing in time for the 2012 presidential election....[H]e chose to repress and discredit his critics: He portrayed them as traitorous agents of the United States.”⁷³ Putin blasted the United States for interfering in Russia's election, more than ever appealing to populism and nationalism to save his regime. By attacking the West, controlling the media, and manipulating the ballot count, Putin won the 2012 election with 64% of the popular vote.⁷⁴

For additional reasons, he saw that the timing was right for extending his control of the periphery and confronting the West. Europe continued to present opportunities due to its disaggregated political organization, economic problems, weakening support for military investments and the use of force, and ambivalence toward Eastern Europe. Moreover, Europe's protector, the United States, was showing signs of overextension as it

⁷² Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018); and Michael McFaul, “The Smear That Killed the ‘Reset,’” *Washington Post*, May 11, 2018.

⁷³ McFaul credits intelligence reports for the insight on Putin's shock at the fate of autocrats such as Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi. See McFaul, “The Smear That Killed the ‘Reset.’”

⁷⁴ “Russia's Presidential Election Marked by Unequal Campaign Conditions, Active Citizens' Engagement, International Observers Say,” Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Press Release, March 5, 2012, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/88661>.

struggled to recover from the Great Recession and to resolve the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Barack Obama's commitment to restore the United States' image as a multilateralist may have also been a consideration. President Obama appeared to be far more cautious than his predecessor in operating unilaterally or applying military force, and he seemed earnest and committed to Washington resuming normal relations with Moscow.

Putin achieved his goal of acquiring Crimea quickly in winter 2014 and subsequently launched campaigns in eastern Ukraine and Syria. To further challenge U.S. and Western European influence, he mounted sustained, sophisticated propaganda campaigns and cyberattacks to disrupt American and European democratic institutions and processes.⁷⁵ According to U.S. director of national intelligence Dan Coats, Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea are the "worst offenders," but Russia is the "most aggressive foreign actor":

[The Russians] are penetrating our digital infrastructure and conducting a range of cyber intrusions and attacks against targets in the United States.... These actions are persistent, they're pervasive, and they are meant to undermine America's democracy on a daily basis, regardless of whether it is election time or not. Russian actors and others are exploring vulnerabilities in our critical infrastructure as well.... What's serious about the Russians is their intent. They have capabilities, but it's their intent to undermine our basic values, undermine democracy, create wedges between us and our allies.⁷⁶

Putin's popularity spiked in Russia with the annexation of Crimea, while support among Russians for a Western-style democratic government dropped significantly in the ensuing year.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Putin backed right-wing opponents of immigration, same-sex marriage, abortion, and church-state separation and provided military assistance to sustain the Assad regime in Syria. Russian media demonized domestic protestors in authoritarian states as terrorists and radicals and labeled revolution

⁷⁵ According to Julia Ioffe, Putin's motivation was the personal affront that he and his inner circle perceived as a consequence of the publication of the Panama papers. For further discussion, see Julia Ioffe, "What Putin Really Wants," *Atlantic*, January/February 2018.

⁷⁶ Veronica Stracqualursi, "U.S. Intelligence Chief: 'The Warning Lights Are Blinking Red Again' on Cyber Attacks," CNN, July 14, 2018, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/us-intelligence-chief-the-warning-lights-are-blinking-red-again-on-cyber-attacks/ar-AAA3XY0?ocid=spartandhp>. Chinese and Russian political interference is discussed at length by Peter Mattis in his chapter for this volume.

⁷⁷ See the extensive polling data collected by the Yuri Levada Analytical Center, available at <http://www.levada.ru/en>. The center is Russia's only independent polling agency and was labeled a "foreign agent" two weeks before the 2016 parliamentary elections.

seemingly everywhere as illicit and Western-sponsored.⁷⁸ The world needs a strong Russia, in this view:

From the Kremlin's perspective, as Washington engages in stupid, hypocritical, and destabilizing global behavior, Moscow shoulders the burden of serving as a counterweight, thereby bringing sanity and balance to the international system....Putin's machismo posturing, additionally, is undergirded by a view of Russia as a country of real men opposing a pampered, gutless, and decadent West.⁷⁹

“Civilization” thus became part and parcel of Putin’s narrative, with the Russian Orthodox Church and Slavic ethnicity touted as key elements in making Russians culturally unique.⁸⁰ Putin seized on this message, understanding its meaning in national lore. Correspondingly, as Fiona Hill explains, “Putin wants respect in the old-fashioned, hard-power sense of the word” and “to turn the clock back seventy years to the old ‘Yalta agreement’ of 1945. He is pushing for a new division of spheres of influence.” He claims that Russia “is the only country in this neighborhood with a unique civilization (rooted in Russian Orthodoxy and language), a long imperial history, a robust economy (based on energy and abundant natural resources) and the capacity to defend its territory and project power abroad.”⁸¹ Putin’s vision, mirroring Russian history, is rooted in imperial notions of power and interests. Whether or not NATO expansion played a role, Putin exploited the “threat” NATO posed to these ambitions and Huntington’s prediction was proved accurate.

Not part of the current narrative and just beneath the surface of Russian culture is a marked fear and lack of understanding of China that harkens to earlier periods. Chinese copying of Russian military technology, investments in the Russian Far East (RFE), and other activities in the border areas sound alarm bells in the press from time to time.⁸² If history is any

⁷⁸ Dmitry Gorenburg, “Countering Color Revolutions: Russia’s New Security Strategy and Its Implications for U.S. Policy,” PONARS Eurasia, Policy Memo, no. 342, September 2014, 3–4, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/PePm342_Gorenburg_Sept2014.pdf.

⁷⁹ Stephen Kotkin, “The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia’s Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2015, 150. See also Vladimir Putin, “Remarks at the Final Plenary Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club’s XI Session” (Sochi, October 24, 2014), <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/23137>.

⁸⁰ Michael Khodarkovsky, “Reviving Old Lies to Unite a New Russia,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2018.

⁸¹ Fiona Hill, “This Is What Putin Really Wants,” *National Interest*, February 24, 2015. In an article almost identically titled, Julia Ioffe offers a different account of Putin’s motives, arguing that he is less goal-oriented and is simply anti-West. See Ioffe, “What Putin Really Wants.” The analysis in this chapter suggests that Russian interests may be subject to alteration and that Putin is probably capable of changing strategy when his and Russian interests change.

⁸² For example, see Denis Abramov, “In Arms Trade, China Is Taking Advantage of Russia’s Desperation,” *Moscow Times*, November 16, 2017, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/in-arms-trade-china-is-taking-advantage-of-russian-desperation-55965>.

guide, fear of China could escalate in Russia should bilateral relations take a turn for the worse.

Putin's equating of himself with the Russian state and civilization is consistent with Xi's approach in China; it is what, in fact, dictators—Communist and former Communist alike—tend to do in their need for legitimacy and to survive in power. Putin's narrative portrays Russia as a great civilization now led by a strong, dynamic leader who personifies Russian virtues, is fighting Russia's enemies abroad (the West generally and the United States specifically), and is reasserting the country's rightful place as the preeminent power in Europe and establishing its dominance in new frontiers such as the Arctic.⁸³ It has no great vision of Russian international leadership or a system of values beyond "Russian" values. There is no sophisticated ideological underpinning. From national weakness, Putin has fashioned a traditional Russian, if personalized and opportunistic, nationalist ideology. His successors will inherit this—at most. They might also inherit chaos.

China. Historical legacies run even deeper in China. The CCP's narrative is of the country's singular greatness, enshrined in its name in Chinese (the central kingdom or country). Xi Jinping's strongest claim to legitimacy is showing progress in achieving what he calls the "China dream," which is no less than the return of China to its traditional position as the most powerful and respected country on earth with no peer competitors. Xi insists that only the CCP can realize this tectonic vision.

To be sure, China was the leading kingdom for most of the past two millennia. Its economy, innovations, and standard of living among the elite were mindboggling to the first European explorers who penetrated the Sinic world. Until the industrial revolution propelled Britain and then other European countries and the United States ahead, China was vastly wealthier, if not as inclined as some nations to extend influence far beyond its periphery. Except for a couple of recent centuries, China sustained a unique position of global wealth and regional hegemony.

As with Russia, this narrative may begin with greatness but quickly moves to bitterness—in China's case over mistreatment by European and Japanese imperial powers. The Japanese are singled out in a category of their own, frequently depicted in racist terms as evil and permanent enemies of China. Americans hold a special place in the narrative as well, as they were outright hostile to the Communist regime in China from 1949 until

⁸³ For a discussion of Russia's strategy to expand its sphere of influence, see Evelyn N. Farkas and James M. Ludes, "We Regret to Inform You That Russia Is (Probably) at It Again," *Atlantic*, August 16, 2018.

the early 1970s. According to the narrative, the United States persists today in “encircling” and “containing” China. Its naval bases and presence in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, support of Taiwan, and alliances with South Korea, Japan, and Australia are offered as proof. Added to these are the never-ending U.S. studies and policies regarding human rights violations. The “rebalance to Asia” undertaken by the Obama administration and most recently the “trade war” allegedly begun by the Trump administration are rankling to China. Unequal sharing of wealth and technology—claimed holdovers from colonialism and then the Cold War—is another recurrent gripe. Associated with these factors, Chinese leaders have held consistently that the post-World War II order is the creation of the United States and its allies for their own benefit.

Much more than Putin, Chinese leaders perceive enormous opportunities opening. The recession of 2008–9 (which China mostly dodged), the doldrums that have plagued the American heartland since then, and the terribly expensive and wearying wars with seemingly no end in the Middle East and Afghanistan engendered a great debate in China over just how soon it can replace U.S. international leadership with its own—and in so doing, bolster Xi’s claims to CCP leadership for life and to an extraordinary place in Chinese and global history. Here several strands are interwoven into an ambitious narrative. Deng Xiaoping’s admonition for China to “hide its strength and bide its time” has been supplanted by Xi’s call to develop “a new type of great-power relationship” between the United States and China, one in which the two nations for some period stand alone as superpowers and the United States respects China’s historic, preeminent interests and ways of asserting influence in the western Pacific. The latter expectation seems to include recognition of Chinese sovereignty in the South China Sea, exclusive air and naval rights extending far off China’s coasts, incorporation of Taiwan into the PRC by 2049, and other unnamed privileges in the country’s vicinity. Xi’s intentions are similar to Putin’s in terms of expanding Chinese influence and interests, but they are set on a much bigger stage. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which comprises the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, aims to position China into expansive regional—and eventually global—leadership by building a strategic network of infrastructure and economic hubs to increase Chinese influence across the Eurasian landscape, through Southeast Asia along the equatorial sea routes to

the Middle East and Europe, and north to the Arctic.⁸⁴ The Made in China 2025 policy seeks to enable the country to leapfrog the United States in technology and innovation. The remarkable progress China has made in modernizing and building its military, already making it much more difficult for U.S. bases, operations, and contingency plans in the region, is a portent of what is to come. The progress the CCP anticipates in the decades ahead for the PLA would enable its forces to eclipse American superiority.⁸⁵

Chinese military and quasi-military actions in the South China Sea and north to Japan have added substance to the narrative. China invoked an alleged historical claim for the great bulk of the South China Sea, the “nine-dash line” that was ironically contrived by the Republic of China after World War II and now is enshrined in a map in PRC passports. China embarked on constructing major island bases out of reefs and atolls across a wide sweep of these waters in 2014. The projects commenced after Russian aggression earlier that year in Crimea and eastern Ukraine had failed to provoke a military response from NATO or the United States; instead, the West only levied economic and diplomatic sanctions. China’s base building met with an even weaker response: much international complaining, occasional and carefully nonconfrontational freedom of navigation operations by U.S. naval and air forces, and a case brought by the Philippines to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. The court ruled against China, but there were simply no enforceable penalties, and China rejected and ridiculed the decision.

Past transgressions against China and ongoing efforts to keep the country down are invoked by the leadership to justify other actions to push the United States and its allies back and build the nation’s wealth and power. On a daily basis, PLA Air Force planes harass the territorial airspace of Japan (as do Russian military aircraft) and frequently Taiwan as well, causing both to scramble their own fighters. Confrontations at sea are recurrent and dangerous, particularly because of China’s use of fishing boats and heavily armed coast guard vessels. In addition, there are ubiquitous Chinese cyberattacks against the United States, Europe, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Targets range from national labs and government computer systems to Congress, defense contractors, commercial businesses, think tanks, and utilities. Much of the hacking is

⁸⁴ Nadège Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Seattle: NBR, 2017).

⁸⁵ See, for example, Elizabeth Economy, “Xi Jinping’s Superpower Plans,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mr-xis-superpower-plans-1532013258>.

government-sponsored, and much more is simply encouraged. A priority of these attacks is the theft of technologies and trade secrets—anything that is a priority to Chinese industrial policy and that can enrich an aggressive entrepreneur or benefit military development.⁸⁶ One of the more spectacular heists, based on different motives, was against the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Chinese hackers obtained the dossiers, including Social Security numbers, of around 22 million Americans who work for or were associated with the U.S. government.⁸⁷

The CCP has resurrected traditional symbols of Chinese civilization. Like his predecessor Hu Jintao, Xi has embraced Confucius and classic Chinese texts and art forms, seemingly for the purpose of justifying the need for “harmony” in society and more fully associating the CCP, and especially now Xi himself, with Chinese history and national pride. Chinese culture and interests are championed overseas to facilitate the acceptance of Chinese influence. Soft power is exercised around the globe through public affairs and nonprofit operations in important cities and through Confucius Institutes established at universities. Free copies of the *China Daily* deliver the CCP’s messages at the world’s newsstands. At the most recent party congress, Xi Jinping Thought was enshrined in the constitution. In today’s version of Communist newspeak, Xi and the CCP espouse values such as freedom and the rule of law.⁸⁸ It is all pulled together in the “China dream,” which Xi uses to inspire belief in his historic leadership of national “rejuvenation.”⁸⁹

If imperial Chinese hegemony and current ideology, foreign relations, industrial policies, and internal monitoring and repression are a guide to what Chinese hegemony will look like in the future, we should expect a hierarchical system directed by a regime whose first priority is maintaining control in order to protect its interests. In other words, we should not expect an open system of common seas and airspace, equal legal standing among nations, acceptance (let alone encouragement) of the rule of law

⁸⁶ Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property, “The Report on the Theft of American Intellectual Property,” NBR, May 2013; Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property, “Update to the IP Commission Report—The Theft of American Intellectual Property: Reassessments of the Challenge and United States Policy,” NBR, February 2017; Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, “2018 Special 301 Report,” April 2018, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/Press/Reports/2018%20Special%20301.pdf>; and William C. Hannas, James Mulvenon, and Anna B. Puglisi, *Chinese Industrial Espionage: Technology Acquisition and Military Modernisation* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁸⁷ A separate but related breach around the same time compromised the data of 4.2 million federal employees. Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Hacking of Government Computers Exposed 21.5 Million People,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2015.

⁸⁸ Javier C. Hernández, “The Propaganda I See on My Morning Commute,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2018.

⁸⁹ Robert Lawrence Kuhn, “Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2013.

and democracy, or democratically run multilateral organizations, among other things. We might expect the extension of the CCP and its influence overseas—an economically corrupt, Leninist form of suzerainty.

To summarize, the external threats to the CCP (and according to the party, to China) and its international ambitions are democratic governments, notably the United States, which are accused of seeking to contain, encircle, and undermine China. Extraordinary efforts are justified for pushing back the democracies and depleting them, for they stand in China's path to its rightful preeminence. Despite the nation's success under the rules of the existing order, new or revised international arrangements are required to weaken the United States further and accommodate Chinese interests. Xi cites China's progress as proof that he and the CCP are winning the contest. Like Putin, Xi has a nationalist ideology, but his is less contrived, being built on nearly a century of evolving Communist doctrine and supporting party infrastructure.

Still weeding out potential rivals and attempting to refurbish the CCP's image through his anticorruption campaign, Xi appears to have amassed more political power in China than anyone since Mao. The CCP boasts around 90 million members, has a long history and tested procedures, and commands the military. Putin's United Russia party is relatively incoherent and still a work in progress. His power is grounded in personal control over his lieutenants and, with them, control of the military, secret police, media, and civilian components of the government. Compared with Putin, Xi commands vastly more impressive state bureaucracies and economic levers. Given his tightened grip on power, ideological sophistication, and the assets he wields internally, Xi would appear to be more secure, but even he has to be vigilant. The tariff war with the United States, the high expenses of BRI, his leadership cult, the new totalitarianism, continuing poverty in the country, a slowing economy, and environmental challenges, among other issues, reverberate among the elites and population as this volume goes to press.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ See Xu Zhangrun, "Imminent Fears, Immediate Hopes—A Beijing Jeremiad," trans. by Geremie R. Barmé, *China Heritage*, July 2018, <http://chinaheritage.net/journal/imminent-fears-immediate-hopes-a-beijing-jeremiad>; Nectar Gan, "Chinese Intellectuals Urged to Toe the Party Line after Pushbacks on Policy," MSN, August 9, 2018, <https://www.msn.com/en-sg/news/other/chinese-intellectuals-urged-to-toe-the-party-line-after-pushbacks-on-policy/ar-BBLDGka>; Jerome A. Cohen, "Xi Jinping Sees Some Pushback against His Iron-Fisted Rule," *Washington Post*, August 2, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/08/02/xi-jinping-sees-some-pushback-against-his-iron-fisted-rule/>; and Keith Bradsher and Steven Lee Myers, "Trump's Trade War Is Rattling China's Leaders," *New York Times*, August 14, 2018.

Interests

Shared and complementary interests. There is an extraordinary level of strategic cooperation between the Russian and Chinese regimes, as the authors of this volume thoroughly document, and driving much of it is their shared interest in stopping Western influence, and that of the United States in particular, from undermining them. Ambassador J. Stapleton Roy describes the situation succinctly: “They are both opposed to a world dominated by a sole superpower. They both feel threatened by the United States’ unilateralism, interventionism, and support for color revolutions.”⁹¹ Their strongest mutual fear is of democratic ideals, the Western policies that promote them, and the positions of influence held by the United States and other democracies around the world and in multilateral institutions. The authoritarians’ nightmare is that Western policy could jump-start and then aid a new wave of “color revolutions” that flow into China and Russia, or even start there. Xi and Putin therefore have a common purpose in deterring, discrediting, weakening, destabilizing, and even defeating the democracies; breaking their coalitions; and checking and rolling back their overseas military bases and outposts of political influence. It is a global conflict, with the “battlegrounds” being Japan, the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia in the East and the nascent democracies in Eastern Europe, the established ones in Western Europe, and most importantly the United States itself.

Besides sharing the threat posed by democracies in general and powerful ones in particular, and hence their common interest in defeating the threat, Russia and China share conventional strategic interests as ambitious nations. Aligned, they seek to pursue more effectively a number of strategic goals: (1) counterbalance the United States on a global level, stretch U.S. capabilities, complicate strategic planning, drive wedges between the United States and its allies and friends, and erode its will to lead, (2) broaden their militarily defended spheres of influence, overturning in these areas post-World War II rules such as freedom of navigation and skies and international rule of law, (3) check the United States and its allies in multilateral forums, blocking their decisions and actions and promoting those of China and Russia, (4) weaken the United States and its allies and friends at home through a withering array of cyberattacks and espionage aimed at their defense industries, economies, media, and political systems, (5) enhance their military capabilities through weapons and technology

⁹¹ Roy, “Sino-Russian Relations in a Global Context,” 39.

cooperation and sales, (6) repress ethnic, religious, and other movements that lead to terrorism and separatist challenges to their regimes, and (7) gain international legitimacy.

Accordingly, in contrast with the treatment they receive from the West, Xi and Putin support each other's political legitimacy and authoritarian values. Neither attacks the other for his monopoly on domestic political power, cyberattacks and espionage, human rights violations, lack of rule of law, extraordinary industrial and trade policies, or aggression overseas. Just the opposite, they honor and extol each other. Xi and Putin have a relationship constructed from expedient calculations. Learning from the past, they do not allow personal or ideological issues to undercut a useful strategic alignment against the United States and the West. In short, they seek to avoid the strategic mistake of their predecessors between the late 1950s and end of the Cold War.

Above all, they must avoid major conflict with one another. Both are nuclear powers possessing a second-strike capability. Even with a collapse in bilateral relations, one would expect no worse than a limited conflict on the scale of 1969—so long as neither perceived a vital interest such as regime survival or highly valued areas or populations to be threatened. At some time in the future, China might absorb parts or all of the lightly populated RFE if Russia were to falter. Today, their nuclear deterrents draw a strategic bottom line.

It is the combination of enduring complementary and expedient shared interests between China and Russia, more than any other factor, that should keep U.S. national security strategists up at night. Simply put, the complementary interests are their separate regional focuses; the expedient interest is dividing American power. With Russia's historical, enduring interests and ambition mainly in Europe, and China's in Asia and along the routes to Asia, memories of the first half of the twentieth century are rekindled. Beyond timing, literally no strategic cooperation between China and Russia need transpire for the United States' worst nightmare to be attempted—the conquering of East Asia and Eastern Europe by autocratic powers hostile to the United States. This is a plausible nightmare for three reasons. First, two decades ago, following the Cold War, Americans looked to cash in the so-called peace dividend. Without a peer competitor even on the horizon, the U.S. policy of maintaining the capacity to fight two major wars, one across the Pacific and one across

the Atlantic, was abandoned.⁹² Second, even if preserving that capacity had remained a policy, Chinese advancements eventually would challenge that capacity, should China sustain stronger economic growth than the United States and make commensurate military investments. Third, historically, wars have been waged when rising, ambitious powers threaten international and regional leaderships.

Scenarios for a collapse of the post–World War II order in Asia and Europe include ones short of war. International economic crisis and resulting political upheaval in the United States, Europe, and Japan might sap their capacity and will to resist new rounds of gray aggression in the two theaters, coupled with ultimatums.⁹³ Chinese strategy for achieving global political preeminence appears to be comprehensive, relying first and foremost on the accumulation of all the ingredients of raw power—economic, technological, and military—and then utilizing the leverage China can derive from these capacities to extend its influence regionally and globally; inserting power in strategic locations where it can do so without firing a shot, such as the South China Sea and base locations farther overseas; aligning with key actors such as Russia, Pakistan, and North Korea; establishing international alternatives to the Bretton Woods system and other international institutions; and harnessing soft power, such as propaganda and diplomatic tools. China is positioning itself for what it hopes will be as peaceful a transition to global leadership as possible, with sufficient advantage to deter violent contestation from the United States, and presumably, since Chinese policy does not reveal specific plans, to replace or heavily modify the post–World War II order.

Over 2,400 years of history should serve to caution Chinese leaders. Contemporary scenarios for the onset of war, and for a new two-front war, are hardly far-fetched. China was likely emboldened to embark on its island-building activities in the South China Sea and expand its harassment of Japanese airspace and territorial seas, as well as U.S. naval operations in the region, by the lack of a military response to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine.

⁹² See Richard J. Ellings, “Preface,” in Tellis et al., *Strategic Asia: 2017–18*, vii–xv, xiii. As late as 2012, the Pentagon’s 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance spoke of reducing the size of the force. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), in a departure from preceding QDRs, noted that “a smaller force strains our ability to simultaneously respond to more than one major contingency at a time,” suggesting the need to return to two-war preparedness. U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C., January 2012), 7, http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf; and U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C., March 2014), 22, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf.

⁹³ Gray aggression refers to planned actions by states to advance their influence, which are often taken without forewarning and lie between normal diplomacy and explicit military aggression.

Analysts should thus assume that there is already strategic interdependence between the Indo-Pacific and European theaters, if not formalized war planning between China and Russia. Signs of future allied weakness on one front—for example, a failure of U.S. resolve on the Korean Peninsula in the face of plausible Chinese and North Korean threats—would seem likely to encourage greater aggression on the other—for example, Russian aggressiveness in Europe. Big wars tend to break out in steps.

A host of developments might tip Asia into war. One can imagine scenarios. China might perpetrate incidents to achieve de facto control of some air or sea space—for example, by using Chinese coast guard destroyers against U.S. Navy ships in the South China Sea, believing that the United States would not respond forcefully. Or China might attack Taiwan following an independence referendum. In another scenario, war could break out on the Korean Peninsula because of an accidental missile launch or an attack ordered by a rogue officer. We should trust the United States to live up to its treaty obligations to Japan, South Korea, and Australia, and to very likely defend Taiwan out of a perceived need to sustain U.S. credibility and prevent the strategically located island from falling into hostile hands. If a Korean conflict erupts, for example, China might seek to divide U.S. forces by instigating crises in the South China Sea and involving Taiwan. These already dangerous circumstances, made ever more so by the uncertainties associated with the fast-changing balance of power in the region, produce an almost endless number of realistic conflict-producing scenarios.

With or without a war in Asia, Russia has proved in Georgia and Ukraine that it will invade its near abroad to extend its influence. If war breaks out in Asia first, with the bulk of U.S. forces being marshaled to fight there, it is hard to imagine Russia not taking advantage in Europe. How would Russia define its near abroad? Would it take one or more of the Baltic states, and perhaps the rest of Ukraine? If these fell rather easily, what would happen next? Would NATO respond before any of its members were attacked. If so, would it only attack advancing Russian forces in conquered territory or also forces in Russia? Would Russia threaten the nuclear annihilation of Western Europe to deter NATO from intervening or utilize enhanced radiation weapons if NATO did intervene? How many U.S. forces would be allotted to the European theater? Together, the enduring complementary and expedient shared interests of China and Russia form the principal challenge to U.S. strategy.

A sharply different category of shared interests is a complicated one and a source of concern to Russia as well as a source of profit. The economic relationship, which received a boost when Russia was hit by Western

sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine, is growing. Russia is increasing energy exports and continues to sell military equipment to China, while China produces a wide array of goods purchased by Russia. Bilateral trade turnover in 2017 amounted to 5.5% of Russian GDP, compared with less than 0.7% of Chinese GDP.⁹⁴ Sino-Russian trade expanded by 21% in 2017 and may grow by another 20% in 2018 to \$100 billion. The Power of Siberia gas pipeline, agreed to in 2014 following the sanctions against Russia, is reportedly 75% complete. The volume of Russian exports to China is thus expected to keep growing.⁹⁵ From the perspective of China, the gas is a boon to meeting the environmental aspiration of replacing coal use. Moreover, it enhances energy security by adding an overland supply from the north, safely far away from vulnerable sea lanes and coming from an adjacent supplier not likely to turn off the spigot, dwarfed as Russia is by Chinese power. In contrast, as Charles Ziegler shows in his chapter, Russia is sensitive to large-scale economic interchange due to the asymmetry in the relationship and the penchant by China to utilize economic leverage punitively when it sees fit, as it has recently done against South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Leverage in this instance comes from the market, not the supplier. The Russian interest here is to manage trade with China at a level that is profitable but does not provide Beijing with decisive leverage. Russia has similar concerns about selling military items to China. Profits aside, at what point does China no longer need Russian arms, and when might these weapons be pointed back at Russia?

Coincident global interests. The coincident global interests are the separate stakes that China and Russia have in the international economic system. Due to their very different stakes, the two countries' interests in the post–World War II economic system neither align nor conflict.

As noted earlier, China has prospered enormously from its integration with the world economy and the arrangements that support this order. It is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), has replaced the United States as the world's workshop, is vital to global supply chains, and pays great attention in industrial planning to the vertical and horizontal integration of its domestic economy—that is, in being the primary global supplier. Russia's stakes are comparatively idiosyncratic and consist mostly in supplying energy to Europe and China and to a lesser extent exporting arms. Individual energy contracts and arrangements are far more important

⁹⁴ "GDP Current Prices," International Monetary Fund, IMF DataMapper, <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/RUS/CHN>.

⁹⁵ "China-Russia Trade Volume Surges in 2018," BRICS Post, April 19, 2018, <http://thebricspost.com/china-russia-trade-volume-surges-in-2018/#.W1nr71BKiuM>.

than the global trading system and its rules. Russia is not a member of the WTO, and its stake in the international economic system is mainly indirect—the continued demand for energy and arms by its customers abroad, which derives in part from the customers’ successful participation in international trade. Its other stake in the international economy is reliance on imports for some consumer goods, many of which come from China. Russia’s direct stake in the global economic system is remarkably narrow and focused.⁹⁶

China’s astronomically greater integration into the global economy than Russia’s may mean little for the prospects for peace. Economic integration—that is, globalization—fails to guarantee international stability. More often than not, it is the most economically integrated countries that go to war with one another. Like divorce, war rarely makes economic sense, but it happens every day. What is important here about Chinese-Russian coincident interests in the global economic system is not a comparative propensity for engaging in conflict; it is that they indicate relative vulnerability, investments in the status quo, and leverage short of war.

Conflicting interests. Geography and demography are destiny, at least to some extent. By far the world’s largest nation by territory, Russia on maps looms over China, the world’s most populous nation. The two countries are in fact each other’s contiguous neighbor of greatest strategic importance, and that has been the case for centuries. The Chinese population has dwarfed Russia’s for as long as the two have been identifiable as countries. Their border hostilities and worries have spanned from their first encounters during the Qing Dynasty in the mid-1600s to the depths of the Sino-Soviet split in the twentieth century to the present day. Even at the height of the Sino-Soviet alliance, as we discussed, the countries jockeyed diplomatically over their frontier.

The China-Russia border comprises two segments totaling nearly 2,700 miles. The major part is 2,607 miles in length and runs from just short of the Pacific Ocean, on the Tumen River across from North Korea, to Mongolia. The short segment, only 62 miles long, is far to the west, high in the Altai Mountains abutting Kazakhstan. As insecure, distrustful, authoritarian regimes, China and Russia remain natural competitors on their frontiers and in adjacent areas: Mongolia, Central Asia, and soon perhaps the Arctic. Today both countries have ambitious plans for the

⁹⁶ Russia aspires to join the WTO, perhaps wishing to emulate China in this regard. But as long as the country is saddled with Western economic sanctions, the prospects for Russia developing a compelling direct interest in the international trading system are bleak.

Arctic, including developing a significant naval presence.⁹⁷ In view of China's vastly superior economy and fast-developing conventional and nuclear military forces, Russia's nuclear deterrent and credibility are essential to its security. Russians are acutely aware of the vulnerability of the lightly populated RFE to China, historic Chinese claims to it, and ongoing Chinese actions with regard to its offshore Northeast and Southeast Asian claims—more than enough factors to give Russians serious pause. In short, alongside the ongoing, significant strategic coordination between China and Russia is latent competition deriving from their geostrategic proximity, exacerbated by the fearful nature of their regimes and the relative superiority of Chinese power.

BRI represents, according to Nadège Rolland, “the organizing foreign policy concept of the Xi Jinping era.” It is, she shows, “not just a series of engineering and construction plans...to complete a fragmented Eurasian transportation system but a thoroughly considered and ambitious vision for China as the rising regional leader.”⁹⁸ BRI's mainland route, known as the “economic belt,” runs west from China through Kazakhstan, other former Soviet territories in Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey, branching into the Arab countries and Europe. Its plans include pipelines as well as transportation projects, communications and cyber links, university and other people-to-people exchanges, and financial services. By 2016, annual Chinese trade with the Central Asian states totaled \$30 billion, far exceeding Russia's \$18 billion.⁹⁹ Russia is maneuvering at the margins. In August 2018, it reached an agreement with Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan to divide up the Caspian Sea, enabling it to better compete with China.¹⁰⁰ Should BRI be successful, Chinese economic ties and influence will predominate along the entire length of Russia's southern border and perhaps into its European neighborhood.

To date, Central Asian states have welcomed the Chinese initiative for the opportunity to boost their economies. According to Paul Stronski, Kazakhstan “is also using Chinese investment to signal to Russia that it

⁹⁷ Marc Lanteigne, “Northern Crossroads: Sino-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic,” NBR, March 2018, http://www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/psa/lanteigne_brief_032718.pdf.

⁹⁸ Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?* 1, 43.

⁹⁹ Paul Stronski, “China and Russia's Uneasy Partnership in Central Asia,” East Asia Forum, March 29, 2018.

¹⁰⁰ The *New York Times* reports that “Russia may have agreed to finally resolve the sea's status now, after three decades of objections, not because of continued Western pressure but because of rising trade competition from China's ‘One Belt One Road’ policy, according to Shota Utiashvili.” Andrew E. Kramer, “Russia and 4 Other Nations Settle Decades-Long Dispute over Caspian Sea,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/12/world/europe/caspian-sea-russia-iran.html>.

has options and that any attempt by the Kremlin to replicate a Ukraine scenario... a country with a large ethnic Russian population, could not go ahead without running into China.” He notes that China may be building a military base on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan and is beginning to sell weapons and provide security assistance in the region.¹⁰¹ Russia still leads the Collective Security Treaty Organization, whose other full members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Through this arrangement and its residual troops in the region, Russia may gain some leverage by supporting political leaderships. It also heads the Eurasian Economic Union, whose goal is a single market with Russia at its center, but lacks the capital to make the organization a significant competitor to BRI. In addition, Russia leads the Commonwealth of Independent States, its arrangement to sustain Russian political special interests in Central Asia. The organization appears more symbolic than real. Without the level of aid and investment funds wielded by China, Russia’s artifices in the region are ineffectual and its efforts are frequently viewed suspiciously by regional states as aimed at undermining their sovereignty.¹⁰² Russia’s role as the region’s hegemon is declining quickly.

As noted above, the expansive RFE is another region of competition. The RFE is bracketed by Siberia to the north and east, China to the south, and the Sea of Japan to the west. It anchors one of six corridors of China’s long-term, geostrategic ambition to extend its hegemony through and beyond its Eurasian frontiers.¹⁰³ Consistent with BRI, China’s current purposes in the RFE appear to be securing its borders and neighborhood, establishing transportation links, gaining privileged access to energy and natural resources, expanding its influence, and positioning itself for long-term dominance.

For the time being, China is pursuing these objectives peacefully to avoid raising fears in Russia and to enable it to concentrate strategically on the western Pacific, Central Asia, and other areas. China is making investments in the RFE and keeping its northern military forces away from the border. From its vulnerable position, Russia is currently pleased with this, as its interests are to maintain the RFE’s security and bolster the region’s Russian population and economic growth.

¹⁰¹ Stronski, “China and Russia’s Uneasy Partnership in Central Asia.”

¹⁰² Arkady Dubnov, “Reflecting on a Quarter Century of Russia’s Relations with Central Asia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 19, 2018.

¹⁰³ Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 72–73.

History haunts the region, however. While as formal policy the PRC accepts the current borders, it considers them to be illegitimate, the result of two of the many “unequal treaties” signed by the Qing Dynasty when it was feeble and defeated. The 1858 Treaty of Aigun and 1860 Convention of Peking allotted Russia what is today the RFE but to China is Outer Manchuria—large swaths on opposite sides of the Amur River, south to Khabarovsk in the middle of the area, and all the way southeast to Vladivostok on the coast of the Sea of Japan. It was along the Amur that the fighting between Soviet and PLA forces was most intense during the clashes of 1969. Although Beijing is quiet on its historic grievances in the current period of strategic alignment, memories of the Sino-Soviet border war and standoff are palpable in both China and Russia.

Day-to-day affairs reflect the comparative dynamism of China. The contrast in the populations and economies across the border is dramatic. Throughout the vastness of the RFE live only six million Russians, some of whom seek money, goods, and entertainment in the drastically more prosperous and urbanized China across the border. And that population is declining in numbers while experiencing miniscule growth in its standard of living. The Chinese population in Manchuria, in contrast, is growing and wealthier. According to one study, there are approximately five Chinese for every Russian between the ages of 15 and 64 living adjacent to the border. The ratio of Chinese to Russians is twenty to one when the distances from the border are widened to several hundred kilometers.¹⁰⁴ Estimates of how many Chinese are living inside Russia vary widely; the number is probably in the hundreds of thousands.¹⁰⁵

The adjacent RFE’s raw materials and land look attractive to Beijing. The RFE boasts oil and natural gas, minerals, large fish stocks in the Sea of Okhotsk, timber, and water. The scale of Chinese compared with Russian investments is astronomical. The most spectacular case is the \$400 billion deal between Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation to supply the RFE’s natural gas to China for the next 30 years. Chinese companies have also invested in a giant copper mine, and Xi announced a \$10 billion cross-border infrastructure fund in 2017. Agriculture is emerging as a vibrant business as well. Chinese farmers are growing a variety of crops on land that Russia is leasing at low rates to encourage production. Many of the timberlands near the border have been leased to

¹⁰⁴ Dragos Tirnovanu, “Russia, China, and the Far East Question,” *Diplomat*, January 20, 2016.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, *ibid.*; and “Chinese in the Russian Far East: A Geopolitical Time Bomb?” *South China Morning Post*, July 8, 2017.

Chinese firms for harvesting.¹⁰⁶ In addition, since 2014, Russian and Chinese government-affiliated companies have been co-developing Zarubino Port, which is south of Vladivostok near the North Korean and Chinese borders and gives China direct access to the Sea of Japan.¹⁰⁷

Russians have looked warily at all these developments, searching for signs that China is positioning itself to control the region. Not surprisingly, as Rolland observes, “Russia’s initial reaction to BRI was cautious.”¹⁰⁸ On balance, however, when viewed from the perspective of current Chinese and Russian priorities, the political and military status quo on the borders is likely to continue, albeit for a finite period. For China, the RFE is propagating fruit in need of regular irrigation. For Russia, the RFE is a profitable orchard seemingly perched near the edge of a cliff that is eroding. Russia needs internal migration to the region and other exceptional developments.

Making the situation even worse from the Russian perspective is the totality of China. The re-ascension of the historic Asian power is the new, long-term reality. There is near certainty that the towering asymmetry between them will endure and in all likelihood grow. Russian security and economic interests in the border and adjacent regions are increasingly vulnerable. What could divide their alignment down the road is the prospect of China continuing to expand more rapidly than Russia, making the relationship even more lopsided and ending Russian dreams of recapturing hegemony in its historic, southern “near abroad” and perhaps into Eastern Europe. Another possibility is a victory by China and Russia over the West, leading, for example, to the dismantling of NATO, the United States’ withdrawal from the western Pacific, and the end of the U.S. alliances in Asia. These would be a short-lived boon to Russia, perhaps, but winning coalitions tend to fall apart. Moreover, if the Soviet experience is any guide, even if they were to achieve victory against the United States either peacefully or in a two-front war, Russia and China would presumably position themselves for maximum advantage over each other for the post-victory era.

In either scenario—faster growth or victory over the West—there would be little cause for China to continue to give a comparatively impotent Russia special consideration. Putin and Xi (or probably their successors) share no universalist, democratic ideology, such as the one that anchors the liberal post-World War II order, to temper raw power politics. What would be

¹⁰⁶ “Chinese in the Russian Far East.”

¹⁰⁷ “China, Russia to Co-develop Zarubino Port,” IHS Maritime 360, July 3, 2014; and Artyom Lukin, “Why the Russian Far East Is So Important to China,” Huffington Post, March 14, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century?* 80.

China's incentive to share hegemony in any part of Central Asia, or elsewhere on the new Silk Road for that matter, or to be satisfied with Mongolian neutrality or even sovereignty, let alone Russia-Mongolia strategic alignment? Why would China permit Russia to retain sovereignty in the RFE, which the tsars wrested unfairly from the Qing Dynasty? Why would China permit Russia to exercise influence on the Korean Peninsula, or with Japan, or to play a decisive role in any important market or supply source around the world, including Western Europe? China could conceivably make exceptions, allowing Russia a small empire in Eastern Europe and carving out for it a special mercenary role as China's enforcer in unstable areas of Central Asia.

In the meantime, reflecting its acute need for markets and investment, Russia nurtures foreign trade opportunities that are out of sync with Chinese foreign policy. It did not, for example, join China in sanctioning South Korea over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in 2017 and is instead pursuing the growth of a Russian-Korean partnership.¹⁰⁹ Another interesting example is Russia's special relationship with China's competitor, India. Russia continues to rank as India's top foreign supplier of military equipment and has plans for much stronger economic ties. The biggest energy market it might tap down the road is Japan, which could also serve as a strategic partner someday, providing Russia with leverage against China as well as the United States.

Strategic Questions

The chapter's opening quotations by Xi and Putin were taken from their remarks made on June 8, 2018, on the occasion of Xi awarding Putin China's first friendship medal. The lavish, highly publicized ceremony was held in the Great Hall of the People, where the CCP and PRC convene their grandest meetings. There could hardly have been a clearer symbol of the Chinese regime's sense of its power and interests. There could hardly have been a clearer demonstration that China is the "big brother" to Russia today and that authoritarian fidelity with Putin is currently important to the CCP.

Indeed, the modern history of China-Russia relations underscores the point that the two countries' authoritarian leaders have acted on the basis of their interests, interests shaped by the balance of power and historically

¹⁰⁹ Anthony V. Rinna, "Russia's Strategic Partnerships with China and South Korea: The Impact of THAAD," *Asia Policy* 13, no. 3 (2018): 79–99.

based, nationalist ideologies that they have championed in their quests to survive, achieve popular legitimacy, and enhance their influence. In view of the trends in the distribution of power and seeming decline of U.S. global and regional leadership, Xi and Putin assess their shared and complementary interests to exceed their conflicting ones. Both have a fundamental interest in undermining and dividing the influence of the United States and other democracies as means to protect their power at home and extend their influence abroad.

How susceptible are China and Russia to reassessing their interests and alignment? Scholars cannot answer that question with certainty, but it stretches credulity to accept that Xi and Putin are immune to reconsidering their cooperation in view of changing international strategic and domestic circumstances. As we have seen, history provides precedents for strategic recalculations by once-collaborating Chinese and Russian authoritarians. The real questions involve identifying the circumstances that would most likely weaken the China-Russia alignment and conducting a full cost-benefit analysis of the policies designed to produce those circumstances.

Policymaking in the United States and its allies is in flux. The rise of China, aggressive actions by Russia, the strategic coordination between the two countries, and the fast-changing balance of power are driving Western and East Asian nations to question their domestic as well as foreign policies. Many are struggling over how to respond to Russian actions and policies that are based on interests shared with or complementary to China's—for example, assassinations in Europe, efforts to undermine democratic elections in the United States and Europe, aggression in Ukraine, and support of the Assad regime in Syria. Similarly, many democracies are struggling with how to coordinate responses to a wide range of Chinese actions. These actions start with predatory industrial policies such as intellectual property acquisition and subsidies causing overcapacity in various industrial sectors. The United States and its allies and partners are struggling to respond to China asserting territorial claims in the South China Sea, conspiring with Russia to circumvent UN and U.S. economic sanctions against North Korea, and intimidating Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Vietnam militarily. Democracies are struggling with how to reorganize their multilateral cooperation. How can they more effectively assemble as coalitions in Europe and Asia to bolster their trade and economic growth and protect sectors of their economies? How can they better balance and deter Russia through NATO and respond to China's stated goal of exerting preeminent influence in Asia and more ambiguous goal of reaching global preeminence? At a minimum, the balance of power in Asia and Europe must be more stable

than in recent years, grounded in the United States' and its allies' improved economic vitality, military strength, and credibility to defend core interests. The United States and its allies need to agree on what those core interests are and to bolster deterrence in both theaters appropriately.

The question of values, as the world learned in the Cold War, is not inconsiderable. No attempt by the United States and its allies to downplay values such as individual freedom, rule of law, and democracy is likely to change the threat perceived by Xi and Putin to their reigns. On the contrary, such attempts could serve to reduce the leverage, credibility, and legitimacy of U.S. and Western leadership. In this regard, the strategic advantage the United States obtained through its championing Western values over the decades of the Cold War serves as a guidepost.

From the West's perspective, how might the interests of these two powers be exploited without, as Angela Stent warns in her foreword to this volume, driving the two closer together? According to Robert Sutter in his chapter, China now occupies the advantageous "hinge" position in China-Russia-U.S. relations. That dynamic may be ending with the Trump administration's tougher policies toward China and efforts to reach out to Putin. U.S. policy matters. Can a full Sino-Russian alliance be prevented, for example, by helping Russia contend with the far more powerful China over the longer term and giving it a greater stake in peaceful relations with European countries, the United States, and Japan, thereby bringing Russian interests into greater alignment with the democracies? Was the rapprochement between the United States and China in the last quarter of the 20th century, ironically, a model of what might portend for U.S.-Russian relations in the second quarter of the 21st century? Are the interests of the Russian dictatorship simply incompatible with such a realignment? And can today's Chinese strategists revert to "biding their time" and downplaying China's overwhelming advantages to calm Russian leaders' fears and avoid pushing them into the West's camp?

As the drastically weaker of the two countries, Russia may be more susceptible to Western policies that seek to change its alignment interests. On his own, Putin (or his successor) is in no position to pressure, let alone pick a fight with, Xi. From the West's perspective, Russia's weak economy is one source of leverage, and specifically the government's dependence on oil and gas sales abroad for revenue. How might stronger sanctions over Ukraine and cyberattacks on democracies affect Putin's calculations? Might there be counter-cyberattack options to signify resolve and the capability to weaken critical components of the Russian economy on which Putin depends? Other points of leverage are the Russian military operations and

aid in eastern Ukraine, which are expensive and dangerous. What if those burdens became heavier through stronger Western military support for Ukraine, to be lifted with Russia's withdrawal? How might Putin respond to accelerated arms budgets and investments by Europeans, budgets and investments that the vastly smaller Russian economy could not match? How vulnerable to influence is Putin if the West were to expand its own cyberstrategy against Russia and more forthrightly champion democratic values? Russia does not share enduring interests with China in their border areas now, and in the longer term the two countries would seem to share no significant interests other than avoiding nuclear conflict. Without credible partners with which to balance China, Russia's long-term prospects appear bleak, to the point that the country risks declining into a vassal of China. Once Russia's aggressive behavior abates, would the United States and its allies consider adding the carrot of additional markets—for example, the long-proposed pipeline to Japan—to diversify Russian interests?¹¹⁰ Would not Japan make an attractive strategic partner to balance China? Would the prospect of Western, Japanese, and international acceptance, should Russia cease aggressive, anti-democracy behavior, assist in Russia's tilting toward the West?

In sum, is there a new strategic equilibrium, a stabilizing grand bargain that the West could construct carefully and methodically over time with Putin and his successors, communicating clearly the methods and goals from the outset and that verifiable Russian behavior is the measure of success or failure?¹¹¹ The analysis here suggests that Putin's and Russia's interests may be subject to alteration. Like his Soviet forebears, Putin has changed strategy in the past when he perceived that his and Russian interests warranted change. His successors, whoever they may be, will assume

¹¹⁰ Shoichi Itoh, "Sino-Russian Energy Relations in Northeast Asia and Beyond: Oil, Natural Gas, and Nuclear Power," in "Japan and the Sino-Russian Entente: The Future of Major-Power Relations in Northeast Asia," NBR, NBR Special Report, no. 64, April 2017, 29–41.

¹¹¹ Because there appears to be zero basis for trusting Russia's leadership, letting up on sanctions without proven progress on key issues is a poor option. Russia needs to know U.S. strategy, just as the Soviet Union knew from day one Ronald Reagan's zero-zero option for getting rid of the SS-20s. Relief from sanctions and progress on a gas pipeline to Japan must come after, or be (incrementally) consonant with, Russia's withdrawing from eastern Ukraine and ending cyberattacks. Indeed, akin to the deployment of Pershing II and Tomahawk missiles, the initial step for the United States and its allies would be to increase support of Ukraine, the Baltic states, and other regional countries, holding in abeyance the carrots until good faith has been shown. Simultaneously, the other NATO members have to raise their defense budgets and act with greater cohesion. The United States likewise must continue to increase its defense spending and show resolve in backing NATO. This requires, in other words, a comprehensive melding of U.S. and multilateral commitments over an extended period of time for the purpose of changing Russia's calculations for aligning with China. In adopting this approach, the United States will be better prepared to deter, and if deterrence fails, to fight, a two-theater war.

responsibility for Russia's interests from the same position of national weakness and could be even more insecure politically.

Xi and the CCP are another story. Strengthened by continuing economic growth and military progress, and with Chinese nationalism surging, they sense that trends are on their side. They are more secure and far more powerful internationally than Putin. They believe that their closer relations with both Russia and the United States and decent relations in Europe give them still fuller advantage. Through his public statements and policies, Xi is committed to bold international accomplishments leading to China's global preeminence. The construction of island bases in the South China Sea and the rollout of BRI provide the most conspicuous evidence of growing Chinese power and the relevance of the current narrative. Barring a major national stumble and presuming continued autocracy, Xi's successors doubtlessly will continue down this path, seeking to fuse national interests, Chinese traditions, and contemporary ideology to legitimize their leadership, protect themselves, and attain greatness.

Xi's and the CCP's vulnerabilities are fewer than Putin's, but still worth considering, as are policies that aim for no more than balancing and containing Chinese power. How dependent on trade is the Chinese people's prosperity? What would be the effects on China and the West of a reduction of that trade through expulsion from the WTO, export or import controls, or long-term tariffs to discourage trade? What would be the effects of reductions in China's ability to invest overseas? Over time, can a coalition of like-minded nations, such as that imagined in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, outcompete China economically? Can enhanced investments in defense and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific successfully balance the fast-growing power of the PLA? Can enhanced ideological confrontation and successful resistance overseas to Chinese power and influence stir resistance to the CCP's totalitarianism domestically and infiltrations elsewhere?

The details of China-Russia strategic cooperation matter enormously. What are the two sides choosing to do together? Which of their cooperative efforts are working? Which are not? What specifically is motivating each effort? Where are their strengths and vulnerabilities? Reducing ambiguity is an important step in assessing threats and opportunities soberly and promoting good policymaking. In the subsequent chapters, this volume will delve deeper into the China-Russia alignment and then weigh options available to the United States.

