

BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Kathryn E. Stoner's

Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order

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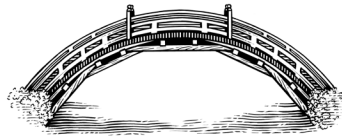
and

James Reilly's

Orchestration: China's Economic Statecraft Across Asia and Europe

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Marcin Kaczmarek

Robert Sutter

Alexander Korolev

Kathryn E. Stoner

James Reilly

Domestic Politics as the Driver and the Limitation to Statecraft

Marcin Kaczmarek

Russia and China have been “fellow travelers” in the emerging post-U.S. global order. The worldviews of their ruling elites have grown closer over the last decade, fueled by the processes of power centralization. Regime survival remains the top concern in both the Kremlin and the Zhongnanhai. Russia’s and China’s actions often mirror each other, creating the impression of coordination, as in the case of military pressure placed simultaneously on Ukraine and Taiwan. The trial and sentencing of Russian key opposition figure Alexei Navalny along with the crackdown on his supporters coincided with China’s introduction of the National Security Law in Hong Kong and an effective liquidation of the city’s autonomy. Under such conditions, scholars and policymakers alike have unsurprisingly directed greater attention toward Moscow and Beijing.

Still, China’s and Russia’s ultimate destinies in the international order appear to differ. The two books discussed here, *Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order* by Kathryn Stoner and *Orchestration: China’s Economic Statecraft Across Asia and Europe* by James Reilly, clearly indicate that Moscow and Beijing perceive their respective roles and places in international politics through different lenses. The two states also deploy their influence in distinctive manners: one focuses on translating wealth into power, the other on amassing power with limited wealth.

Questions such as what constitutes power, how states exercise power at their disposal abroad, and how this power is linked to domestic political and economic arrangements are at the heart of both books. Stoner and Reilly reject the eternally popular metaphor of great powers as billiard balls defined by their material resources and acting rationally and strategically in the international realm. Instead, both authors strive to nuance popular understanding of state action and geopolitical and geoeconomic statecraft. Exploring the relationship between the domestic political-economic context on the one hand and engagement with the external world on the other, the two books delve into the limitations of successful statecraft and the obstacles encountered by states trying to convert their resources into influence.

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Stoner's first principal argument concentrates on the power at the Kremlin's disposal. She challenges a widespread belief that Russia has been a "power in decline" for the last three decades. Instead, she argues, Russia has managed to rebuild a substantial part of its power projection portfolio (Stoner, p. 235). This resurgence did not take place as part of a retrenchment strategy; on the contrary, Moscow "resurrected" itself against the backdrop of U.S. and European sanctions imposed after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Stoner vows to pay much more attention not only to assets of the Russian leadership but also to the leadership's "desire and ability" to use those assets for foreign and domestic policies purposes (Stoner, p. 236). Even if the Kremlin's assets are limited and incomparable in scale to those of the United States, China, or (economically) the European Union, its current leadership shows determination to translate latent power into instruments of influence.

The question that remains relates to the long-term strategic aims of Russian leadership (assuming that such aims exist). Despite rebuilding its influence in the neighborhood and employing a full repertoire of foreign policy instruments, Russia has neither managed to reverse the pro-Western orientation of Ukraine or Georgia nor prevent the rise of China's influence both in Central Asia and in other parts of the post-Soviet space (Stoner, pp. 67–68). It is Beijing's self-restraint more than anything that explains cooperative relations between Russia and China in their shared Eurasian neighborhood.

In the second part of the book, Stoner links Russia's assertive policy, especially since Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, with the ruling regime's search for a new source of domestic legitimacy. While Russia's foreign policy is often interpreted as a poster child of the realist tradition of international relations theory, Stoner persuasively argues that domestic political considerations are at least as important in driving Moscow's engagement with the external world. Assertive foreign policy has become the means to defend the patron-client network established in Putin's Russia and to maintain popular support in the face of worsening economic prospects (Stoner, p. 249). This explanation embedded in domestic politics counters first and foremost realist interpretations that see Moscow's foreign policy as either a response to Western (NATO's and the EU's) encroachment on Russia's neighborhood or a result of Russia's offensive power projection. Stoner's argument also constitutes the implicit defense of the "reset" policy pursued by the Obama administration in 2009–12 as a testimony to the possibility of different (i.e., cooperative) Russian-Western relations.

The emphasis on the relevance of a regime type, while undermining realist narratives, leads inadvertently to another set of simplifications. Stoner assumes that a (domestically) different Russia would conduct a completely different foreign policy, including the readiness to support liberalizing post-Soviet states such as Georgia or Ukraine, cooperate with the United States in the Middle East, and “create a united front against the rise of China” (Stoner, p. 263). Such a counterfactual seems to lose all the nuance that characterizes the volume and ultimately reduces all aspects of Russia’s foreign policy to its relationship with the West. *Russia Resurrected* portrays a hypothetical democratic Russia in black and white terms, a state that would throw all its weight behind the United States.


These two threads—the exercise of power abroad and the role of the domestic political context—are also central to Reilly’s book. His volume adopts a narrower approach with a focus on the attempts by Chinese leadership to translate wealth into (geo)political power and influence. Reilly recognizes economic statecraft as embedded in the ideas dominant in the People’s Republic of China since its inception and facilitated by its institutions (Reilly, p. 13). Unlike Stoner, he pays less attention to individual leaders, arguing that ideas and institutions have shaped economic statecraft practices across different leadership periods (from Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao to Xi Jinping). Reilly perceives China—with the Chinese Communist Party at the core of its political system—as uniquely positioned to employ economic instruments for political aims, yet he also identifies a number of challenges, with control and coordination at the top of the list (Reilly, p. 162). This area is where the orchestration approach, defined as a way of identifying subordinate actors who share the leadership’s priorities and encouraging them to implement their parochial as well as national goals, comes into play (Reilly, p. 2).

Reilly convincingly reconstructs how Chinese leaders have successfully employed orchestration tactics through leading, coordinating, and delegating. In most cases, they managed to align the priorities of the Chinese state and numerous domestic players, even if it sometimes required a learning process. Nonetheless, as China’s economic statecraft is ultimately about advancing political aims, a broader discussion centered on the latter seems to be missing. Analyzing the Western European case, Reilly singles out Beijing’s goals for the EU to lift the post-1989 arms embargo on China and for China to secure a market economy status for itself. He does not, however, elaborate on Beijing’s strategic aims. Does China want to separate Europe from the United States and would thus be willing to support the EU for that purpose? Or does it aim to divide the EU to force “the race to the

bottom” among the group’s members? Was the establishment of the “16+1” formula in Central and Eastern Europe thought of as a way to weaken the EU or was it a mere trial balloon of how to lead regional cooperation?

At times, the picture of relations between domestic politics and foreign policy seems a bit too simplified. Reilly analyzes CEFC China Energy as an example of a private Chinese company with murky ties. Initially, CEFC’s successful investments in the Czech Republic were aligned with Beijing’s aims, according to Reilly, but later on the company crossed certain boundaries, which led to its de facto nationalization and the arrest of its chairman (Reilly, pp. 110–12). At the time of building its influence in Central Europe, CEFC was supposed to buy a stake in Rosneft, Russia’s state-owned oil champion and the key partner of the Chinese energy industry. The failure of this transaction prevented China from gaining an invaluable asset in the Russian upstream oil market. In my reading, this case illustrates the primacy of domestic politics and political infighting over foreign policy priorities rather than a successful orchestration tactic.

To some extent, both volumes reaffirm the existing “specialization” of Moscow and Beijing in international politics. Russia tends to rely predominantly on military means, diplomacy, and sharp-power resources, whereas China employs a repertoire of economic statecraft tools, including credit lines, investments, loans, and development aid. This specialization does not allow for easy predictions though. Russia has been more successful than typically assumed in translating its limited socio-economic assets into political influence abroad. Chinese leadership, in turn, while skillfully mobilizing and directing the variety of its domestic actors, has failed to secure durable influence, especially in Western and Central Europe. More often than not, China’s economic statecraft has generated backlash, ultimately undermining its gains. In both cases, domestic politics have both enabled and constrained political leadership.

This focus on how and to what extent domestic politics and socioeconomic contexts drive and shape Russia’s and China’s external actions remains the most relevant contribution that these two books inject in the ongoing debates about non-Western powers and their attitudes toward the global order. Against the backdrop of reviving realist theoretical traditions and concepts such as “grand strategy,” the two books offer a nuanced picture of an often messy policymaking process and its numerous unintended consequences. 

Domestic Drivers Influencing Russia-China Alignment: Implications for Challenging the West

Robert Sutter

The status and outlook of the China-Russia relationship have significant implications for the Eurasian region and global order. The United States, and increasingly its allies and partners, view the two powers as determined to undermine the interests of what is often labeled as “the West” and the U.S.-led “liberal world order.” The two authoritarian powers work ever more closely together in seeking the expansion of their power and influence in both their respective priority spheres of influence—China in Asia, and Russia in Europe and the Middle East—and elsewhere in the world. The Chinese-Russian efforts vary and reflect particular interests for each power, but usually these activities have a common dimension in seeking to weaken the power and influence of the United States and the many elements of the international order it supports that impede these states’ ambitions.

Against this background, accurately and fully assessing the driving forces behind the development and consequences of Chinese and Russian behaviors challenging the prevailing order is very important. Foreign assessments of the drivers for China are undergoing change as U.S. policymakers and those of associated states came late in appreciating the challenges posed by China’s behavior coming at their countries’ expense. U.S. and other policymakers also may be underestimating Russia’s domestic drivers and capacities to challenge and counter U.S. interests and influence.

Kathryn Stoner’s comprehensive assessment in *Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order* of Russian military, economic, and political capacities involves careful considerations of hard, soft, and so-called sharp power and provides an important corrective for those tending to underestimate Russian strength. James Reilly likewise provides in *Orchestration: China’s Economic Statecraft Across Asia and Europe* an in-depth analysis of the paramount method China uses to spread influence abroad—employing party-state control of access to Chinese money, what he calls Chinese economic statecraft, to become a leading power in Asia and the world. Both specialists see the patterns of the two powers’ behavior, deemed

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very challenging in the West, as deeply rooted in domestic determinants and practices and unlikely to change.

Examining Stoner's assessment, the reader sees the Putin regime's success in effectively developing oil, gas, and other resources and competently managing the Russian economy to sustain growth sufficient to allow impressive improvement of military capacities. Putin's regime has also made increasingly sophisticated use of cyber intrusions and manipulations and other sharp-power means to counter, influence, and control international opponents. These advances are most significant regarding Russian nuclear and conventional weapons development and in the overall readiness of a much more professional and better trained military force. Robust autocratic political control to the advantage of Putin and his colleagues effectively neutralizes political opposition. Social welfare gaps and adverse demographic trends have not translated into societal discontent undermining the regime. Indeed, a key argument of the book is that Putin is driven to develop military and other capacities and to use them to take decisive actions in defense of Russian and regime interests in world affairs as a means to sustain his support among the Russian people. The pattern of behavior seems to be working well, suggesting its durability at least until Putin leaves the scene.

What this means for Russia's relations with China in a period of acute U.S. rivalry with both states seems obvious and positive for the Russia-China relationship. In real power terms, Beijing is in the dominant position with an economy ten times the size of Russia's. Yet Beijing remains very intertwined with and dependent on the United States and the West economically, and it seeks to avoid serious disruption in those relationships that might come from strongly aggressive actions confronting U.S. and Western interests. With much less to lose economically, Moscow instead takes on these tasks in challenging the West, indirectly benefiting Chinese interest in weakening U.S. and allied capacities.

The more confident Russia depicted by Stoner is less dependent on support from China in dealing with Western sanctions and other pressures. Such a government might be inclined to challenge China where Russian and Chinese interests diverge. According to some specialists, the main area where these important shared interests might differ is in the danger for Russia that it will be treated as a junior partner by China, given the latter's massively greater economic power and influence along with its increasing

global military capacities.¹ Such a trend would challenge Russia's own great-power status and ambitions—viewed as critically important to any Russian regime in the 21st century.

The powerful Russia with broad international impact depicted by Stoner does indeed sustain this priority well, and thereby the Putin regime continues to gain popular support. Given this state of affairs, the risk of Russia being treated as a junior partner by China is low. Chinese interests in treating Russia as an equal are warranted and the current situation appears to preclude outside efforts to drive a wedge between Beijing and Moscow on this basis.

Reilly's assessment of Chinese economic statecraft depicts Chinese leaders as being determined to follow the techniques employed in the Belt and Road Initiative and other global economic schemes. China's past domestic and international experiences, and notably its enormous success in domestic development and world economic influence in recent decades, reinforce its current practices. Overall, China's plans involve workable programs that expand the country's international economic impact and importance in ways that are much cheaper and more cost-effective than many conventional government foreign assistance programs. The recent Chinese programs involve loosely controlled frameworks including local Chinese state and private enterprises as well as international actors not well controlled by Beijing. Weaknesses in these plans involve difficulties in central control of the frameworks and the implementation of the targeted goals. That the results of these efforts have been mixed for Chinese influence abroad because of poor implementation or unanticipated backlash against expanding Chinese influence has not thus far deterred continued Chinese determination to follow such economic statecraft in seeking international influence in the future.

This important dimension of Chinese foreign policy seems generally compatible with sustained close Chinese-Russian cooperation in common opposition to the United States. The areas treated in Reilly's volume do not involve Central Asia, usually seen as the most likely area where Chinese expanding influence would run up against Russian core interests. But Russia has key interests in areas treated in the book—Western and Eastern Europe, North Korea, and Myanmar—and Chinese practices do not appear to counter Russian interests in these instances. One can argue that Chinese

¹ See the chapters by Richard J. Ellings, James B. Steinberg, and Robert Sutter in *Axis of Authoritarians: Implications of China-Russia Cooperation*, ed. Richard J. Ellings and Robert Sutter (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2018), chap. 1, 5, and 6.

interests in maintaining a stable economic interchange with Europe would be at odds with Russia's efforts to weaken the European Union and divide Europe and NATO, and yet what Chinese economic statecraft in Europe does demonstrate in more subtle ways are China's efforts to weaken and divide European and NATO unity where it impinges on the country's interests. And China has seen its interests well-served by joining with Russia in military exercises in the Baltic, Black, and Mediterranean Seas, exercises intended to intimidate and coerce European states.

In sum, the domestic drivers of foreign policy examined in both countries on balance reinforce their common efforts against the United States and the West. Because these volumes are not designed to examine the relationships China and Russia have with one another, Russia's relations with China get very brief treatment in the Stoner volume while Russia is not mentioned in the Reilly book. These relationships are critical, however, in determining the extent of the two states' cooperation and collaboration with one another in challenging the U.S.-led order. They figure prominently in calculations of differences between the two powers that the United States and others could exploit in seeking to weaken the difficulties posed by expanding Russian and Chinese power and influence.

In future publications it would be interesting to see the authors draw implications of their findings for greater or lesser Sino-Russian cooperation against the West. In addition, other questions worth considering include: How important to Russia was China's key role in providing Central Asian oil and gas producers, notably Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, with outlets for export not controlled by or used for the advantage of Russia, thereby increasing the profits these states gained from such exports at Russia's expense? How significant for Russia is the challenge to its interests in the Eurasian Economic Union posed by China's Belt and Road Initiative, which is having a strong impact on Central Asian and other states in Russia's orbit? Why has Putin's Russia basically put aside or played down Moscow's long-standing interests in good ties with India, Vietnam, and the two Koreas to adopt policies in line with China's interests? In what ways other than the military exercises noted above has China deferred to Russian interests in Moscow's priority areas of influence, Europe and the Middle East?

As noted earlier, both studies emphasize the domestic drivers of Russia and Chinese behaviors challenging U.S. influence and interests. Does this line of analysis negate the view by some that Russia and China are driven to cooperate in countering U.S. interests as a response to escalating U.S. pressure in recent years? Or does it challenge the common view that Beijing

and Moscow cooperated more closely in undermining U.S. interests in the past decade largely because they viewed the United States, Europe, Japan, and other allied powers in comparative decline and averse to harsh countermeasures at China's and Russia's expense?

In sum, these two detailed and authoritative studies add greatly to our understanding of the domestic drivers of Russian and Chinese foreign behavior. They clarify for the United States and the West the reality of the many challenges they will continue to face in dealing with China and Russia, determined to have their way at the expense of other states and the prevailing global order. ♦

Updating Neoclassical Realism: A New Angle on Global Power Projection

Alexander Korolev

From the vantage point of the international relations discipline, James Reilly's *Orchestration: China's Economic Statecraft Across Asia and Europe* and Kathryn Stoner's *Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order* are important books that contribute to the field both empirically and theoretically. Each book makes a unique contribution to its field of focus. Taken together, however, their respective contributions are magnified as they send an overarching message that challenges our assessments of global politics as well as the structure of the contemporary international system.

Empirically, the books explore global power projection by China and Russia and successfully debunk some deeply entrenched myths surrounding the assessments of the two countries' impact on the global order. Specifically, Reilly's analysis reveals that China does not—and is not likely to, as some might worry—“rule the world” any time soon. Economic diplomacy is naturally the main aspect of China's rise, and yet Beijing has not been fully successful in turning its economic strengths into tangible strategic results. Beijing's strategy of economic statecraft through expanding trade, aid, investment, and infrastructure projects in target countries largely leaves Chinese leaders unable to realize their political goals. Moreover, China's economic statecraft often exacerbates anxieties and distrust across the four different regions covered in the book: Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, North Korea, and Myanmar. For example, Beijing's major goals of securing market economy status, ending Europe's arms embargo, dissuading Pyongyang from pursuing nuclear weapons, and fostering a friendly image in Myanmar remain unachieved, despite decades-long efforts in the economic realm. Not only does China's deepening economic presence fail to wrest significant policy concessions, especially from the leaders of wealthy, stable democracies, but in fact it appears damaging for Beijing's diplomatic objectives (Reilly, p. 169). And since Beijing is unlikely to veer from its current, not spectacularly effective approach to economic statecraft, its capacity to project power overseas will remain limited and

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one-dimensional, not showing any strong signs of impending global political dominance by China.

While Reilly, by showing the limits of China's global power projection, adds a sobering note to what at times appear inflated assessments of China's global geopolitical clout, Stoner presents a compelling wake-up call to those who might be dismissing Russia as an insignificant regional actor in decline. *Russia Resurrected* introduces an innovative multidimensional understanding of power that goes beyond the traditional means of "men, military, and money" (Stoner, p. 27) and includes geographic domain and policy scope and weight associated with a country's external behavior as important metrics. Examining Russia's power in this way, Stoner demonstrates that, contrary to popular assessments, Russia is "good enough" not only to meddle in the affairs of its immediate geopolitical environment but also to dramatically alter the global balance of power (Stoner, p. 4). According to Stoner, Russia has not been declining since the end of the Cold War; rather, the country has been resurrecting itself while showing resilience to exogenous shocks, and using its power (hard, soft, and sharp) instrumentally to secure important economic and geopolitical benefits necessary for sustaining Vladimir Putin's autocratic political regime. Though domestic challenges are significant, Russia appears capable of challenging the global dominance of the still most powerful country—the United States.

Thus, the empirical message generated by the two books is critical for our understanding of global politics and the trends of global power transition. Paraphrasing Stoner, who argues that Russia is "neither as weak as we think, nor as strong as its leadership would like it to be viewed" (Stoner, p. 28), one way to summarize the critical takeaway from the two books together is: while Russia is not as weak as we think, China is not as powerful or influential as it looks. This finding has critical real-world implications, especially for the United States, which is finding it increasingly difficult to navigate the consolidating China-Russia alignment while still believing that Moscow, due to weakness, cannot well-manage closer strategic cooperation with Beijing.¹

The theoretical contributions of the two books are equally important. Both authors are critical of realism, and while they might disagree with my interpretation, I found the analysis presented in both books highly

¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., "A New Sino-Russian Alliance?" Project Syndicate, January 12, 2015 <<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/russia-china-alliance-by-joseph-s-nye-2015-01>>.

pertinent to enriching the neoclassical realist analytical framework, the key explanatory target of which is states' actual external behavior. Neoclassical realism concurs with structural realism (Waltzian neorealism) on the importance of the international system, which sets the context and general parameters of state behavior, but it introduces domestic politics (or "the state") as a critical layer of intervening variables that fall between the international system's parameters and states' actual foreign policy. These domestic variables are not independent from the structural parameters of the international system—rather, they have a causal impact on the external behavior of states, particularly great powers such as China and Russia. Meanwhile, there is little agreement within neoclassical realism on the central explanatory variables at the unit level (state level) and their degree of impact, which makes the framework less parsimonious but more flexible.

From this perspective, the two books introduce a battery of new domestic-level factors that can be added to what neoclassical realism as an analytical approach has accumulated since Gideon Rose coined the term in 1998.² *Orchestration* unfolds how China's domestic attributes, such as ideas as embodied in strategic culture and political-economic institutions, create complex domestic structures that exert a powerful influence on how Beijing engages in economic statecraft abroad. Special attention is paid to the domestic-level complications associated with the intensity of the principal-agent problem and what the author calls the "governors' dilemma" (Reilly, p. 7)—when central authorities are faced with the challenge of monitoring and controlling Chinese firms pursuing commercial interests abroad. Such control is exercised through carefully selected implementing agents, such as various ministries, government agencies, and regional officials, whose interests are expected to align with the strategic goals of the central government. The institutional edifice created by such orchestration of interests, however, is difficult to manage. It is comprised of highly complex hierarchical delegation structures that are not immune to the pervasive issues of moral hazard, policy stretching, and enterprise malfeasance. The ubiquitous occurrence of these problems affects the effectiveness of China's economic statecraft and, in the end, undermines Beijing's diplomatic priorities.

² While reviewing literature in an essay in 1998, Rose captured the fact that these works introduced important domestic variables that, while not canceling out the role of international structure, complement our understanding of foreign policy, forming a new analytical approach. See Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72.


Russia Resurrected, in turn, introduces the nature of the political regime as a key explanatory unit-level factor in understanding how Russia expands its global power and thus affects the global distribution of capabilities. Stoner's analysis goes deeper than a simple statement that autocratic regimes behave differently from democracies. The book reveals a complex domestic-level incentive structure generated by Russia's patronal autocratic political economy that has consolidated under Putin's rule. It is both Putin and the political milieu in which he operates that influence Russia's power projection abroad. Russia's patronal autocracy, in which Putin and his cronies use the state's resources for personal gain, shapes both Russia's national interests and the policies to pursue them. This creates a peculiar mechanism that converts Russia's moral and material national attributes into useable power and enhances the contemporary Russian leadership's willingness and ability to deploy its power resources abroad, allowing Russia to punch above its weight when dealing with the West, particularly the United States (Stoner, p. 236).

Even given the contributions of the two books, some questions can be raised regarding the analysis and the findings they present. Reilly's *Orchestration* is remarkable in terms of engagement with sources in Chinese, which enhances its value immensely and ensures that it is not out of step with how the issues are viewed in China itself. Nevertheless, the rich empirical evidence presented in the book invites a question of whether the described policymaking processes are all "orchestration." Which processes are thus not an orchestration? In the Chinese context, are those bureaucratic agencies (the "implementing agents") not simply an extension of the central government? The description of the mechanisms of orchestration and its top-down mobilization component resembles what in the Chinese literature has been called a "wisdom-pooling" (*jisi guangyi*) policymaking model of China's central government as well as other concepts.³ The question then is: Why is it orchestration and how useful is the concept for grasping the intricacies and uniqueness of economic statecraft in China?

Careful readers of *Russia Resurrected* may find themselves unpersuaded by the argument that when it comes to Russia's global power projection and particularly relations with the West, it is all about Putin and his cronies. Russia does too many different things around

³ See Wang Shaoguang, Yan Yilong, and Hu Angang, "Zhongguo zhongyang zhengfu 'jisiguangyi xing' juece moshi—guojia 'shierwu' guihua de chutai" ["Wisdom-Pooling" Decision-Making Model of China's Central Government: The Case of the Formation of the "12th Five-Year Plan"], *China Social Science Magazine*, no. 6 (2014): 1–16.

the world, many of which serve Russia's national interests. Linking this all to the nature of Putin's regime practically eliminates this regime as a viable independent variable. Moreover, when discussing the poor current condition of Russia-West relations, Stoner mentions the "tremendous cooperation between Russia and the West" that happened during Putin's early years as a president and later through Medvedev's presidency (Stoner, p. 266) when Putin effectively remained in charge (Stoner, p. 255), which proves that Russia-West cooperation is not impossible. This also shows that Putin's regime itself, at least when it comes to cooperation with the United States, is a variable rather than a constant. If that is the case, its independent causal impact is debatable. A dramatic foreign policy change from cooperation to confrontation within the span of the same political regime implies that either there is something else driving the change or a more complex causal mechanism, never specified in the book, is at play. The argument about declining regime popularity as an impetus for aggressive external behavior is not compelling because Putin's approval rate has fluctuated and has never fallen below 60% (Stoner, p. 25), which is high enough to win elections hands down. As follows from the book's Section III: The Means of Russian Power, this "something else" might be the changing structure of the international system and the relative decline of the United States in the global distribution of material capabilities. Since roughly 2008, the power threshold generated by the United States has become no longer insurmountable, making it easier for other great powers to successfully challenge the United States' global dominance. In this regard, Russia is not unique; China, too, increasingly is challenging the U.S.-dominated international order. The international structure has become more permissive toward anti-U.S. balancing. This transformation is a system-level trend that precedes the role of domestic politics.

These issues aside, each book has succeeded in delivering a clear and important message which makes them meaningful reads. Thanks to their relevance to neoclassical realism, both works will be of interest not only for China and Russia area experts but also for the broader audience of international relations students and scholars. 

Author's Response: Russia Is Not as Weak as We Think

Kathryn E. Stoner

I want to thank Marcin Kaczmarek, Robert Sutter, and Alexander Korolev for their thoughtful comments on *Russia Resurrected*. I also greatly benefited from their insights into Russian-Chinese relations in their simultaneous examination of my book with James Reilly's *Orchestration*. As Kaczmarek noted at the outset of his review, China and Russia mirror each other in many ways in their behavior in the international system, but their ultimate destinies, and the ways in which their respective leaders pursue and perceive their roles in any future international order are rather different. As I move my own scholarship forward from *Russia Resurrected*, I am increasingly intrigued by the budding synergies and cooperation (if not a formal alliance) between the current regimes ruling Russia and China. The comparative exercise in the review essays here are helpful in thinking about different ways in which Russia and China behave and interact in the current international system.

I am pleased that this distinguished group of authors found the book useful and generally compelling. At the same time, all three reviewers raised interesting and difficult questions about some of the implications of my argument that I will try to address briefly in this essay.

Kaczmarek notes that while Russia's current leadership has done well in using far fewer assets than has China in "translating latent power into instruments of influence," the question of what the leadership's long-term strategy may be still remains. He notes that Georgia and Ukraine have leaned more toward Europe and the West despite Russia's best efforts. While this claim is true to a large degree, Russia under Vladimir Putin has managed to stymie their membership in NATO and the European Union by maintaining low-boil conflicts (and sometimes high-boil in the Ukrainian case) in both countries, making them less desirable prospective members for Western military and trade alliances. As my book describes in chapter two, Russia's tentacles reach very deeply into both countries, and even into the three Baltic republics that are already members of NATO and the European Union, in part because of the hangover of existing Soviet infrastructure and influence.

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In many cases, gas, oil, and water pipelines still run through Moscow, and significant portions of the populations in these countries still speak Russian, read the Russian press, and are bombarded with Russian-language television programs due simply to proximity. Additionally, as noted in chapter two, Russian investors (both state and private, although the lines between the two are often indistinguishable) have significant economic assets in many countries of the former Soviet Union. So while the elites and even majorities of citizens in Ukraine and Georgia bend toward Europe and the West, Russian instruments of influence have managed to prevent them from actually joining Western institutions—at least for now.

Further, Kaczmarek argues that when it comes to the Russia-China relationship, Russia is surely the “junior partner” and that to the extent that there is cooperation between the two in terms of international relations and foreign policy, it is due to “Beijing’s restraint...in their shared Eurasian neighborhood.” Similarly, Sutter asks about the power balance between these two now global powers in Central Asia in particular, although he endorses my skepticism by indicating that “the risk of China treating Russia as a junior partner is low.” But both reviewers imply directly or indirectly that there is an obvious conflict of interest between the geopolitical goals of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which, after all, was announced by President Xi in Astana, Kazakhstan, in 2013.

But is there really a conflict of interest here able to create a barrier to even closer cooperation between these two “great powers”? Or is China’s BRI more complementary than potentially conflictual with Russia’s EEU and other Russian-led regional cooperation institutions? I would argue the latter. The EEU and BRI are different sorts of initiatives—one is a trade organization while the other is an infrastructure investment policy. The EEU was not formed in response to China’s BRI activities in Central Asia; its foundations were laid soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 with the signature of an initial customs treaty among Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus in 1995. This was further extended through subsequent treaties in 2010 to establish the free movement of capital, labor, goods, and services, and then reformed again in 2015 to expand membership.

Indeed, the EEU was set up as an alternative trading bloc to the European Union, not as a policy to counter BRI. In contrast to the EEU, BRI is an array of policies intended to develop physical connections between China and Europe as a sort of modern Silk Road. BRI, therefore, envisions the development of a “belt” of highways, railroads, and pipelines financed by

low-interest loans from the Chinese government to target states, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

But recall that all these countries are former republics of the Soviet Union. There are far more people in Central Asia who speak Russian than speak Chinese. Russia has multiple other strings to pull in the region—economic-, cultural-, and security-related through other established institutions like the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in addition to the EEU. These soft-power, and other hard- and sharp-power, tools provide Russia's leadership with leverage in Central Asia that China simply lacks despite its economic prowess. These states, too, have independent interests despite being sandwiched between two powerful neighbors, and at times have been able to play one off against the other (and against the United States) in pursuit of their own national economic and security goals.¹ Although they are relatively poor and underdeveloped, they are not merely bystanders in some modern version of the nineteenth century “great game” for global domination between two empires.

It is true that the Russian leadership was initially suspicious of BRI-funded projects in this area of traditional Russian influence. But in the aftermath of seizing Crimea and the ensuing sanctions from the EU and the United States in 2014, by 2015 Vladimir Putin's regime began to view the BRI less as an EEU competitor and more as a useful means to bolster trade goals with Central Asian states by creating infrastructure and further trade opportunities for Russia and its southern trade partners. Infrastructure development in Central Asia is beneficial for Russian economic interests and even potentially for its national security if coordination with China promotes a more stable neighborhood in a sometimes fractious region. In sum, while China has established and funded projects and investments throughout Central Asia, it is not at all clear that they are in competition with Russian regional goals as much as they may actually support them.

Finally, Korolev provides a very insightful set of observations regarding how my book and James Reilly's are complementary in reassessing the efficacy of Russian and Chinese power projection abroad. He notes that the “critical takeaway from the two books together is: while Russia is not as


¹ See Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). On reports of protests in 2019 in Kazakhstan against some BRI projects there, see Dante Schulz, “Anti-China Protests Held in Several Kazakhstani Cities,” Caspian Policy Center, April 8, 2021 ≈ <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/anti-china-protests-held-in-several-kazakhstani-cities>.

weak as we think, China is not as powerful or influential as it looks.” It all depends on how you understand a state’s strategic goals in the international system and how you measure power.

I also seek, as Korolev notes, to bring domestic political variables back into our understanding of why Russian international relations under Putin have become more assertive and aggressive. Korolev challenges the argument toward the end of his review by observing that Putin was, of course, president of Russia (and a very assertive prime minister under Dmitri Medvedev when he was not president) when the country’s foreign policies were more cooperative with the West and the United States in particular. So, if the regime is the same and the policy is changed, Korolev wonders, can it really be regime type alone driving the different policy?

My answer to this question is in the final chapter of *Russia Resurrected*, where I argue that indeed the regime in fact did change considerably over the last two decades. Putin did not begin his long tenure as president in the spring of 2000 as the autocrat he had become by autumn 2021. Indeed, it is the evolution of the regime into a patronal autocracy, becoming more authoritarian after Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012, that has caused a shift in how his regime has defined and pursued Russian national interests, and the way that its leadership has chosen to deploy its array of power tools in international politics.

That is, just because the individual in office has remained the same does not mean that the nature of the regime has not changed. In the last twelve months alone in Russia we have witnessed dramatic crackdowns on the opposition, the generous usage of the “foreign agents” law to silence critics, and blatantly fraudulent elections in September. Today, Putin’s Russia is more autocratic than it has ever been—it has become a country where a critical tweet or too ironic an Instagram post can turn a teenager into a criminal.

Sadly, the evolution of a more open political regime with a far less confrontational foreign policy (as Russia clearly had in 2000) into a hardened autocracy, and of a more liberal (if not fully democratically minded) political leader into a dictator with an aggressive global view, is hardly exclusive to modern Russia. Witness Viktor Orban’s transformation (helped in part by Putin) from democrat to autocrat in Hungary over the last several years or Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s increasingly authoritarian regime in Turkey. Unfortunately, history has demonstrated that many hardened autocrats start out as softer versions of what they eventually become, and that this transformation affects not only their domestic politics but their foreign policies too. 

Author's Response: Understanding China's Economic Statecraft

James Reilly

How do domestic factors affect China's foreign policy? This question has been at the core of my research agenda since graduate school. Over the past decade, I have sought to understand how Chinese policymakers strive to utilize China's vast wealth to advance their foreign policy objectives. *Orchestration: China's Economic Statecraft Across Asia and Europe* represents the culmination of these efforts. It is an honor to have three such distinguished scholars discuss my book alongside the excellent study by Kathryn Stoner.

Alexander Korolev's response most directly engages my book's core approach by asking, "Why is it orchestration and how useful is the concept for grasping the intricacies and uniqueness of economic statecraft in China?" Orchestration theory was developed by international relations theorists who noted that in practice most governance is indirect since "governors" frequently rely upon third parties to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and legitimacy.¹ They divide indirect governance into two "ideal types": delegation and orchestration. Emerging out of the dominant principal-agent framework, delegation presumes that the agent's initial interests diverge from the principal's goals, requiring contract-like compensation, oversight, and punitive measures to shape the agent's behavior. In an orchestration strategy, the "orchestrator" instead identifies a like-minded agent who shares the orchestrator's basic goals and then incentivizes and supports the agent to act in ways that should advance both the agent's and the orchestrator's goals.

I was introduced to this framework by one of the concept's originators during my 2015–16 fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Amid my struggles to conceptualize what I was learning about China's economic statecraft, it was as if someone had suddenly turned on the lights. For the first time, I had a conceptual framework that accurately and yet parsimoniously encapsulated what I had long sensed

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¹ Kenneth W. Abbott et al., "Two Logics of Indirect Governance: Delegation and Orchestration," *British Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 3 (2015): 719–29.

about how Chinese policymakers sought to utilize their nation's vast wealth to advance their foreign policy goals.

In the book, I argue that Chinese leaders seek to retain a central role for the party-state while relying on a broad array of economic statecraft techniques to advance multiple policy goals. This ambition creates considerable implementation challenges. Orchestration—designing economic statecraft initiatives to maximize interest alignment between the foreign policy goals of central leaders and the interests of key implementing actors—eases these difficulties. If implemented smoothly, China's economic statecraft thus requires only a light touch. The Belt and Road Initiative is the latest and largest manifestation of Beijing's orchestration strategy.²

I deploy orchestration as a conceptual framework to describe the implementation of China's economic statecraft. As such, it is distinct from models of policy deliberation (such as the “wisdom-pooling” framework Korolev mentions). Korolev also asks, “Which processes are thus not an orchestration?” Two stand out: when top Chinese leaders personally implement economic statecraft initiatives (clearly not an instance of indirect governance), and when they rely on oversight and punitive mechanisms that fit more neatly within the traditional principal-agent framework.

To answer Korolev's initial question then, the payoff from my use of the orchestration framework arises in illuminating the realms of China's economic statecraft that go beyond direct leadership action and instances where leaders strive to mobilize bureaucratic or economic actors to advance foreign policy objectives. Such examples dominate my book's empirical material and, I would contend, account for the vast majority of China's economic statecraft.

Korolev suggests that I might disagree with his interpretation that my book's analysis builds on neoclassical realism. In fact, as I explain, “economic statecraft...shares a core assumption with neoclassical realism: domestic ideas and institutions shape how rising power affects a country's foreign policy” (p. 4). After quoting Rose's seminal article, I add: “Realism alone, however, offers little guidance into how these domestic ideas and institutions actually influence policy outcomes.”

My book's core premise is that domestic ideas and institutions exert a powerful influence on how a country engages in economic statecraft—helping explain why different countries do economic statecraft differently. The first

² James Reilly, “China's Belt and Road Initiative,” in *After Engagement: Dilemmas in U.S.-China Security Relations*, ed. Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), 330–60.

chapter thus describes how China's tumultuous modern history forged a distinctive, coherent belief system about economic statecraft, while the second chapter examines how institutional structures shape China's orchestration approach.

Turning to the empirical material of the remaining four chapters raises a familiar challenge for all social scientists: deciding at what level to pitch one's explanatory approach. Navigating the inevitable trade-off between parsimony and detailed description will invariably give rise to complaints over either distortions resulting from the chosen level of abstraction or that the author has failed to step back and contemplate the ubiquitous big picture. Marcin Kaczmarek's essay is notable in applying both critiques. He suggests that my description of domestic factors in China's "messy" foreign policy "at times...seems a bit too simplified" and also that the book is missing a "broader discussion" of China's "strategic aims," such as whether Beijing seeks to "separate Europe from the United States," or perhaps strives to "divide" or "weaken" the European Union.

The first point is easily addressed: the book never mentions the case he refers to involving CEFC's failed Russian shares purchase; nor would I agree that "domestic politics and political infighting" is usefully juxtaposed against my application of the orchestration framework. The request for an articulation of Beijing's broader strategic aims, however, raises an interesting methodological point.

Orchestration is concerned with identifying and assessing the effectiveness of the domestic processes by which Chinese policymakers strive to turn economic resources into political influence abroad. My approach was thus to begin each case study by specifying and ranking what I identify as China's policy objectives toward that country or region. For instance, the chapter on Western Europe identifies China's two top policy goals in Europe as securing market economy status and ending Europe's arms embargo (p. 88), noting that Chinese leaders also sought to utilize economic tools "to maximize diplomatic leverage and demonstrate Beijing's benevolent intent" (p. 63). I apply the same approach in all four case studies.

One payoff of this more modest methodological choice is that I am able to assess the degree to which Chinese leaders were successful in using economic statecraft to achieve their policy objectives. For instance, I concluded that in Western Europe, "Beijing's economic statecraft not only failed to advance its two top policy goals...but exacerbated popular distrust

of China and spurred European leaders to adopt a hard line in restraining China's economic presence on the continent" (p. 88).

Not counting myself among the scholars who confidently claim to be able to reliably identify more macro-level (and often nefarious) Chinese objectives, I have chosen to leave such tasks to others. It is perhaps worthwhile to note, however, that as a field we hardly lack for such broad assertions. Moreover, such claims often lack empirical foundations or even logical coherence. Most worrisome of all are vague assertions of vast Chinese ambitions that risk exacerbating the alarmism over Chinese foreign policy currently sweeping through policymaking circles in many Western capitals—an issue to which I will return.

A more interesting point arises from Kaczmarek's comparison of China and Russia. It is, of course, an oversimplification to suggest that Russia and China respectively "specialize" in deploying military and economic might abroad. Scholars of the Chinese military would be surprised to learn that China does not rely heavily on its military capacity, while Russia clearly deploys its oil and gas resources in strategic fashion. Nonetheless, Kaczmarek is correct in pointing to the usefulness of comparisons—and in doing so, echoes Korolev's query about the uniqueness of China's orchestration approach to economic statecraft.

The book concludes by suggesting how subsequent studies might build on my findings to develop an exciting new field of research: comparative economic statecraft. I propose distinguishing countries along three dimensions: who engages in economic statecraft, why they use economic statecraft, and how they do so. Variations across countries and over time can guide subsequent research questions. Why, for instance, would a country apply the same approach over time, across issues, and toward different targets? Why would a certain group of countries engage in economic statecraft similarly; and why might their approaches vary from another set of countries? How do domestic attributes—such as strategic culture and political-economic institutions—influence how a country engages in economic statecraft? The answers to such questions would form the building blocks for the study of comparative economic statecraft. Subsequent scholarship comparing Russian and Chinese economic statecraft might consider taking up—and hopefully improving on—my initial comparative framework.

Remarkably, all three reviewers highlight one finding from my case studies: Chinese leaders often face considerable difficulty in influencing policy decisions in target countries. Although this was not my primary

analytical objective, I am struck by the absence of commentary on the policy implication that I drew from this empirical result:

The implications for Americans, Australians, and other citizens of wealthy democracies far from China's shores is that anxiety over the political costs of accepting Chinese investment and trade has been vastly overwrought. While Beijing is able to effectively orchestrate its economic statecraft, Chinese leaders have been unable to wrest significant policy concessions from the leaders of wealthy, stable democracies. For such countries, economic engagement with China yields far more economic benefits with far fewer political costs than most popular analyses assume (p. 169).

Instead of addressing this conclusion, Robert Sutter finds that my book describes "Chinese behaviors challenging U.S. influence and interests." He concludes that my study will help "clarify for the United States and the West the reality of the many challenges they will continue to face in dealing with China and Russia, determined to have their way at the expense of other states and the prevailing global order." This assertion is not supported by the evidence in the book, nor do I agree with these claims. In fact, the book's case studies provide a quite different depiction of Chinese influence abroad.

Amid the depths of the last global financial crisis and in response to European requests, Chinese policymakers mobilized their banks and enterprises to purchase European goods, invest in European firms and infrastructure, and provide financial support for the euro—initiatives for which Angela Merkel expressed profound gratitude. Across Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe, China's infrastructure investments facilitated economic growth and fostered linkages across long-standing ethnic and nationalist divisions while stimulating new investments and political attention from wealthy Western European states suddenly concerned about Chinese influence in their traditional backyard. China has been the most important factor propelling greater economic openness and reform within North Korea and has repeatedly used its economic leverage to discourage Pyongyang's pursuit of nuclear weapons. In Myanmar, Chinese diplomats built early and close linkages to Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy, providing critical support for her economic and political initiatives.

Chinese leaders will undoubtedly continue their orchestration approach to economic statecraft by encouraging financial institutions, enterprises, and regional governments to spread their economic footprint abroad in hope of advancing multiple policy goals. Yet whether these efforts threaten U.S. interests is a determination being made in Washington,

not Beijing. Despite its ambitions, China's modest and uncertain increase of influence along its western and southern periphery, a region dominated by underdeveloped and unstable states, only threatens U.S. interests if they are defined as seeking to retain exclusive influence over Asia or are striving to stymie China's rise in power. Overreacting to China's economic statecraft poses a far greater danger of feeding an insidious security dilemma.

Rather than counterproductive struggles to stem China's modest increase in influence, U.S. policymakers should reject alarmist fears and instead pursue cooperation with Beijing on issues of common concern: supporting economic development, combating climate change, and addressing the public health and economic dislocations from Covid-19. This, ultimately, is the most important policy implication of my book. 