

CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Strategic Implications and U.S. Policy Options

By Robert Sutter



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the scope and implications of China-Russia relations, explains why Sino-Russian cooperation against U.S. interests has increased during the past decade, assesses key determinants, and examines U.S. policy options.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The China-Russia relationship continues to deepen and broaden with ever more negative implications for the U.S. The drivers of Sino-Russian cooperation overshadow the brakes on forward movement at the U.S. expense. The momentum is based on (1) common objectives and values, (2) perceived Russian and Chinese vulnerabilities in the face of U.S. and Western pressures, and (3) perceived opportunities for the two powers to expand their influence at the expense of U.S. and allied countries that are seen as in decline. The current outlook is bleak, offering no easy fixes for the U.S. Nonetheless, there remain limits on Sino-Russian cooperation. The two governments continue to avoid entering a formal alliance or taking substantial risks in support of one another in areas where their interests do not overlap. Longer-term vulnerabilities include Russia's dissatisfaction with its increasing junior status relative to China, China's much stronger interest than Russia in preserving the existing world order, and opposition to Russian and Chinese regional expansion on the part of important lesser powers in Europe and Asia seeking U.S. support.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The main recommended U.S. policy option involves multiyear and wide-ranging domestic and international strengthening—militarily, economically, and diplomatically—to better position the U.S. to deal with the challenges from China and Russia.
- Participants in the NBR project differ on the appropriate amount of strengthening, with some urging sustained U.S. primacy and most others favoring various mixes of strengthening and accommodation requiring compromise of U.S. interests.
- In applying this appropriate amount of strengthening and accommodation, some participants view Russia as the leading danger, warranting U.S. accommodation with China to counter Russia; others seek to work cooperatively with Russia against China, which is seen as a more powerful longer-term threat; and others view the above maneuvers as futile in the face of strongly converging Russian and Chinese interests and identity.
- Specialists from Russia and China, but few others, favor major change in existing U.S. policy to accommodate both Moscow and Beijing.

The partnership between China and Russia has matured and broadened after the Cold War, with serious negative consequences for U.S. interests. In particular, the relationship has significantly strengthened during the past decade. The dispositions of Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping support forecasts of closer relations over the next five years and probably beyond. The momentum is based on (1) common objectives and values, (2) perceived Russian and Chinese vulnerabilities in the face of U.S. and Western pressures, and (3) perceived opportunities for the two powers to expand their influence at the expense of U.S. and allied powers that are seen as in decline. The relationship has gone well beyond the common view a decade ago that Sino-Russian ties represented an “axis of convenience” with limited impact on U.S. interests.¹

The judgments and analysis of this report reflect the main findings of a two-year research and policy engagement project conducted by the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) on the subject of the strategic implications of the advancing the Sino-Russian relationship. The project spanned 2016–18 and was supported by a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The findings and policy options are based on 50 commissioned papers and formal presentations at workshops and panel discussions in December 2016, January 2017, March 2017, July 2017, and May 2018, which involved deliberations by 80 leading U.S. specialists and 30 leading specialists from China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and Europe. They also were influenced by in-depth briefings with responsible officials at the U.S. National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the Department of State; multiple briefings for U.S. congressional staff; and presentations and discussions at academic meetings in Seoul, Singapore, and several locations in the United States. The project’s interim findings and policy options were published in two NBR Special Reports: “Russia-China Relations: Assessing Common Ground and Strategic Fault Lines” and “Japan and the Sino-Russian Entente: The Future of Major-Power Relations in Northeast Asia.”²

The following section explains the scope and provides an overview of the implications of China-Russia relations. It is followed by sections that explain why Sino-Russian cooperation against U.S. interests has increased during the past decade, assess key determinants of bilateral relations, and identify U.S. policy options going forward.

Overview of the Implications of Recent China-Russia Cooperation

Russia and China pose increasingly serious challenges to the U.S.-supported order in their respective priority spheres of concern—Russia in Europe and the Middle East, and China in Asia along China’s continental and maritime peripheries. Russia’s challenges involve military and paramilitary actions in Europe and the Middle East, along with cyber and political warfare undermining elections in the United States and Europe, European unity, and NATO solidarity. China undermines U.S. and allied resolve through covert and overt manipulation and influence peddling that employs economic incentives and propaganda. Chinese cyberattacks have focused

¹ Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

² Michael S. Chase, Evan S. Medeiros, J. Stapleton Roy, Eugene Rumer, Robert Sutter, and Richard Weitz, “Russia-China Relations: Assessing Common Ground and Strategic Fault Lines,” NBR, NBR Special Report, no. 66, July 2017, <http://www.nbr.org/publications/issue.aspx?id=349>; and Shoichi Itoh, Ken Jimbo, Michito Tsuruoka, and Michael Yahuda, “Japan and the Sino-Russian Entente: The Future of Major-Power Relations in Northeast Asia,” NBR, NBR Special Report, no. 64, April 2017, <http://www.nbr.org/publications/issue.aspx?id=344>.

more on massive theft of information and intellectual property to increase China's economic competitiveness and accelerate its efforts to dominate world markets in key advanced technologies at the expense of leading U.S. and other international companies. At the same time, China's coercion and intimidation of its neighbors, backed by an impressive buildup of military and civilian security forces, has expanded its regional control and influence.

Russia and China work both separately and together to complicate and curb U.S. power and influence in the international political, economic, and security realms. They coordinate their moves and support one another in their respective challenges to the United States and its allies and partners in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. These joint efforts involve diplomatic, security, and economic measures in multilateral forums and bilateral relations involving U.S. opponents in Iran, Syria, and North Korea. The two powers further support one another in the face of U.S. and allied complaints about their coercive expansion and other activities to challenge the regional order and global norms and institutions backed by the United States.

American specialists involved with the NBR project differ on the importance of Chinese-Russian cooperation opposing and undermining U.S. interests. Some focus on the respective problems posed for the United States by Russian and Chinese policies and practices, respectively, deeming their cooperation of significantly less concern. In contrast, a strongly emphasized view of some participants in the project sees major challenges to the United States posed by the complementarity of Chinese and Russian interests in Asia and Europe, which in a worst-case scenario could lead to a two-front war. Even short of such a war, there remain major challenges for the United States as it is compelled to divide resources and attention between two theaters, as seen in the concurrent coercive use of military and other state power by Russia in Ukraine and China in the South China Sea.

Overall, the United States' ability to deal with these rising challenges is commonly seen as in decline. The U.S. position in the triangular relationship among the United States, Russia, and China has deteriorated, to the satisfaction of leaders in Moscow and Beijing opportunistically seeking to advance their power and influence. Russia's tension with the West and ever-deepening dependence on China, in conjunction with Washington's ongoing constructive interaction with Beijing, have given China the advantageous "hinge" position in the triangular relationship that the United States used to occupy.

From one perspective held by some U.S. foreign policy experts, the developing China-Russia rapprochement represents a failure of the U.S. foreign policy strategy going back to the Nixon administration, under which the United States sought to have better relations with Russia and China than they had with one another. Given the end of the Soviet Union and the threat it posed to both the United States and China, it is not surprising that Sino-Russian relations have improved markedly in recent decades. But the degree of recent collaboration clearly disadvantages the United States and has reached sufficient importance that some have urged Washington to seek as a matter of strategic importance to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing. The failure to do so would leave in place a strengthening authoritarian axis increasingly capable of challenging the liberal order central to the U.S. position in the world. As noted above, for some the situation has become dire, with the United States facing expanding and predatory Sino-Russian opposition on several fronts of critical importance to U.S. interests, especially in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. As will be discussed below, the proponents of this perspective see China as the main threat and

recommend a more nuanced U.S. approach to Russia, using inducements as well as punishments to encourage Moscow to cooperate more with the West and to balance against China's dominance.

A contrasting view from other knowledgeable American specialists is that the ever more extensive development of overlapping Sino-Russian interests served by the two countries' mutual cooperation since the end of the Cold War makes any U.S. effort to manipulate one against the other very difficult. Unlike the Sino-Soviet animus of the Cold War, China and Russia today have come to depend on each other for economic, military, and diplomatic support in the face of challenges that have been brought on in particular by U.S. and Western policies at odds with both countries' domestic and international ambitions. The prevailing pattern is of ever-closer Sino-Russian cooperation in opposition to a U.S.-led international order seen as disadvantaging them. At the same time, the values and outlook of authoritarian leaders in Moscow and Beijing converge in opposition to U.S. interests and goals; those leaders are not likely to change for the foreseeable future.

Recent Russian and Chinese policy calculations show that the importance of improved relations with the United States is low for Putin and the Russian leadership; their worldview focuses on dealing with the U.S. threat with coercive means short of war, including military deployments, cyberattacks, and security assistance to U.S. adversaries. The Xi government continues to balance strong opposition to the United States' international leadership and encirclement in Asia with a desire to manage differences with the United States in order to avoid confrontation and conflict. China has a much greater stake in the U.S.-led international order than does Russia, but it strikes the balance in ways that seriously undermine the United States. For example, China's coercive advances to control disputed territory along its rim undermine the U.S. position as regional security guarantor, and its ever-expanding military buildup seeks to turn the military balance of power in Asia against the United States.

Complicating an effective U.S. policy response is the fact that the United States and allied leaders remain preoccupied with troubles at home and abroad, creating a balance of international power favoring further adverse advances and challenges by a rising China and resurgent Russia. And U.S. influence on key areas of Sino-Russian cooperation, notably sales of advanced weapons, energy-related trade and investment, and cooperation in the United Nations and elsewhere against various Western initiatives, is low.

While the drivers detailed below overshadow the brakes on forward movement at the United States' expense, there remain limits on cooperation. The two governments continue to eschew the commitments of a formal alliance. Moreover, up to this point it has been hard to find instances when Russia took substantial risks in support of China's serious challenges to the United States that did not involve overlapping Russian interests, and vice versa.

Meanwhile, much Sino-Russian cooperation depends on circumstances subject to change. The bilateral relationship focuses on overlapping interests and converging outlooks of the authoritarian rulers in Beijing and Moscow. Though not discussed prominently, there is full awareness on both sides that today's bonhomie follows decades of acute Cold War hostilities. At that time, Moscow was the dominant power pressing Beijing to defer. Today, the tables have turned. Russia, with national wealth only one-tenth the size of the increasingly modern Chinese economy, is ever more dependent on China. This reality severely undercuts Putin's goal, widely supported in Moscow, of re-establishing Russia's great-power status.

For its part, the United States, though challenged, remains a superpower with the means to take steps to change prevailing trends. Through effective economic and military strengthening and adroit statecraft, the United States could lead efforts to counter the challenges of China-Russia cooperation. U.S. policy choices considered later involve a broad range of possible efforts to change the international balance of power to the United States' advantage. Some steps to potentially change the circumstances underlining the current adverse trends involve imposing greater costs on Russia and China for their challenges, while others involve more cooperative U.S. relations with each country.

The circumstances determining the course of Sino-Russian relations and their implications for the United States also involve lesser powers with important roles to play. Japan, a key U.S. ally in Asia, is acutely concerned with China and in the lead among regional powers seeking to improve its relations with Russia. India and Vietnam, Asian powers with close ties with Russia, are wary of Chinese dominance and actively building closer ties with the United States. Some other Asian and many European states allied to or partnering with the United States have relations with China and Russia that have an impact on U.S. interests, both positively and negatively.

The participants in the NBR project not from China or Russia generally favor a multiyear and wide-ranging plan to strengthen the position of the United States domestically and internationally to better deal with the negative implications of China-Russia cooperation. Participants differ on the appropriate amount and methods of strengthening. Some stress sustaining U.S. primacy without compromising, while many more favor various mixes of strengthening and accommodation that require some significant compromise of U.S. interests and values. In determining the appropriate mix of strengthening and accommodation, the participants often disagree on how the United States should seek an advantage in its competition with China and Russia. In particular, for some Russia looms as the most immediate and disruptive danger, whereas China continues to have a strong interest in working cooperatively with the United States. Thus, the option of working cooperatively with China in seeking to weaken Russia should be pursued. In contrast, others see China as a much more powerful and potentially existential threat and argue that the United States should seek common ground with Russia to offset potential Chinese dominance. Several remain convinced that the closeness of Russian and Chinese interests and identities make efforts to exploit Sino-Russian differences unlikely to succeed. Russian and Chinese experts generally put the onus on the United States to compromise and substantially change existing policy in order to meet Russia and China halfway.

Why Has Chinese-Russian Cooperation against the United States Strengthened Recently?

Putin's Pivot

The advance in Chinese-Russian cooperation against the United States is partly the result of Moscow's recent worldview. There is some debate among foreign policy specialists about the origins and durability of Putin's harder line toward the West and tilt toward China. The Russian regime's perceived vulnerability in the face of internal instability that it sees as fostered by the West prompted Putin to shift policy to ensure self-preservation. He further turned away from the West and toward China in 2012 in the aftermath of the large-scale demonstrations in Moscow to protest the results of the December 2011 parliamentary election. The election was widely viewed as

unfair and compromised, and it continued following his decision to reclaim the presidency from his interim successor Dmitri Medvedev. Western support for the protests and criticism of Putin's handling of the situation reportedly convinced him that the West was committed to regime change in Russia, that Medvedev's attempted reforms and rapprochement with the West were ill-advised, and that a change in the country's direction, both foreign and domestic, was necessary.

This decision and the ensuing pivot in Russian foreign policy away from the West and toward China intensified in the wake of the Ukraine crisis and Russia's takeover of Crimea amid the threat of possible further Western encroachment in Russia's periphery. The pivot made clear that the function of Russian foreign policy is heavily domestic—to maintain the stability of the regime. Its goal is to provide for the security and the well-being of the elite rather than the well-being, security, and international standing of the country itself and its people.³ A rapprochement with the West and participation in its institutions would improve Russia's security, economy, and popular well-being, but it would require the Russian elite to take steps that would diminish its hold on the country's domestic politics and economy. In short, it would mean regime change in Russia.

By contrast, no such threat is seen in Russia's closer relationship with China. Sino-Russian cooperation does not call for Russia's political system to become more open; it does not call for a more transparent and orderly investment regime; it does not require taking on the entrenched bureaucracy, de-monopolizing the economy and opening it to more competition, or removing other barriers to trade and investment that participation in Western-led institutions would require. China appears content to accept Russia as it is. Indeed, the country's authoritarian trends under Xi Jinping since 2012 reject the same Western norms that Putin opposes. Moreover, from the perspective of Russia's ruling elite keen to protect its interests, the rationale for partnering with China is reinforced by the complementary nature of the two countries' economies. Militarily, Russia increasingly recognizes that it cannot compete with China and instead chooses to embrace its neighbor. The two powers are also like-minded on many major international issues. Of course, as already noted and discussed further below, they differ in their opposition to the United States and the U.S.-backed international order. Russia is much more willing to take risky measures to disrupt this order and confront the United States, whereas China wants to preserve much of the existing order that benefits it and avoids potentially costly initiatives that risk significant backlash from the United States in particular.

China's Response

The modern history of the Chinese relationship with Russia shows cycles of cooperation and cycles of contention. The upswing in relations since the end of the Cold War has shown durability and continues to advance. The preferences of the Xi and Putin governments support further strengthening over the next five years and probably longer. The extension of Xi's rule well into the next decade brings his authoritarian regime more into line with Putin's dictatorship.

³ In a paper commissioned for the NBR project, U.S. expert Eugene Rumer persuasively explained that foreign policy is the exclusive property of a narrow elite that does not see itself as accountable to the population for its choices, and the population does not hold the elite accountable for them. Independent institutions that could subject the elite's foreign policy to scrutiny—a free press, an independent legislature, a community of independent academics and think tanks, independent business associations, and other civil-society actors—do not exist in Russia. With the elite fully in control of all major media outlets, its foreign policy choices are presented to the general public so as to maximize the public's support for it and for the regime. Such circumstances reinforce developments showing that Russian foreign policy is an instrument of domestic stability and regime preservation. The analysis in this section is based heavily on this paper and the discussion of its findings at a January 26, 2017, workshop held by NBR. See Eugene B. Rumer, "Russia's China Policy: This Bear Hug Is Real," in "Russia-China Relations: Assessing Common Ground and Strategic Fault Lines."

China has strong incentives to further enhance its relationship with Russia, covering economic, military, and diplomatic cooperation. These incentives remain robust. They involve access to reliable supplies of oil and gas as well as advanced military equipment and technology. Another powerful incentive is the perception of a common Sino-Russian front both in opposition to U.S.-led efforts to promote an international order adverse to the authoritarian regimes and in opposition to U.S. military deployments and economic and political pressures applied to counter expansionism by Russia and China in their respective spheres of influence. Russian accommodation of Chinese broad-gauge geoeconomic ambitions is central to the success of Xi's signature Belt and Road Initiative.

The prevailing trend shows Moscow ever more dependent on and accommodating of China and its concerns. At the same time, Beijing has carefully avoided a direct challenge to Russian great-power pretensions as it works together with Moscow on a wide range of common concerns at odds with U.S.-supported interests, institutions, and norms. Overall, for China, Russia is a pliant and influential partner providing strategic, political, and economic support for Chinese interests in Asia while preoccupying the United States with challenges in Europe and the Middle East. Meanwhile, until the end of the Obama government, the risks for China in cooperating more closely with Russia remained low, with U.S. and allied governments reluctant to cause serious deterioration in ties with Beijing. The Trump administration's National Security Strategy is much tougher on China, listing it along with, and even ahead of, Russia as the major U.S. national security concern.⁴ President Donald Trump's actions have applied heavy pressure on China to sanction North Korea and now involve major trade and investment disputes. At the same time, Trump collaborates closely with Xi on North Korea and other issues, and there has been little U.S. government emphasis on Beijing's close cooperation with Moscow.

Key Determinants of Chinese-Russian Cooperation

The drivers of forward movement in China-Russia relations allow for stronger cooperation adverse to U.S. interests, despite significant brakes involving differences and disagreements between the two countries.

*Drivers*⁵

The desire to counterbalance U.S. global influence and revise the international order. Russian and Chinese interests converge most prominently on the desire to serve as a counterweight to perceived U.S. preponderant influence and to constrain U.S. power. As noted above, Russia's and China's behavior in their respective spheres of interest that challenge the United States shows that China sees Russia as a useful counterweight to U.S. power and Russia values their cooperation for the same reason.

The desire to counter the United States' perceived promotion of human rights and democracy. The governments in Moscow and Beijing feel vulnerable and sometimes threatened in the face

⁴ 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>.

⁵ The factors listed here include motives driving Russian and Chinese leaders to cooperate against U.S. interests as well as determinants focused on other mutual interests less directly linked to the United States, such as sales of Russian oil, gas, and arguably military equipment to China.

of the United States' promotion of human rights and democracy, motivating closer cooperation in response.

Opposition to U.S. military advances in areas important to Russia and China. Targets include opposition to U.S. missile defense systems—notably the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea—U.S. military reconnaissance along the Russian and Chinese border, and U.S. long-range strike capabilities, such as conventional prompt global strike.

Opposition to U.S. policies on space and cyberspace security. China and Russia work together to influence rules and norms for outer space and cyberspace to their advantage, opposing U.S. interests. They propose international treaties restricting weapons in space that would nonetheless allow Beijing and Moscow to develop and test anti-satellite missiles threatening this key element of modern U.S. military power. The two powers are together in thwarting U.S. efforts to preserve open access to the internet, establishing strict rules and policing of internet sovereignty.

Strongly ingrained common identity and strategic culture. Moscow and Beijing share a negative view of U.S. and allied intentions, which reinforces their cooperation against perceived outside threats. The rapport between Putin and Xi rests in part on this common outlook and adds to incentives for closer collaboration.

Sales and development of advanced weapons, military technology, and other defense cooperation. Sino-Russian national security collaboration includes arms sales, defense dialogues, and joint exercises. China and Russia have expanded contacts between their national security establishments and institutionalized their defense and regional security dialogues, military exchanges, and strategic consultations. Their shared objectives include promoting arms sales and influencing third parties, with the goal of changing the balance of power to the disadvantage of the United States.

Trade and investment links. Western sanctions after the Russian takeover of Crimea mean that China has loomed more prominently in Russia's calculations as an increasingly large purchaser of its oil and gas and a supplier of needed capital and technology. China, for its part, views Russia as a source of secure energy supplies.

Brakes

Economic asymmetry and longer-term military and political implications. Many Russian and Chinese complaints about energy development, trade, and investment involve long-running disputes over the price China pays for Russian energy and the frequent protracted delays in Russia actually supplying China with contracted raw materials. They reflect important differences that are reinforced by a stark trend of Russia increasingly playing the role of a dependent junior partner in its relationship with China. Russia's dependence on China has reached the point that Moscow has accommodated China's economic dominance and greater overall influence in key areas along Russia's periphery in Mongolia and Central Asia. The heavily asymmetrical economic relationship undergirds strategic forecasts that ever-greater Chinese military capacity and international influence could at some point jeopardize Russia's interests along its rim. This trend runs counter to the strong Russian drive under Putin for the country to reclaim its status as an international great power.

Asymmetrical tools of power. Underlining the above economic asymmetry, which puts Russia into an unfavorable subservient position as a junior partner to the ever more powerful China, is Russia's somewhat limited toolkit for exerting international influence. Such tools include nuclear weapons, military power, and covert operations and intelligence in nearby areas; they come along

with the country's large economic and demographic weaknesses and the absence of soft power. In contrast, China features the full range of international security, economic, and diplomatic tools, which are growing rapidly. As its capabilities grow, the priority that China gives to Russia may decline, further undermining the latter's international image and long-standing ambitions as a great power.

Limits on arms sales and defense cooperation. Russia has less to offer China than it once did as a source of advanced military hardware, because of advances in China's defense industries. It also maintains restrictions on sales of some advanced weapons systems, presumably because they would pose a direct threat to Russian security.

History, distrust, and divergence regarding the China-Russia-U.S. triangle. Both Moscow and Beijing are familiar with the history of duplicity and animosity that characterized their often confrontational relationship in the past and their respective dealings with the United States against one another. Recent cooperation has put those concerns in the background, but they are not forgotten.

Divergence on relations with the United States. The active debate in the United States over a possible effort by the Trump administration to reach an understanding with the Putin government raises questions in the minds of Chinese leaders about whether Putin might be inclined to shift policy closer to the United States in ways that would negatively affect Chinese interests. Meanwhile, China has a bigger stake and stronger interest than Russia in managing tensions with the United States. Although China supports Russia in its periodic dramatic uses of force to advance its interests at the United States' expense, and China conducts its own incremental probes and advances that undermine U.S. interests, Beijing also seeks a stable working relationship with Washington. Beijing does not want to be seen as an adversarial revisionist power and repeatedly has publicly disavowed seeking an alliance with Moscow. Its balancing act between Washington and Moscow saw major Chinese banks go along with Western sanctions on Russia, with China resorting to other means to provide Russia with economic support.

Divergence on relations with Japan. Japan's strong efforts to improve relations with Russia since the start of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government in 2012 have yet to achieve a major breakthrough. However, the possibility remains that Moscow may be persuaded to improve relations with Tokyo in a way that could work against Beijing's hard line against Japan.

Divergence on Central Asia. Both sides have failed to coordinate effectively their economic strategies in the region. China has much more to offer and has gained political influence through its trade and investment activities. In particular, it plans to do much more in Central Asia with its various new Silk Road programs, notably the Belt and Road Initiative, which holds the prospect of orienting these economies more toward China than Russia. Russia's relative discomfort with this is an open question, but China is dedicated to continuing this effort for both security and economic reasons. This situation has produced a rough division of labor in Central Asia, with China as the primary provider of economic goods and Russia as the security provider. A looming question, and potential source of tension, is whether China's growing economic role will inevitably lead to an increased security role—and how Russia would respond.

Divergence over Europe and the Middle East. China's ever-growing interest in economic penetration of Europe and the Middle East requires stability, which has been challenged by Russian assertiveness. This is another possible source of friction between the countries going forward. For example, Beijing's strong ambitions involving infrastructure building and investment in countries

such as Poland, Ukraine, and Germany could be jeopardized if China is viewed as an enabler in the event of significant Russian expansion at the expense of its European neighbors.

Divergence on India, Vietnam, North Korea, Syria, the South China Sea, and Taiwan. Russia has close relations with India and Vietnam, including the large-scale provision of advanced military equipment that secures these states against China's rise. China has long resisted Russian efforts to raise India's international profile in multilateral bodies such as the Chinese- and Russian-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. North Korea, Taiwan, and the South China Sea are more important for China than for Russia. Russia does have an important stake in North Korea, however, and its involvement has the potential to complicate Chinese policy. Russian demonstrations of support for China regarding the South China Sea and Taiwan through rhetoric and military exercises mirror the Chinese posturing in support of Russian actions in Syria. Such posturing underlines both sides' continued ambivalence about supporting each other with binding commitments.

U.S. Policy Options

This section considers five general points of agreement among the NBR project experts concerning U.S. policy choices for dealing with the widely recognized adverse strategic implications of China-Russia relations for U.S. interests. It then discusses the different policy options favored by members of the group. The following factors largely account for the differences between these experts:

- Some participants view China as the main long-term danger to U.S. interests and favor working more closely with Russia against China; others see Russia as the more immediate and disruptive danger and favor working more closely with China against Russia; and others, including Chinese and Russian experts, see such U.S. maneuvers as futile because leaders in Beijing and Moscow coalesce based on converging interests and common values.
- The fluidity of international and domestic circumstances complicates accurate forecasting. Notably, uncertainty prevails as to whether the avowedly unpredictable Trump will follow his administration's declared National Security Strategy opposing the adverse and predatory behavior of China and Russia or instead adopt more accommodating approaches in line with his repeated expressions of respect and support for Xi and Putin.

Broadly speaking, the United States can choose among four policy options for managing China-Russia relations. The first option is U.S. strengthening to oppose both countries. Second, the United States could apply strengthening and accommodation in seeking better relations with China for an advantage against Russia. Third, it could apply strengthening and accommodation in seeking better relations with Russia for an advantage against China. The fourth option is U.S. accommodation and compromise with Russia and China.

Five Judgments concerning U.S. Policy Options

Pursue strengthening and consider alternative policy choices amid international and domestic uncertainty. The broad recommendations in the NBR project for dealing with the negative strategic implications of China-Russia relations for the United States are in line with the recommendations of other authoritative studies in calling for wide-ranging efforts by the United States to strengthen

its economic, military, and diplomatic power and influence.⁶ The goal of such strengthening is to create a more favorable balance of power supporting the U.S.-backed international order that is now challenged by Russian and Chinese actions. Building national power at home and abroad requires greater domestic cohesion and less partisan discord and government gridlock. Strategies employed need to be realistic and effectively implemented.

However, in laying out specific options for U.S. policy toward Russia and China, the NBR project differs from other authoritative studies. The reason is that it sees the United States not as a constant among variables—notably, an actor assumed as able and willing to employ the recommendations offered by the project. Rather, U.S. policy and behavior are viewed as a major uncertain variable affecting international dynamics, notably including the China-Russia relationship.

Recognize that there are no easy fixes. There is general agreement among experts participating in the NBR project that the problems posed by China-Russia relations are big and that there are no easy fixes for these problems. To fix them will require prolonged whole-of-government approaches that are difficult for U.S. policymakers to carry out amid many high-profile distractions at home and abroad. Such large-scale U.S. government foreign policy approaches often involve extensive publicity used to rally support at home and abroad for the new effort against the perceived foreign danger or threat. Unless carefully managed by the U.S. administration, such publicity is seen negatively by some participants in the NBR project as more likely than not to feed Russian and Chinese perceptions of the United States as a weak opponent—an angst-ridden, declining power seeking in vain to reassert its previous dominance. In sum, it is difficult for the U.S. government to carry out strengthening strategies effectively over time in a low-key and resolved manner reflecting confidence and assurance.

Avoid counterproductive tactical moves. U.S. policymakers choosing between confrontational and accommodating policy choices in relations with Russia and China need to do so with awareness of how such moves affect the longer-term objective of the United States' national and international strengthening, or possibly other goals sought by U.S. policymakers. For example, accommodation of Russia or China to expand the United States' room for maneuver or other tactical benefits could be counterproductive by weakening domestic resolve and the resolve of U.S. allies and partners. Similarly, applying greater pressure and tougher measures toward either power also could be troublesome if not in line with domestic interests and those of U.S. international supporters.

Play the long game by targeting vulnerabilities in the China-Russia relationship. The likelihood of quick success through specific moves toward Russia and China appears low. The NBR project participants recommend that U.S. policymakers play a long game in seeking to exploit vulnerabilities in Sino-Russian collaboration. As noted above, areas of cooperation that show little susceptibility to being influenced by U.S. policy include arms sales, some aspects of Russian energy exports to China, and some aspects of the U.S.-led international order that Moscow and Beijing seek to change. More promising issues warranting U.S. attention and possible exploitation involve

⁶ Major studies include Julianne Smith, "A Transatlantic Strategy for Russia," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2016; Angela Stent, "Russia, China and the West after Crimea," TransAtlantic Academy, 2016; Lisa Sawyer Samp et al., *Recalibrating U.S. Strategy toward Russia: A New Time for Choosing* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017); Eugene Rumer, Henry Sokolsky, and Andrew Weiss, "Guiding Principles of a Sustainable U.S. Policy toward Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia: Key Judgments from a Joint Task Force," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Policy Outlook, February 2017; Julianne Smith and Adam Twardowski, "The Future of U.S.-Russian Relations," Center for New American Security, January 2017; Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, *Revising U.S. Grand Strategy toward China*, Council Special Report 72 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2015); Orville Schell and Susan Shirk, "U.S. Policy toward China: Recommendations for a New Administration," Asia Society, February 2017; and Bobo Lo, *A Wary Embrace* (Sydney: Penguin Special Studies, 2017).

the very different standing that Russia and China have with the United States and the asymmetry in their respective worldviews and international ambitions.

For example, because Russia is an avowed opponent of the United States on various key issues bilaterally and in regard to the U.S.-led international order, U.S.-Russian relations have declined to the lowest point since the Cold War. Whatever positive cooperative elements in the relationship remain are fully overshadowed by differences and disputes. In contrast, China benefits much more from stable relations with the United States and the existing U.S.-led international order. Although its disputes with the United States have been growing in recent years, they have not yet reached a stage of overshadowing Chinese interests in sustaining a good working relationship. Such calculations persuaded some participants in the NBR project to favor the United States working cooperatively with China to seek an advantage against Russia.

However, other participants see China as the greater threat, not only to the United States but also eventually to Russia. Asymmetries in the Sino-Russian relationship make Russia more dependent on China and more distant from re-establishing its great-power status. Against this background, some argue that the United States should seek cooperation with Russia to offset the common danger posed by China's rise.

Another promising vulnerability in China-Russia relations involves their respective coercive strategies in pursuit of regional leadership at the expense of neighboring powers. The countries' goals are at odds with the core interests of most of their neighbors. Taken together, Moscow and Beijing favor fragmentation of NATO, the European Union, the U.S. alliance structure in Asia, and regional groupings led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other organizations that impinge on Chinese or Russian ambitions. The United States opposes coercive changes to the status quo and supports existing boundaries, stronger regional collective security, and the sovereignty and aspirations of all states in accord with international norms. A strong United States provides a welcome counterweight for Asian and European nations affected by Russian and Chinese ambitions. Meanwhile, U.S. contributions to the capabilities and resolve of neighboring states can be justified on their own merits without direct reference to Russia or China. Such steps provide a significant outlet for U.S.-backed strengthening against adverse Chinese and Russian practices that is less directly confrontational than the application of U.S. power against China or Russia.

Consider Russia and China together as well as separately. Most recommendations from other authoritative studies of U.S. policy dealing with Russia and China focus on one or the other country but not the two together. The NBR project finds those recommendations to be useful but contends that they need to be incorporated with recommendations looking at China and Russia together in order to fully address the implications of their relationship for U.S. interests:

- One cannot discern appropriate U.S. policy toward Russia and China without careful consideration of the main differences between the two that can be used by U.S. policy.
- U.S. policy that does not deal with China-Russia cooperation risks ineffectiveness in the face of the two countries' actions together, reinforcing their respective challenges to the United States. It also risks reinforcing the perception that the United States is passive and declining in the face of Sino-Russian advances.
- The different standing that Russia and China have in their relations with the United States means that U.S. policy needs to be tailored to both at the same time in ways that avoid worsening the United States' overall position. For instance, if Trump were to make significant compromises

with Putin as the United States pursues a trade war of major economic pressure on China, Putin might see these compromises as tactical ploys to increase pressure on China with little lasting benefit for Russian interests.

- Assessing U.S. policy toward both powers facilitates the difficult task of determining with greater accuracy what are the trade-offs for the United States as it seeks an advantage in U.S. policy toward one power or the other.

The policy options explained below start with a policy choice about whether the United States should seek accommodation of Russia and China. This option is generally not favored by the participants in the NBR project, with the exception of specialists from China and Russia. The discussion then moves to examine three policy choices involving varying degrees of U.S. strengthening in opposition to Russian and Chinese challenges and U.S. accommodation of China and Russia. As noted above, those three U.S. policy options are:

- U.S. strengthening to oppose both Russia and China
- Applying U.S. strengthening and accommodation in seeking better relations with China for an advantage against Russia
- Applying U.S. strengthening and accommodation in seeking better relations with Russia for an advantage against China

Favoring the first of the above three options are the majority of experts in the NBR project. This includes those few favoring sustained U.S. global primacy, many more supporting pursuing rivalry with Russia and China through a mix of strengthening and accommodation, and those who see U.S. attempts to divide Russia and China and gain an advantage by accommodating one and pressuring the other as futile.

Accommodation to Meet Russia and China Halfway

Russian and Chinese leaders voice support for this policy choice. This choice also is endorsed by some U.S. specialists but enjoyed little support during the project deliberations apart from Chinese and Russian participants.⁷ The choice involves U.S. actions reducing both existing sanctions on Russia and military, economic, and political pressures on Russia and China (such as military deployments and surveillance in Asia and Europe, trade and investment restrictions, and criticism of human rights conditions) as means to improve relations and ease tensions.

The benefit of accommodation is that it avoids costly U.S. military and other strengthening measures, eases tensions with Russia and China, is seen as reducing the chance of conflict, allows the United States to conform peacefully to a new international order featuring a rising China and a resurgent Russia, and allows the United States to focus more on various domestic problems. Russia and China would be outwardly supportive and presumably find that this policy choice meets their current goals.

One drawback of accommodation is that it would likely be seen in the United States and elsewhere as poorly timed, coming amid growing Sino-Russian challenges to U.S. interests in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, and in international economics, politics, and security, and would add to the perception of U.S. weakness and decline that prompts these challenges.

⁷ Examples of U.S. scholars supporting this option include Lyle J. Goldstein, "Is It Time to Meet China Halfway?" *National Interest*, May 12, 2015; Michael Swaine, "Creating a Stable Asia: An Agenda for a U.S.-China Balance of Power," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016; and Rensselaer Lee, "U.S. and Russia: A Pacific Reconciliation?" *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, October 28, 2016.

Accommodation also risks being viewed domestically as “appeasement,” which is not favored by most Americans and certainly not by Republican leaders in Congress. Finally, it could undermine U.S. alliances and emerging partnerships with key nonaligned powers (e.g., India, Egypt, and Vietnam).

Strengthening to Sustain U.S. Primacy

The majority of experts participating in the NBR project recommend that the United States try to sustain its position as the world’s leading power, especially militarily, which supports a vibrant U.S.-led international order favorable to U.S. interests. Some give top priority to continued U.S. international primacy. This policy choice involves directly facing the many challenges posed by Russia and China and mobilizing international partners and domestic resources in a coherent strategy to deter further challenges, deal with existing ones, and exploit Sino-Russian differences—all from a position of greater U.S. strategic strength. A military buildup and international economic activism would accompany improved U.S. domestic governance, economic growth, social cohesion, diplomatic activism, and international attraction—i.e., soft power.

One advantage of this policy choice is its broad domestic political support. It echoes the “preserve peace through strength” theme highlighted in the Trump administration’s National Security Strategy and is widely supported by congressional Republican leaders, the Republican Party platform, and many defense-minded Democrats.⁸ The reported parochialism of the Republican Party base under President Trump does not seem to apply to strong national security threats, which warrant more rather than fewer resources according to President Trump and his close associates. Allies and partners would be reassured by a demonstrated U.S. willingness to bear the costs and risks of this version of U.S. leadership. Russia and China would be put on guard and perhaps would need to recalibrate their challenges to U.S. interests and their perception of U.S. decline, leading to greater moderation on the part of Moscow and Beijing.

However, the costs of this effort are very high. One does not easily move from a 280-ship navy to President Trump’s endorsed 350-ship navy without spending enormous resources. This option will face major budget hurdles involving the Budget Control Act and deficit financing not supported by some leading Republicans. The costs may require political compromise opposed by some in the Republican majority in Congress to accommodate Democrats and thereby reach a budget arrangement allowing for substantial and sustained increased outlays for military and other involvement for years to come. Administration and congressional leaders seeking greater burden-sharing by allies and partners may find those states continuing to free ride under the umbrella of resurgent U.S. protection. Meanwhile, the objective of primacy appears unrealistic to those Americans who judge that the United States cannot stop China’s rise, Russian resurgence, or the numerous international challenges caused by Iran, Syria, ISIS, and North Korea. This policy choice also risks driving Russia and China closer together against the United States.

Mixing Strengthening and Accommodation

Most experts in the NBR project favor the United States adopting a variety of initiatives meeting the interests of Russia and China while at the same time endeavoring to engage in domestic and international efforts to strengthen the U.S. position in the world balance of power amid rivalry

⁸ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 4.

and competition with China and Russia. The positive initiatives could involve gestures to advance common ground and ease sanctions and other economic, military, and diplomatic pressures on Russia and China as a means to manage tensions and possibly improve relations. For example, the United States could seek greater cooperation with Russia over the conflicts in Syria, issues in the Arctic, and nuclear arms control. Much more extensive is the potential for the United States to expand common ground with China through various political, economic, and security initiatives. Examples include cooperation on North Korea, reducing U.S. surveillance flights near China, and easing U.S. restrictions on Chinese investment in the United States. Meanwhile, both Russia and China have more important interests in Central Asia than does the United States. By supporting each power's peaceful efforts to expand its interests in Central Asia, the United States could show goodwill and ease tension with both powers. The above positive U.S. steps would be carried out as the United States concurrently implements domestic and international strengthening measures to counter challenges posed by Russia and China.

The advantage of an approach that includes accommodation is that it could help avoid conflict as the United States strengthens against Russia and China. On the one hand, it would diminish the large costs that would arise from strengthening without concurrent positive moves toward Russia and China. On the other hand, it would diminish the chance that allies and partners would be upset as accommodation is accompanied by reassuring strengthening of U.S. commitments to them. Russia and China would likely remain wary of U.S. intentions but receptive to positive initiatives. Moreover, this policy choice could keep Russia and China on the defensive and off balance, perhaps encouraging both countries to exercise caution as they discern U.S. strength, weakness, and resolve. It also could result in more fluidity in Russia's and China's relations with the United States and one another, possibly providing more opportunity for the United States to exploit differences between them.

One drawback of accommodation is that Russia and China could focus on the U.S. strengthening against them and dismiss the positive initiatives, risking greater tension and costs for the United States by driving the two countries closer together in working against U.S. interests. Another risk is that Russia and China could become stronger as a result of the United States easing sanctions and investment restrictions. Possibly viewing the accommodations as signs of weakness, they could use their added strength to double down on negative pressures and challenges to U.S. interests.

An example of mixing strengthening and accommodation: Amid strengthening, the Trump administration plays down the promotion of human rights, democracy, and U.S. values. This illustrative policy choice is consistent with the Trump administration's more pragmatic approach to defending American values in international affairs. In particular, the current government has demonstrated to Russia, China, other authoritarian governments, and other states seen as carrying out policies offensive to American views of human rights and democracy promotion that it is much less likely than previous administrations to seek intervention in the internal affairs of other countries regarding human rights and democracy.

The benefits of such an approach are that it reduces a major incentive for Russia and China to work together or separately against heretofore perceived U.S. efforts at regime change targeting both countries. It also reassures U.S. allies and partners whose policies and practices on human rights and democracy have alienated past U.S. administrations. If accompanied by greater military,

economic, and diplomatic strengthening, the new pragmatism on human rights and democracy is less likely to be seen as appeasement.

The drawbacks are that this policy choice still exacts security and economic costs and may prompt unfair burden-sharing among allies and partners. It also sacrifices the political support at home and abroad that comes from the United States promoting its values and could undermine the vision of the world order long defended by the United States.

A second example of mixing strengthening and accommodation: The United States avoids both the perceived excess of primacy and the sacrifice of core American interests. This policy choice favors strengthening, views primacy as unrealistic, and avoids accommodation at the expense of key U.S. interests, including American values. Judging that some accommodation will be essential to the stable management of international relations, the United States should be prepared to take steps, consistent with its core interests, to reduce the danger of unwanted rising tensions with both China and Russia as it shores up American leadership. Examples could include sustaining the long-standing *modus vivendi* with China vis-à-vis Taiwan and implementing restraints on U.S. ballistic missile defenses that might undermine Russian and Chinese nuclear deterrence. In addition, as discussed above, the United States could pursue cooperation with Russia on Syria, arms control, and the Arctic, and with China on North Korea and development in Central Asia and elsewhere.

The potential benefit of this policy choice is prolonged U.S. strengthening while managing tensions without a major sacrifice of U.S. interests. As the United States becomes stronger, it can use selective accommodation as part of its toolkit to foster less contentious U.S. relations with both Russia and China that are advantageous for broader interests of international leadership.

The risk is that Russia and China may focus on U.S. strengthening and dismiss the United States' nuanced approach toward accommodation. Americans seeking primacy may view deference to Chinese and Russian interests involving Taiwan, missile defense, and other issues as ill-advised concessions weakening U.S. options in the protracted contest with Beijing and Moscow.

*Seeking Advantage with Positive and Negative Incentives toward China and Russia*⁹

Several participants in the NBR project, including those from Russia and China, remain convinced that the closeness of Russian and Chinese interests and identities makes U.S. efforts to seek an advantage by exploiting their differences unlikely to succeed under foreseeable circumstances. Others disagree and favor one of the following options.

Tilt toward China and away from Russia. This policy choice views Russia as the more troublesome of the two powers, and it seeks to isolate the country further by emphasizing the United States' common ground with China while increasing sanctions on Russia. It could involve maintaining strict sanctions and heightening military pressure against Russia while developing more common ground with China on North Korea, easing trade and investment tensions, and

⁹ In addition to the two main options in this section, another related option supported by two NBR project participants is keeping Russia and China on the defensive and off balance while exploiting perceived differences. This policy choice involves positive and negative incentives. For example, the United States could (1) join China's Belt and Road Initiative, thereby promoting Chinese expansion in Central Asia and adding friction in China's relations with Russia, (2) propose studying intermediate-range ballistic missile deployments in Asia, despite restrictions of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, as a means to work with Russia to get China to limit its ballistic missiles, thereby adding friction in China-Russia ties, and (3) encourage Japan, India, and Vietnam to expand ties with Russia, concurrent with U.S. strengthening of ties with all three Asian powers to challenge Chinese regional expansion. Such positive steps by the United States toward China or Russia could divide the two countries, reducing their cooperation on issues at odds with U.S. interests. At the same time, supporting China in Asia could alienate Japan and other U.S. allies and partners; weakening the INF Treaty could alienate U.S. allies in Europe, as well as Japan; and tactical U.S. moves regarding Russia and China may be seen as signs of weakness, prompting greater challenges from China and Russia to U.S. interests.

showing U.S. support for China's Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia and other areas near Russia. U.S. energy production could also compete with Russian energy exports to China, and in the process keep energy prices down, weakening Russia's economy, complicating Sino-Russian energy cooperation.

The benefit of this policy choice is that it is in line with existing U.S. policy against Russia. It also provides the opportunity for the United States to privately warn China that common interests are in jeopardy as China collaborates with Russia. The perceived forecast is that Russia would feel more vulnerable and seek more cooperative relations with the United States.

The risk is that this policy choice may not work as forecast; China and Russia may be too close to be divided without more accommodation from the United States. Meanwhile, Russia may be prompted to lash out and play the spoiler. Russian actions could involve closer collaboration with Iran in support of conflicts in the Middle East that undermine U.S. interests; more direct military pressures and threats in Europe; and intensified overt and covert efforts to disrupt European democracies and support authoritarian regimes.

Tilt toward Russia and away from China. This policy choice involves the United States wooing Russia by easing sanctions and military pressures with the goal of managing the perceived larger and longer-term strategic danger posed by a rising China. This option would involve an intensification of U.S. trade and investment pressures, a buildup of U.S. and allied forces around China's rim, and vocal opposition to China's expansion of control in disputed regions, self-serving trade and investment in the Belt and Road Initiative, and perceived subversion of nearby countries and leading developed states through covert influence peddling and overt propaganda. The United States would signal an interest in consulting and possibly coordinating with Moscow in strengthening their respective relations with key Asian opponents of Chinese dominance, notably India and Vietnam, and defending the common U.S.-Russian interests in sustaining the independence of Japan and the Korean Peninsula in the face of China's growing power.

The advantage of this policy choice is that it would build common ground with Russia, including in mutual areas of concern over possible Chinese dominance. As discussed above, Russia resents its junior-partner status in relations with China and is clear-eyed on how China requires increasing deference from its neighbors as it rises in power and prominence. Beijing, worried about a U.S. tilt toward Russia amid a hardening U.S. position toward China, has a lot at stake in workable ties with the United States. The expectation is that China would moderate policies toward the United States to preclude closer U.S.-Russian ties at odds with Chinese interests (e.g., closer U.S.-Russian relations with Japan, India, and Vietnam and cooperation on arms control and the Arctic).

The risk of this policy choice is that it may not work as forecast. China and Russia may be too close to be divided without more accommodation from the United States.

An example of favoring a tilt toward Russia. Proponents of this policy choice see dire consequences flowing from growing China-Russia coordination and collaboration at the United States' expense, with the potential for a two-front war. Viewing China as the main threat to the United States, they object to existing U.S. restrictions on interactions with Russia. Moreover, they view Moscow as deeply concerned about Russia's increasing subservience to a dominating China and malleable to greater attention involving a mix of U.S. and allied pressures and inducements. Some in this group favor easing U.S. sanctions and other accommodations at the outset of heightened efforts to woo Russia away from China. Others disagree with such initial compromises. They favor a nuanced coordinated strategy between the United States, other Western countries,

and Japan, employing existing sanctions and other tough policies along with inducements of mutual benefit that would follow greater U.S. and allied interchange and agreement with Russia. Moscow presumably would be inclined to pursue this path of cooperation with the United States and its allies and partners in order to achieve greater international independence and prominence.

This option would have the benefit of restoring Russia's historically strong linkages with the West and stalling the recent trajectory of Russian dependence on China. A more independent Russia with close ties to the West would serve as a brake on China's ambitions in Eurasia. If done in close coordination with United States' European and Asian allies, U.S. inducements toward Moscow would avoid the danger of being seen as appeasing Russian aggression.

The risk is that Putin may be unpersuaded by U.S. inducements while continuing strong antipathy toward the West and close relations with China. Russia may view these inducements as signs of weakness, prompting the country to cooperate more closely with China in seeking advances at the expense of the declining Western powers. Russian and Chinese officials could also use the positive U.S. initiatives toward Russia to divide the United States from European powers committed to sanctions against Russian aggression.

Conclusion

The results of the NBR project summarized in this report make clear that the task for U.S. policy in dealing with the onerous responsibilities of defending U.S. interests in the face of Sino-Russian policies and practices remains formidable. Perhaps it is good news that the U.S. debate over the seriousness of the China-Russia challenge likely will ease as Beijing and Moscow continue on a path of closer coordination, with ever more obvious consequences adverse to the United States' interests. Such a trend may facilitate a coming together of divergent U.S. opinions to deal with this challenge.

Nonetheless, a major uncertainty continues regarding the will and ability of the U.S. administration and congressional leaders to establish and pursue the long-term, multifaceted government effort that American participants in the project view as needed to invigorate the sinews of U.S. military, economic, and diplomatic power and to provide a foundation for addressing the present and future challenges posed by these leading international competitors. A prerequisite for success in this endeavor is greater convergence among the wide-ranging policy options discussed above, allowing for a coherent and well-supported U.S. government-led strategy.

There are alternatives to such an expensive and demanding approach. They notably include U.S. accommodation of substantial expansions of Chinese and Russian spheres of influence in their respective regional areas of concern and a major pullback from existing U.S. foreign commitments, thereby enabling the creation of a new international order much more strongly influenced by China and Russia in ways that up to now have been opposed by U.S. leaders. As discussed above, this option is favored by the Russian and Chinese specialists in the NBR project and by the leaders of these countries. Some U.S. specialists also urge the United States to follow aspects of this option to "meet halfway" China and/or Russia. However, many U.S. specialists in the NBR project join the vast majority of other American specialists involved in the numerous recent authoritative assessments of U.S. policy toward China and Russia noted above in judging that such accommodation and pullback is not in the overall strategic interests of the United States.



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