



U.S.-RUSSIA RELATIONS: COMPETITION, DETERRENCE, AND DIPLOMACY

October 22-24, 2021 | Eisenhower Farm
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

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The Aspen Institute Congressional Program
October 22-24, 2021
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

FRIDAY, October 22:

Members of Congress travel to Gettysburg via private car departing Washington, D.C. at the conclusion of today's congressional session, arriving in Gettysburg late afternoon.

4 – 7 pm Covid testing available on site at Wyndham Hotel
(required of all participants)

6 – 7 pm *Pre-Dinner Discussion*

REFLECTIONS ON THE COLD WAR AND A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

U.S.-Russian relations have been tense since the Bolshevik revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union. However, what was once primarily a rivalry of systems became an existential threat with the advent of the atomic and hydrogen bombs. Looking back on the post-Stalin years and then again forty years later, an era of unprecedented bi-lateral cooperation, Susan Eisenhower will offer some observations on our current time and a possible path for the future of the U.S.-Russian relationship.

Susan Eisenhower, *Chairman Emeritus,
The Eisenhower Institute*

7 – 9 pm *Working Dinner*

Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily. Discussion will focus on the opportunities, challenges, and potential solutions regarding U.S.-Russia relations.

SATURDAY, October 23:

7:30 – 8:15 am Breakfast is available for all participants

8:15 – 8:45 am Transit to Eisenhower Farm, shuttle service provided

8:55 – 9 am **WELCOMING REMARKS**

In 1950 the Eisenhowers bought this 189-acre farm adjoining the Gettysburg Battlefield. During Ike’s first term as President, major renovations were done on the house. Eisenhower used his weekends at Gettysburg to escape the pressures of the presidency. He would bring dignitaries to Camp David for meetings, then on to the farm, and for a sit on the porch, which allowed him, “to get the other man’s equation.” Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was one such visitor in 1959, concluding a ten-day visit to the U.S. The Eisenhowers donated the farm to the National Park Service in 1967.

***Stephen Sims**, Superintendent,
Eisenhower National Historical Site*

9 – 9:15 am **INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK OF THE CONFERENCE**

This conference is organized into roundtable conversations and pre-dinner remarks. This segment will highlight how the conference will be conducted, how those with questions will be recognized, and how responses will be timed to allow for as many questions and answers as possible.

***Charles W. Dent**, Executive Director,
Aspen Institute Congressional Program*

9:15 – 11 am *Roundtable Discussion*

30 YEARS AFTER 1991: IS IT A ‘NEW’ RUSSIA?

Vladimir Putin has been in power in Russia for over two decades and has built what appears to be a highly consolidated authoritarian system, while weathering social, economic, and geopolitical crises. Russia permits increasingly little space for public political dissent, yet the Russian people as a whole appear to tolerate, if not fully trust, the regime that rules them. As the Kremlin cracks down on external challenges to its power, rival forces within the system may become increasingly restless, especially as Vladimir Putin ages and approaches the end of his fourth official term in 2024.

- How should Americans understand Putin’s power and the Russian political system—is there more to it than just repression?
- Will a post-Putin era be more of the same?
- How has the Kremlin managed the Russian economy through multiple crises, and what are the prospects for Russia’s growth, decline or stagnation in the 2020s?
- What do ordinary Russians think about their government, and how much do they share the Kremlin’s rejection of “Western” values?
- What has been the impact of U.S. foreign policy on ordinary Russians, and how do they see the United States today as compared to the past?

***Marlene Laruelle**, Director, Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, George Washington University*

***Yuval Weber**, Research Assistant Professor
Bush School of Government, Texas A&M University*

11 – 11:15 am Break

11:15 am – 1 pm *Roundtable Discussion*

CYBER, SPACE AND WMD: THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Russia inherited the Soviet Union’s status as a nuclear superpower, making it central not only to U.S. interests in nuclear strategic stability but also to address nonproliferation challenges such as North Korea, Iran, and non-state actors. In recent years, however, Moscow has also accelerated its investment in new domain weapons systems in outer space and cyber space, while showing greater willingness to disrupt a global balance that it thinks favors Washington. Particularly concerning have been Russia’s apparent efforts to influence the 2016, 2018 and 2020 U.S. elections, the Solar Winds hack, and other cases of aggressive cyber and information operations targeting foundational institutions of U.S. democracy.

- What is the state of the U.S.-Russia nuclear relationship in the wake of the Biden-Putin agreement to extend the New START treaty?
- How can Russia be effectively deterred from future interference in U.S. elections and democratic processes?
- Does past experience with arms control and deterrence offer lessons for managing competition in cyber, space and other new domains?

- What are the prospects regarding U.S.-Russia cooperation in managing global proliferation risks, especially Iran and North Korea?
- Do the U.S. and Russia have common interests, for example, in countering online radicalization?
- What are the prospects and significance of U.S.-Russia cooperation on space operations and security?
- What is the state of U.S. leadership in space sustainability and security?

***Dmitri Alperovitch, Executive Chairman
Silverado Policy Accelerator***

Bruce McClintock, Lead, RAND Space Enterprise Initiative

1 – 2 pm	<i>Working Luncheon</i> Discussion continues between members of Congress and scholars on the challenges for U.S.-Russia relations.
2 – 5 pm	<i>Optional Educational Site Visit</i> GETTYSBURG NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD MEMORIAL A tour led by an historian and engaging in dialogue on lessons learned during the Civil War and how it informed future decision making in foreign policy and the Cold War.
5:15 – 6 pm	<i>Pre-Dinner Commentary by National Park Service rangers, concurrent with reception</i>
6 – 8 pm	<i>Working Dinner</i> Seating is arranged to expose participants to a diverse range of views and provide the opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Scholars and lawmakers are rotated daily. Discussion will focus on the opportunities and challenges and potential solutions regarding U.S.-Russia relations.

SUNDAY, October 24:

6:30 – 9:30 am	Covid testing available on site at Wyndham Hotel (required of all participants)
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7:30 – 8:55 am Breakfast is available for all participants

9 – 11 am *Roundtable Discussion*

RUSSIA AND CHINA AS GREAT POWER COMPETITORS TO THE U.S.: HOW DEEP IS THE PARTNERSHIP AND WHAT CHALLENGES LIE AHEAD?

Over the past half-decade, Washington’s relations with both Beijing and Moscow have taken a dramatic downward turn. Russia’s aggressive and destabilizing actions, and China’s manipulative economic practices coupled with increasingly assertive efforts to disrupt and limit U.S. global leadership have led U.S. officials to speak of a new era of “great power competition.” As the Biden Administration charts a course forward with Russia and China, it will consider not only the balance between U.S. power and that of its near-peer rivals, but the interests and capabilities of other states that are impacted by, and can help shape, this competition.

- Are Russia and China de facto allies? How deep and sustainable is their current partnership and what drives it?
- How do U.S. allies and partners see the emerging “great power competition” among the U.S., Russia, and China? How should the U.S. take their interests into account?
- Are there realistic prospects for U.S. policy to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing in the short or long term?
- Can Beijing or Moscow effectively drive wedges between the U.S. and its regional allies?
- How has U.S. policy been understood by allies and partners in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region?

Zack Cooper, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

Nikolas Gvosdev, Professor of National Security Affairs,
U.S. Naval War College

Yun Sun, Director, China Program, The Stimson Center

11 – 11:15 am Break

11:15 am – 1 pm *Roundtable Discussion*

U.S.-RUSSIA POLICY: A ‘PROBLEM FROM HELL?’

When President Dwight Eisenhower took office, he recognized the need for a thorough rethinking of U.S. policy toward the then Soviet Union, grounded in expert knowledge of Soviet intentions and capabilities, as

well as recent foreign policy experience. Ike gathered the leading American experts on Russia policy of the time, including George F. Kennan, for a strategic exercise dubbed the "Solarium Project." The result was a menu of predictions and policy options that helped the Eisenhower administration and subsequent U.S. policymakers shape Cold War strategy to achieve balance among competition, containment, rollback, and other objectives. Today, as we encounter geopolitical challenges of a scale not seen since the Cold War, the U.S. might benefit from a similarly thorough strategic thinking exercise, encompassing not just Russia policy, but national security and foreign policy objectives more broadly.

- What has been and what should be the main U.S. policy goals toward Russia, and how do these goals relate to broader U.S. national interests?
- To what degree has U.S. policy succeeded in advancing these goals in recent years, and where has it failed or been counterproductive?
- Have sanctions proven effective as the main instrument of U.S. policy toward Russia? What adjustments might improve their effectiveness?
- How should the U.S. achieve balance among potentially competing interests, especially in relations with Russia and other regional states?

Emma Ashford, Senior Fellow, The Atlantic Council

Anna Makanju, Head of Public Policy, Open AI

1 – 2 pm

Working Luncheon

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: BLUEPRINTS FOR ACTION

Matthew Rojansky will offer a brief summary of the discussions and scholars' policy recommendations thus far. Participants are encouraged to suggest ideas for legislative action. Questions for discussion may include:

- What is at stake for the United States in relations with Russia?
- What U.S. interests are most at threat from Russia? Are there areas of potential mutual interests?
- Have U.S. policies achieved their intended goals up to now?
- What is the right balance between legislative and executive leadership on U.S. policy toward Russia?
- What actions from Congress are needed to steer U.S.-Russia policy in the right directions?

- Can Congress in its oversight and other leadership roles play a more productive role in shedding light on these challenges?

Matthew Rojansky, Director, *The Kennan Institute,*
The Wilson Center

2 pm

All participants depart Gettysburg

Members of Congress depart Gettysburg via private car this afternoon and arrive in Washington, D.C. late afternoon.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Rep. Don Bacon

**Rep. Jim Baird
and Danise Baird**

**Rep. Jim Banks
and Amanda Banks**

Rep. Ken Calvert

**Rep. Gerry Connolly
and Catherine "Smitty" Smith**

**Senator John Cornyn
and Sandy Cornyn**

**Rep. John Curtis
and Sue Curtis**

Rep. Diana DeGette

**Rep. Ted Deutch
and Jill Deutch**

**Rep. Rick Larsen
and Tiia Karlén**

Rep. Don Norcross

**Rep. David Price
and Lisa Price**

**Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon
and Mark Stewart**

**Rep. Dina Titus
and Thomas Wright**

Rep. Peter Welch

SCHOLARS

Dmitri Alperovitch Chairman, Silverado Policy Accelerator

Emma Ashford Resident Senior Fellow, New American Engagement Initiative,
Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, The Atlantic Council

Zack Cooper Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute; co-director, Alliance for
Securing Democracy

Susan Eisenhower Chairman Emeritus, The Eisenhower Institute, Gettysburg College

Nikolas Gvosdev Professor of National Security Affairs, U.S. Naval War College

Marlene Laruelle Director, Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasia Studies, The
George Washington University

Anna Makanju Head of Public Policy, Open AI
Bruce McClintock Policy Researcher & Lead, RAND Space Enterprise Initiative
Yun Sun Director, China Program, The Stimson Center
Yuval Weber Research Assistant Professor, Texas A&M's Bush School of Government and Public Service

RAPPORTEUR

Matthew Rojansky Director, The Kennan Institute, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

FOUNDATION REPRESENTATIVES

Deana Arsenian Vice President, International Program and Program Director, Higher Education in Eurasia, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Thomas Kean Chairman of the Board, Carnegie Corporation of New York

ASPEN INSTITUTE CONGRESSIONAL PROGRAM

Charlie Dent Executive Director
Lauren Kennedy Senior Manager of Congressional Engagement
Bill Nell Deputy Director
Carrie Rowell Conference Director
Pat Walton Program Coordinator

RAPPORTEUR'S SUMMARY

MATTHEW ROJANSKY

Director, The Kennan Institute, The Wilson Center

Setting the Scene

Members of Congress met in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania from 22 to 24 October, 2021 for briefings and discussions on the state of U.S.-Russia relations in the first year of a new administration, and in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to pandemic-related restrictions, more than two years had elapsed since the last Aspen-organized conference on U.S. policy toward Russia and Eurasia, which was held in Prague, Czech Republic in May/June, 2019. The degree to which national and global challenges have grown since that time can hardly be overstated. As of this writing, over three quarters of a million Americans have died from the pandemic, while the country suffers continuing deep partisan, socioeconomic and cultural fissures, and faces looming threats from Russia, China, and from increasingly capable international criminals in cyberspace—to name just a few challenges now before the U.S. Congress.

With these weighty responsibilities front of mind, the backdrop of the Gettysburg battlefield, whose hallowed grounds members walked during the conference, provided ample reminders of the challenges Americans have overcome in the past. The Battle of Gettysburg itself (July 1-3, 1863) cost over 50,000 lives on both sides, and is remembered as the turning point in a defining struggle for freedom and national unity in the face of division. When he came to dedicate a national cemetery on the site just four months later, President Abraham Lincoln's brief remarks gained immortality as the Gettysburg Address. Members of Congress keenly felt Lincoln's sentiment that, "the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here." Those words recalled the duty of lawmakers on all sides of current debates to rededicate themselves to the cause of unity in the United States of America, and to support the American people in their ongoing struggle for freedom, democracy, prosperity, opportunity, and peace.

Gettysburg was also the scene of important more recent history. During the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, a young U.S. Army officer named Dwight D. Eisenhower commanded Camp Colt at Gettysburg. Eisenhower went to great lengths to protect the health and safety of 10,000 soldiers under his command as well as the civilian population in the nearby town, for which service he earned military honors and promotion. Ike also forged indelible memories of the place, such that when he returned from his military service in Europe, in 1950, he purchased a farm at Gettysburg, which stands today as The Eisenhower Farm National Historic Site. Ike, who weathered the storm of the McCarthy era, and confronted deep divisions over civil rights, also stewarded the country through the dangerous first decade of the Cold War, and even hosted Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at his Gettysburg farm—indeed the Eisenhower family greeted Khrushchev on the very same lawn where members of Congress met under a tent on a brisk but beautiful Pennsylvania autumn day.

History and Strategic Empathy

One unique and memorable aspect of this gathering was the opportunity for members and scholars to hear from Susan Eisenhower, an expert in international conflict resolution and crisis management, as well as President Eisenhower's granddaughter. Ms. Eisenhower was not only present, as a child, at the historic Ike-Khrushchev meeting at Gettysburg, but established and led the Eisenhower Institute at Gettysburg College for many years. In her own multi-decade career, she has become an expert on Russia and on U.S.-Russian relations, experiences and knowledge on which she drew to frame the overarching challenges of the present situation for members of Congress.

Eisenhower counseled that, as her grandfather well understood, Americans had to embrace a deeper understanding of the other side in order to advance our own interests. This approach, called "strategic empathy"—which is different from sympathy or agreement with the other side—was essential to the deception tactics and overall successful strategy for the Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944. Ike argued that to successfully defeat the Germans, he had to understand in some detail how they saw the world, and plan for contingencies that their way of thinking might produce.

Susan Eisenhower asserted that this same approach is needed to contend with challenges from Russia, China and other rivals today. Members should, she warned, avoid

assuming that everyone is operating according to the same rational rules of the game. Indeed, emotions are always important in foreign policy, just as in politics and other areas of human endeavor, and Americans ought to apply themselves to understanding how Russians feel about the past three decades since the end of the Cold War, and about today's world situation, because these feelings are likely to govern Russian behavior. It was none other than Russian President Vladimir Putin, who in 2003 told American visitors how proud he was to have been the first international leader to call President George W. Bush to offer help after 9/11 and to provide intelligence in support of U.S. operations in Afghanistan. Russia's place, Putin said at that time, was with the West.

30 Years After 1991: Is it a New Russia?

The amicable end of the Cold War thirty years ago, and Vladimir Putin's apparent view that Russia's place was with the West nearly twenty years ago, are facts that seem ill matched with today's reality of persistent East-West hostility, grown especially acute over the past decade of U.S.-Russia confrontation and competition. Putin's power within Russia is built upon what appears to be a highly consolidated authoritarian system, which has proven resilient against social, economic and geopolitical crises. The Kremlin permits increasingly little space for public political dissent, yet the Russian people as a whole appear to tolerate, if not fully trust, the regime that rules them. As the Kremlin cracks down on external challenges to its power, rival forces within the system may become increasingly restless, especially as Vladimir Putin ages and approaches the end of his fourth official term in 2024. All this gives rise to key questions about how Russia under Putin works, which scholars and members examined in detail.

Scholars described the Russian leadership's strategic goals as twofold: to survive and to stay relevant. The imperative to survive, they explained, is challenged by internal forces that could threaten to collapse the system and external forces that could surround and overwhelm Russia. Relevance, meanwhile, is largely measured in international terms, by benchmarking Russian power and influence against that of the United States.

As scholars explained, Vladimir Putin has become the "indispensable man" within the Russian political and economic system. He provides "balance at the top, and order down below." For powerful elites within the system—the very top echelon of which is numbered in

dozens only—Putin is indispensable because only he can apportion resources among the civil bureaucracy, the military and other security services, the Church, regional power players, and other key sectors of state power. This is possible in no small part because Putin has, after twenty years, transcended any one of these sectors himself. As one scholar noted, when Putin disappeared for more than a week in 2015, it spawned a near panic among Russian officials and the Russian media.

Were Putin to anoint a successor from within one or another sector or clan, it could trigger a destabilizing conflict for resources not seen since Russia's "wild" 1990s. Balance at the top of the system, in turn, enables order lower down, even if it comes at the cost of repression or expulsion of those who are not considered to be "with the state," most notably political dissidents such as the imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and defeated oligarch rivals such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky. This is certainly rule through fear and intimidation, yet Putin is not Stalin: according to one scholar, he uses "enough violence to make it plausible, but not so much that it is expected."

Russia's quest for global relevance, scholars explained, means it seeks respect from its clients and from others. The Russian elites are not naïve. They know they have been downgraded, but they also believe that their principle rival, the United States of America, has suffered a decline in power as well. Both Washington and Moscow offer "virtue narratives"—while America may cast itself as the "city upon a hill," or seeks to lead by the power of its example, in President Biden's words, Moscow casts itself as the "Third Rome," the rightful and only true heir to traditional Christian, conservative, European values.

Whether Russian leaders are genuinely driven by such notions, or are more instrumental in their deployment of ideology, scholars explained that Moscow has impressive capabilities that allow it to punch well above its apparent weight internationally. The Russian population may be in long-term decline, but Russia remains the largest state in Europe in population, geographic, natural resource, military, and even economic terms (taking domestic purchasing power into account). Debating whether Russia is a "great power" or merely a "regional power" misses the point—it can be a regional power with global ambitions and global relevance. In this sense, Russia is comfortable being in third place behind the United States and China, as long as it commands respect and can act independently, unconstrained by other powers.

Putin, according to scholars, feels that only he can lead Russia on the difficult path needed to secure respect from the United States and the wider world. He views the annexation of Crimea, which was genuinely popular in Russia—the atmosphere at the time was described as “like a Superbowl win for the home team”—as proof that his personal success and Russia’s are one and the same. This is not to discount the difficulties Russia faces internationally. To steer safely through a dangerous world, Putin will seek a “third way,” one that is neither subordinate to the so-called “liberal order” under American domination, nor in unequal alliance with Beijing. Rather, as members pointed out, Russia can pick and choose the issues and regions where it will compete—and others where it may cooperate—with the other major powers. Success for Moscow, scholars and members concluded, is if an issue cannot be solved without Russia.

Cyber, Space and WMD: Threats and Opportunities

Like the Soviet Union, Russia remains a nuclear superpower, which puts it at the center not only of U.S. interests in strategic stability, but also efforts to address nonproliferation challenges and other risks to global security. In recent years, however, Moscow has also accelerated its investment in new domain capabilities in outer space and cyber space, while showing greater willingness to disrupt a global balance that it thinks favors Washington. Particularly concerning have been Russia’s apparent efforts to influence the 2016 U.S. elections, the Solar Winds hack, and other cases of aggressive cyber and information operations targeting foundational institutions of the U.S. economy and political system. In the face of these disturbing trends, scholars addressed the state of U.S.-Russia negotiations on cyber security, nuclear issues, and outer space cooperation, and assessed the prospects for meaningful progress in any of these areas.

Members expressed concern over ongoing Russian cyber attacks, and with Russia’s track record of interference in U.S. elections and democratic politics. One member raised the point that whereas authoritarian states like Russia and China see the Internet as a potential weapon, the United States is an open society, and “our openness makes us a big target.” As scholars put it, the U.S. does not face a “cyber problem” in Russian hacking so much as a “Russia problem.” To be more clearly understood, this problem needs to be broken down.

Scholars identified several main categories of actual and potential U.S.-Russia tension in the cyber domain: Cyber warfare, such as destructive Russian state-sponsored attacks on Ukraine or Estonia, can be thought of as the application of new technology to longstanding political conflict, and can be addressed by lowering the overall temperature of conflict in East-West relations. Election interference, which is an outgrowth of this conflict “by other means,” is seen by the Kremlin as a proportional response to U.S. support for Russian political opposition figures, and to U.S.-supported international media and nongovernmental organizations that the Kremlin views as hostile and destabilizing in the former Soviet region.

Espionage in cyber space, like the now-famous Solar Winds hack, is likely to continue and is best addressed through strengthened defenses. Criminal ransomware attacks with origins in Russia can and should be stopped by the Kremlin, but it must have sufficient motivation to do so, which can be addressed through negotiations, and potentially also through the threat of sanctions, as long as those sanctions are severe and credible. Ransomware is a critical issue, which has been correctly put at the top of the agenda for U.S.-Russia cyber dialogue, because it gives criminal actors the capability to “hijack” relations between the world’s two nuclear superpowers with the press of a button.

Scholars also addressed the ongoing U.S.-Russia strategic stability dialogue, which at the time of the meeting had recently established working groups to discuss a framework for extending/replacing the bilateral U.S.-Russia New START nuclear arms control agreement, as well as to consider strategic issues posed by the rise of new technologies and new actors. One concern, scholars acknowledged, is that although Washington has impressive offensive capabilities in new technological domains, it is seldom willing to use them for fear of triggering escalation, which might spill over into the nuclear realm.

Another domain of growing importance is space—and it, in turn, brings new actors to bear on U.S.-Russia relations, as scholars explained. As one member pointed out, the capabilities of private actors in space may soon dwarf those of governments. Space is existential for the whole population of the Earth, and is increasingly central to the economic wellbeing of technologically advanced societies. Yet space is also becoming increasingly congested, contested, and competitive. Although Washington has recently launched both a Space Force and a Space Command, scholars cautioned that it should also lead in raising global awareness of outer space as a shared resource. In particular, U.S. credibility could be enhanced

by more transparency about space capabilities, and this could in turn facilitate security agreements with other major space powers, such as Russia and China.

Russia and China: Competition and Partnership

Throughout both days' discussions, members raised questions about the Russia-China relationship, and the role that China might play in each of the policy issues on the agenda, underscoring the reality that Washington's relations with both Beijing and Moscow have in recent years taken a dramatic downward turn. Russia's aggressive and destabilizing actions, and China's manipulative economic practices, coupled with increasingly assertive efforts to dominate East Asia and disrupt and limit U.S. global leadership, have led U.S. officials to speak of a new era of "great power competition." As the Biden Administration charts a course forward with Russia and China, it must consider not only the balance between U.S. power and that of its near-peer rivals, but the interests and capabilities of other states that are impacted by, and can help shape, this competition.

Addressing the basic assumptions underlying Russia-China relations, and how the U.S. should approach this challenge over the long term, scholars explained that while Russia and China each jealously guarded their ability to act independently, they each need things that the other can provide, and they are brought together by their opposition to U.S. power. Frozen out of Western capital markets thanks to sanctions, Russia depends on China for consumer goods and some investment, as well as consumption of its raw material exports. China in turn needs those raw materials to fuel its factories, and seeks advanced military and space technology in which Russia is still a world leader.

The ultimate aim for U.S. policy, scholars suggested, should be to maintain a favorable overall balance of power in both the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific regions, which will require flexibility. Rather than seeing competition with Russia and China in rigid, zero-sum terms, scholars explained, Washington should recognize areas in which agreement with either Moscow or Beijing was possible, for example on Arctic issues, where neither the U.S. nor Russia welcomes increasing Chinese interference. At the same time, Washington will need to help shape flexible coalitions to prevent Russian or Chinese domination in at least four main areas: security, economics, technology, and governance. The point of such situational coalition-building is to keep allies and partners engaged in the areas where they are most motivated and

most capable, rather than to force states to make zero-sum choices across the board. India, some members noted, was an important test case, since despite its history of democratic governance, New Delhi has long had and seeks to maintain close security ties with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Members were concerned that Washington had missed an opportunity for economic coalition-building in stepping away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement. They also asked what role values should have in shaping coalitions, focusing in particular on the Biden Administration's planned Summit for Democracy, and wondering which countries from Europe, Asia or the Middle East could be included. Scholars noted that neither Russia nor China had much to offer other countries in terms of attractive ideologies, and indeed shared little with one another ideologically, aside from their opposition to the United States and embrace of authoritarian methods of control at home. "China and Russia can share sufferings, but not joy," said one scholar, who explained that much of what China and Russia do together is meant either to send messages to the United States, or to prepare for potential regional crises.

U.S. Russia Policy: The Role of Congress and the Future

When President Dwight Eisenhower took office in 1953, he recognized the need for a thorough rethinking of U.S. policy toward the then Soviet Union, grounded in expert knowledge of Soviet intentions and capabilities, as well as recent foreign policy experience. Ike gathered the leading American experts on Russia policy of the time, including George F. Kennan, for a strategic exercise dubbed the "Solarium Project." The result was a menu of predictions and policy options that helped the Eisenhower administration and subsequent U.S. policymakers shape Cold War strategy to achieve balance among competition, containment, rollback and other objectives. Today, scholars cautioned, the U.S. would benefit from a similarly thorough strategic thinking exercise, shedding misperceptions on which ineffective policies have been based, and embracing a broader, longer term view of U.S. national interests.

Members of Congress welcomed the challenge of thinking more deeply about U.S. national interests and where Russia fits into them, asking not only what is at stake, and what Washington should aim to achieve, but what is the right role for the U.S. Congress versus that of the Executive Branch of government? Some members asked whether Congress was organized in the right way to deal with the evolving and emerging challenges they had

discussed, including in cyberspace and outer space. Others asked whether U.S. policymakers are sufficiently well informed about Russia, and whether official Washington collectively spends too much or too little time and energy on Russia relative to its capabilities.

Scholars described several key misperceptions that have shaped U.S. policy toward Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union, including: that Russia will become a Western-style democracy; that Putin alone determines Russian foreign policy; that Russia is in decline and will soon be less of a problem; that Russian foreign policy can be influenced through coercion; and that Europe and the United States are in lockstep in their views and policies towards Russia. These misguided assumptions, scholars argued, had set up U.S. policy for disappointment time and again.

Members asked whether it was possible to define and enforce “red lines” against Russian malign behavior, and scholars offered evidence about the mixed effectiveness of U.S. sanctions policy in the past. Similarly, members expressed concerns about future Russian aggression against former Soviet neighbors such as Ukraine and Georgia, while some scholars said in response that it was doing those countries no favors to offer rhetorical and financial support in their conflicts with Russia if, in fact, Americans were not willing to fight to defend them. Similarly, noting the lack of unity on some issues within Europe and growing calls for European “strategic autonomy,” members and scholars concluded that the United States and NATO remain, for all practical purposes, Europe’s only significant security actors today.

Scholars contended that better Russian expertise is sorely needed within the U.S. government. In particularly dire need are language skills and on-the-ground contextual knowledge of Russia, which can only be gained by time spent in the country. With all U.S. consulates in Russia’s regions closed as of this writing, and the U.S. embassy in Moscow down to barely 100 staff (from an average of around 2,500 in the 1990s), this problem is becoming acute indeed. Scholars suggested that public-private partnerships might be an effective means of restoring area studies at U.S. universities, but recognized that collapsing investment in Russian area expertise since 1991 is a long-term problem that cannot be quickly turned around.

Members and scholars wrestled with the challenge of preserving and restoring U.S. “soft power” with the Russian people. Some called for creative solutions, like offering visa-free travel to young Russians, even though the Kremlin has imposed a “chilling effect” on the relationship with its Foreign Agent laws, and the State Department has issued a “Do Not Travel” warning for

Russia. Some newly emerging technologies for direct Internet access, such as Star Link, might enable more virtual communication between Russians and the West by bypassing increasingly tightly controlled domestic networks. But there is no substitute for direct contact between Russians and Americans, scholars and members conceded, and they wondered whether either side would now be willing to make any compromises for the sake of restoring such exchanges.

The policy discussion concluded on a hopeful note. While acknowledging the difficulties of the current adversarial relationship, members and scholars felt that they had gained improved understanding of Russia, and some expressed the hope of traveling to meet with Russian counterparts face-to-face. Recalling Susan Eisenhower's inspiring opening words, members welcomed more exposure to Russia and to the realities of U.S.-Russia relations, so that they could apply "strategic empathy" to their important work in the future. Some expressed the hope that despite the present difficulties with Russia, Americans would not become too fearful to be creative.

30 YEARS AFTER 1991: IS IT A “NEW” RUSSIA?

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What Is “New” and What Is “Old” in Today’s Russia?

Today’s Russia relies heavily on three legacies:

1/Long-term history and space constraints

- *Demographic transformations* due to population decline (albeit slower than predicted by Western observers in the 1990s), resulting in large part from high male mortality and “brain drain” of highly educated youth. Russia’s working-age population is projected to decline from 104 million in 2016 to around 92 million in 2030. The country is thus destined to become not only older but also poorer in terms of human capital in the coming decades.

Russia’s demographic decline is not necessarily bad news for a retracting economy, but the country will need to invest massively in human capital if it wants to maintain a highly skilled workforce, something that does not appear to be happening thus far. Migration, for its part, primarily provides the country with low-skilled workers.

- *Russia’s spatial disparities* will intensify in the coming decades, making the country an archipelago of populated regions in a largely depopulated landmass. These spatial reconfigurations—which will further contrast the dying regions of the East and North with the booming regions of the West and South—will transform Russian citizens’ perceptions of their relationship to Europe. As the population moves west and southwest, Russia’s demographic heart will come to be anchored in the geopolitically fragile Black Sea region. Demographic, economic, and geopolitical structural factors are pushing Russia toward Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

2/Soviet legacy

- *Continuity of economic fabric.* It would not be easy to reform certain sectors of the Russian economy even if the regime had the will to do so. Enterprises in Siberia and the Far East that rely on raw mineral extraction and industrial transformation are often unable to compete in a market economy, but they cannot be closed without destroying the social fabric of cities and pulling the rug out from under residents who rely on state support for these enterprises. The Russian regime's response has been to continue to subsidize enterprises in these sectors to avoid social crisis while simultaneously developing new economic sectors that function in accordance with the rules of the market economy.

- *Continuity of elites.* The Russian political apparatus is still largely Soviet. A new study by Maria Snegovaya and Kirill Petrov found that between 50% and 70% of Russian political elites are descended from—or were themselves members of—the Soviet nomenklatura. About one-third of decision-making positions are occupied by people with law enforcement (*siloviki*) backgrounds. The younger generation now entering mid-level administrative positions is mostly technocratic; yet it is unclear what political positions they might take up were the regime to allow for greater ideological plurality.

- *Continuity of perceptions.* There has been both bottom-up and top-down nostalgia for some elements of the Soviet past: not for the Communist regime per se but for the way of life, cultural production, great-power prestige, and predictable social order it engendered. This nostalgia existed at the popular level in the 1990s before being transformed into a tool for regime security in the 2000s-2010s. The population's need for stability and predictability, understandable given the rapid transformations of the 1990s, has been transformed into an argument for political stagnation.

3/The legacy of the 1990s

The third legacy is that of the turbulent 1990s. Since Vladimir Putin's arrival in power, the 1990s have been framed as a time of trouble, hardship, and violent disorder that the country should avoid repeating at any price. This narrative has become a central legitimization frame for the regime and the easiest way to discredit the liberal opposition as a threat to the country's survival. Not only is it systematically reinforced and disseminated through state-controlled media, but this discourse also resonates with a large part of society, which equates

liberalism with the collapse of state services, the unpredictability of daily life, the erosion of moral values, and the criminalization of the public space. Yet this is gradually changing as new generations grow up without direct memory of this decade.

The Putin Regime and Russian Society: A Weakened but Still Working Consensus

The consensus between Russian society and the regime has long been a genuine one. The regime has embodied what a large majority of Russian citizens have wanted for their country since the 1990s: continued reform but at a comparatively slow pace, rising standards of living, greater predictability for the near future, the rebuilding of some elements of the Soviet past (especially the efficiency of the state and its international status), and the prevention of the disintegration of public services and the collapse of the Federation itself.

The consensus is based on elite-enabling behavior, i.e., pushing the authorities to implement changes outside of the accountability framework of elections. Other than voting in elections, engaging in a citizen appeal or complaint process is the most common form of political participation among Russian citizens, undertaken by more than 10 percent of the population. As stated by Danielle Lussier, "Over the past fifteen years, the Russian federal government has developed a system for gathering, reviewing, and addressing citizen appeals. Russians' preference for appealing to public officials for assistance has enabled Putin to develop the President's Reception into a mechanism for collecting information about citizen satisfaction, addressing particularistic concerns, and providing oversight of lower levels of government. In modernizing the citizen appeals process for a large percentage of the Russian population that does not view itself as particularly political, Putin has succeeded in presenting himself as an efficient manager and benevolent protector of citizens' rights."

For a long time, only a small minority of Western-oriented liberals criticized the regime's growing authoritarianism and inability to reform some key sectors. This minority was stable at around 12-15% of the population, clearly identifiable in polls and surveys. This began to change in 2011-2012, during the massive anti-Putin Bolotnaya protests (the most massive protests that happened so far in Russia against Putin's coming back to the presidency after the Medvedev's presidency), and criticism has grown since the "rally-around-the-flag effect" created by the annexation of Crimea began to dissipate around 2016.

The consensus based on the traumas of the 1990s that saw political transformations resulting in the collapse of state structures is slowly weakening and a new bottom-up impetus

for transformation is visible. We now see a growing segment of the population expressing dissatisfaction with the regime—even if Putin is always considered a national-level figure and is therefore more positively judged than the government or the Parliament; a growing number of people ready to protest in the streets (one-third of those who protested for the opposition presidential candidate Alexey Navalny on January 23, 2021, were first-time protesters); and an impressive blossoming of urban and environmental activism. Never before has Russian society been so active in terms of grassroots initiatives, crowdfunding, charity, and do-it-yourself civil activism (for instance, legal defense), which are particularly visible among younger generations.

Yet this does not mean that Alexey Navalny can necessarily capitalize on the atmosphere of dissatisfaction. As of June 2021, Putin's main political opponent enjoyed just 20-24% popularity as a politician among 18-39-year-olds and significantly less among older generations. Such support may be high for Russia, but it shows the limits of Navalny's actions: millions of people may watch his videos denouncing corruption, but a relatively small share of the population believes in Navalny as a credible opposition figure.

Two approaches to regime change are emerging: a revolutionary one, embodied by Navalny, who believes the "system" can be dismissed and fundamentally changed; and an evolutionary one, advocated by many grassroots activists, who propose to change the "system" through small, bottom-up pushes starting at the municipal level. Given that many Russians see the revolutionary approach as dangerous and unrealistic, incremental shifts that display relentlessness rather than combativeness are probably more realistic.

The Othering of the West and the State-Backed Conservative Ideology

Historically, Russia has always perceived itself as the "other Europe," or the "second Europe"—the Slavic one born of the Byzantine legacy and dissociated from the Catholic/Protestant, Romano-Germanic world. The Soviet Union revamped this tradition as the "second world" opposed to the capitalist order. The two-decade period that encompasses perestroika, the 1990s, and the first years of the Putin presidency (until the Munich speech of 2007) stands out as an exception during which Russian elites believed in the possibility of Russia joining the "common European home." That option has largely fallen off the radar of political elites, who now consider that:

1. The West will never make room for Russia as an equal partner;

2. Europe is too weak and dependent on the U.S. to be able to support a partnership with Russia over the opposition of Washington; and
3. The West is declining—it has failed politically and economically—and there is no reason for Russia to try to join a club of declining powers.

I see Russia's official anti-Americanism mostly as a way for the Kremlin to explain its dissatisfaction at not being recognized as an equal partner and at being treated as at best a rule-taker regional power and at worst a rogue state on a par with North Korea or Iran. Yet the feeling that Russia is being contained by Western and especially NATO advances on its so-called Near Abroad is largely and genuinely shared by a large part of the Russian elite and population. This opposition to the U.S.-led world order has translated into an official narrative of Russia as the savior of conservative Christian values in the face of a decadent, morally corrupt West—even if the geopolitical opposition continues to dominate over the ideological one.

At the popular level, anti-Americanism relies on old Soviet tropes but also on the difficult cultural encounters of the 1990s, a time during which American cultural production (music, cinema, brands) became widespread in Russia. This cultural production has gradually come under fire for having replaced national production, as well as for promoting violence and supposed moral nihilism to younger generations. Yet the population does not unquestioningly accept the anti-U.S. narratives propagated by state media: while tensions peaked in 2014-2015, Russians are in 2021 only slightly more likely to say they have a negative opinion of the United States (43%) than a positive one (39%)—and negative views have declined significantly over the past two years.

While scholars disagree on whether Russia's official "conservative turn" has genuine ideological content or is merely an empty shell used by the regime to secure its legitimacy, very few studies have looked at society's reception of state-produced conservative discourses. Ignoring the demand side of conservatism limits our ability to capture how the social contract has been negotiated in Russia. The regime's cultural hegemony is not a unidirectional, top-down process that shapes a passive, receptive public opinion "brainwashed" by media "propaganda."

Russian society's reactive conservatism of the 1990s predated state conservatism but was largely devoid of moral content, especially with regard to family issues, as Russian society has largely been atomized and privacy questions are left to each household. This reactive conservatism was based on the broad but imprecise feeling of an "ideological vacuum" created

not so much by the loss of doctrines, which had been largely discredited, as by the collapse of the Soviet moral order.

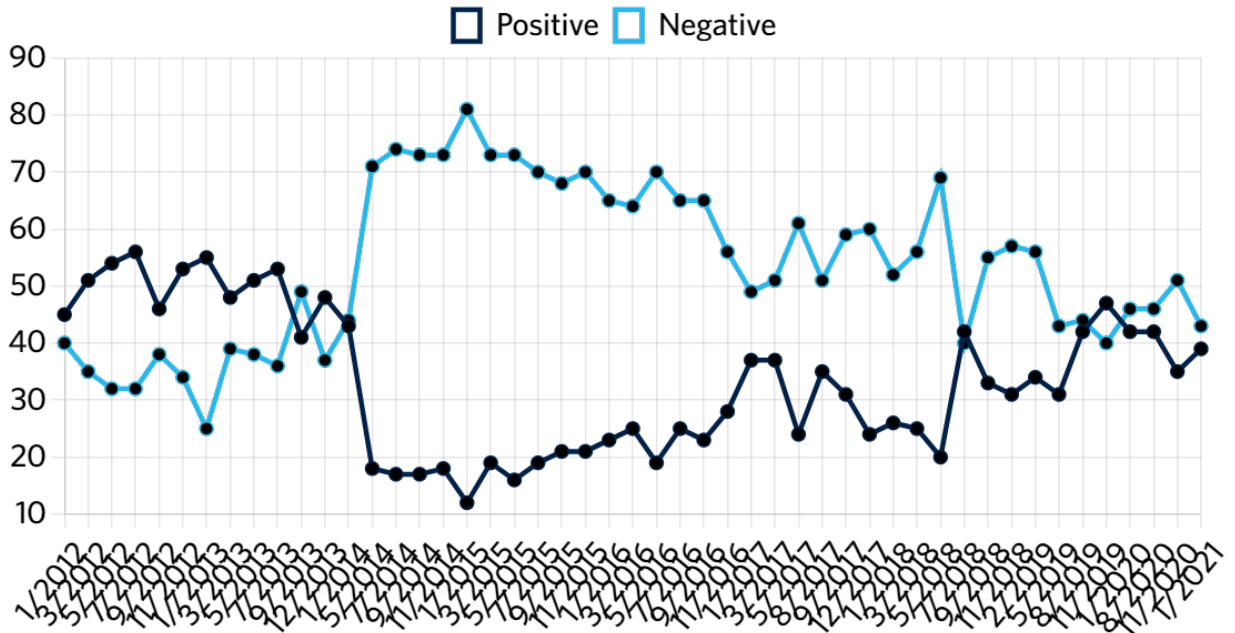


Table 1. Russians’ View of the US, 2012-2021 (answer to the question: “In general, what is your attitude toward the United States?”)

Source: Chicago Council, March 2021, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/despite-political-tension-americans-and-russians-see-cooperation>

The selective affinity between a bottom-up reactive conservatism and a top-down moral conservatism has afforded Putin himself and the regime more globally long-term support for two decades; however, it has severe limitations. Russian society has become more conservative on relatively few topics: chiefly homosexuality, where top-down mechanisms are particularly visible, and to a lesser degree abortion and divorce. As for religion, the “Orthodoxization” of society appears to be part of the trend toward Identitarian Christianity visible all over Europe. Orthodoxy is referred to as a cultural identity without entailing any religious practice per se. Moreover, the caveats to these conservative features are numerous: homophobia seems to have reached its peak and is now declining, while the vision of the family order appears to reflect mainly a “normalization” of abortion and divorce practices that put Russia close to many European countries. With the exception of homophobia, Russian society does not appear strictly conservative.

If a discursive moral conservatism may remain a long-term element of the Russian regime, it will probably come to be challenged in terms of practices, as society is increasingly polarized between conservative strongholds and growing liberal or at least liberalizing social groups, especially among the younger generations. This polarization may undercut moral conservatism's status as a "glue" that permits consensus among citizens and acceptance of the political order. Moreover, the rise in power of ultraconservative or reactionary groups—in particular around the Church, which is trying to position itself as a moral leader—is creating a certain backlash even among elites, showing the limits of the state-sponsored "conservative turn."

Will a Post-Putin Era Be More of the Same?

There is an individual Putin and a collective Putin. The individual Putin will one day disappear from power, but it is difficult to imagine that the collective Putin will dissolve. The law enforcement agencies and the military have learned their lesson from the 1990s and will not allow for a new collapse. As the backbone of the state, they will maintain control of a large share of political processes in a post-Putin era. Whoever will succeed Putin will have to accommodate his legacy and reform political culture at a relatively slow pace. Moreover, even in the event that a more liberal political elite comes to power, Russia's main strategic foci will remain, especially the need to fight for relevance on the international scene. One can imagine a post-Putin regime with which it is easier to talk about the so-called Near Abroad, but not a deep evolution of Russia's main strategic positioning.

30 YEARS AFTER 1991: IS IT A 'NEW' RUSSIA?

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1989 vs. 1991: The Origins of Russian Grievances

From late 2011 to 2016 I lived in Moscow, first as a doctoral student¹ researching how booms and busts in the energy market shaped Soviet and Russian foreign policy, and then as an assistant professor in the Faculty of World Economy and International Relations at the National Research University-Higher School of Economics. I moved to Moscow right as the “tandemocracy” of Dmitri Medvedev and Vladimir Putin were returning to their original positions, restoring Putin to his preferred place at the top of the system and causing the streets to swell with protesters angry at their exclusion from the basic task of selecting their country’s leaders. The open disappointment by Western leaders that Medvedev and his relatively less confrontational approach to international affairs would be replaced by Putin presaged event after event in subsequent years that mined new lows in Russia’s relations with the West.² Western commentary during this period openly wondered whether “Russia wants to fight a new Cold War” and asserted confidently that “Russia is back as a revisionist power.” From my Russian colleagues, however, the singular refrain was that all blame could be placed on the United States: America was the true revisionist actor in the international system because it violated the agreements reached at the Malta Summit in December 1989 by then-leaders

¹ I graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. My Aggie colleagues have suggested that they will forgive me ... in time and contingent upon good behavior.

² Just to jog the reader’s memory, a few lowlights: the Magnitsky Act in December 2012 targeted the Russian elite with economic sanctions, a tool that would come to dominate Western displeasure with Russian foreign policy; Edward Snowden’s escape to Moscow in 2013 led to the first cancellation of a U.S.-Russia summit since the 1960s; the Euromaidan, collapse of the Viktor Yanukovich government, annexation of Crimea, and separatist conflict in Donbas in 2014 brought war back to Europe; intervention into the Syrian civil war led Russia into direct conflict with U.S. and Turkish forces in 2015; interference in the U.S. presidential elections in 2016 broke new ground in cyber conflict.

George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev ending the Cold War while Russia is vainly trying to maintain the status quo.

Obviously, blaming others for your own actions is gaslighting, but the logic used by Russian policymakers, scholars, and commentators revealed the sources of contemporary Russian grand strategy, namely, making the world look more like 1989 than 1991. From the Russian perspective, the Malta Summit following the collapse of socialist governments of the Warsaw Pact states represented a suitable conclusion to the Cold War and its ideological competition by acknowledging American primacy as the basis for a new international order. Gorbachev and Bush did not develop an institutional structure at that meeting, but the acceptable contours of a new era were clear:

- (1) The Soviet Union is in one place, the NATO countries are in another, and a buffer zone of non-aligned states between them;
- (2) through its size and military power the Soviet Union would retain a veto role in the international and European security architecture; and
- (3) it would expect and accept Western support in its redevelopment away from Stalinism as the effective compensation for reducing international tension.

Gorbachev anticipated that a world in which the Soviet Union was no longer financially responsible for numerous imperial dependencies would allow him to reduce defense spending and undertake much-needed reforms. Neither he nor Bush conceived of American unipolarity or NATO expansion beyond incorporating the territory of the German Democratic Republic (the former East Germany). We all know how the rest of the story played out. By giving up the external empire, latent nationalist feelings in the "internal empire," the non-Russian parts of the Soviet Union that had been conquered decades or even centuries earlier by the Tsars, reemerged. Add to that the adoption of market-oriented reforms, which removed the Communist Party from determining economic outcomes, Gorbachev's efforts to increase openness in society that threatened to unleash repressed trauma regarding the Stalinist period, and the sentiment that the West won the Cold War all led to the last-ditch effort by hardliners to remove Gorbachev from power through a (poorly organized) putsch in August 1991. The coup attempt failed, and Gorbachev remained in power, but he was a spent force. Boris Yeltsin dealt the final blow to the Soviet Union by working with his Ukrainian and Belarusian counterparts to remove their republics from the Soviet Union, which they did on December 8,

1991. Without those three republics and the others that had already declared their independence, it was all over by Christmas 1991, merely two years after Gorbachev left Malta thinking he had remade international relations.

How Long Will Putin Rule Russia?

In the United States we look at this era between the end of socialism in Europe—punctuated by the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification—and the dissolution of the Soviet Union as one big period of peace, democratization, and, not to put too fine of a point on it, Western victory. For the Russians, the end of the Cold War and the end of the Soviet Union are two very different events and the difference in perception defines the chasm between the United States and Russia today. The Russian belief in an international order that should have started with the end of the Cold War is not to suggest a return to the Soviet Union or that era's superpower competition. No Russian official believes that level of military spending is feasible or desirable. Rather, their belief in the end of the Cold War as the correct starting point for the contemporary world is that international affairs run more effectively with Russia in the top echelon of states to work with other great powers to run international affairs collectively. Their ideal is something akin to how France was swiftly reintegrated into European great power politics by the victorious powers after losing the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century simply because France was too big to exclude.

The political distance between Russia's power and place in the international system and the role in international affairs its political elite believes it *should* play is the key to understanding how Putin has effectively exploited to gain, consolidate, and sustain power for twenty years and counting. Namely, he has exploited this grievance about Russia's place in the world as the organizing principle of both Russian grand strategy and as the justification for his own rule. Putin's core political argument is that he is the only person able to make the world look more like 1989 instead of 1991 and restore Russia to its rightful place in international politics as one of the few leading powers responsible for regional and international security. This argument that Russia needs him, and the world needs Russia, is simple enough for the entire society to accept, clear enough for the bureaucracy to organize and implement policy, and broad enough that it conveniently takes decades to accomplish.

So, what has Putin done in his twenty years of power? Set himself up to rule for another twenty years, if not longer. Putin's key achievement at the apex of the Russian state has been the elimination of alternative sources of power, which has allowed him to recreate the traditional practices of power in Russia and consolidate the entire political system around himself personally. At first, Putin used violence, coercion, and some good luck to address the inherited problems of the 1990s one by one and create a stronger, unified, centralized state:

- After the disastrous 1994-1996 war with Chechnya (a rebellious province in the North Caucasus) left the Chechens with a tremendous amount of autonomy, he started another war with them that resulted in a pro-Moscow government.
- He coopted or repressed all the oligarchs who had undermined Boris Yeltsin and influenced the political arena for personal benefit to recreate an economic system with the government at the center of economic decision-making and the president as the final arbiter of who wins and who loses.
- He utilized a mid-2000s oil boom to resolve the pension and wage arrears that defined the 1990s and gained him a lasting source of popularity with the generation that had experienced the Soviet collapse and economic calamity that followed.
- He eliminated formal and informal political opposition, including by appointing federal envoys to eliminate local laws at variance with federal laws, cancelling gubernatorial elections, breaking opposition parties into neutered "systemic opposition," and harassing, jailing, exiling, and murdering political opponents.

Throughout this time Putin has worked assiduously to ensure that he is the true indispensable figure to the Russian political elite and to Russian society by making the entire country think that life without him is going to be worse than life with him. Putin long ago eliminated any serious political opposition, so his presidential campaigns have alternative candidates but no real choices. As a result, his opponent, so to speak, is the weakness of the 1990s; his campaign slogan is effectively "It was so much worse before I got here; sure, things could be better, but without me they're likely to be worse than ever." It may not be very inspiring, but if all the various elite groups believe that he is the only person able to balance their interests and keep the population at bay, then Putin has delivered for them. If there is enough money in the various reserve funds to handle crises (and they usually keep about \$500-750 billion on hand and have withstood sanctions and oil price collapses for years), then the

society implicitly recognizes that the government can prevent a true meltdown of the system as experienced in the 1990s. If everyone can see Putin challenging the West through military interventions abroad, then that looks like restoring lost national pride mixed in with a fair bit of revenge. All of this is cynical, but it is sustainable.

What Can Be Done?

This essay has so far identified Russia's core geopolitical grievance and Vladimir Putin's domestic political success: Russia's spot at the table should not be the result of good behavior, but as the consequence of its natural size and reach, and Putin is going to achieve that result no matter what he must do. What the U.S. government and the Congress can do about that, however, must recognize the following principles:

- First, we in the United States need to have a clear and long-term strategy of what we want from Russia because it is clearly willing to accept any short-term pain to frustrate short-term goals. Our sanctions policy has produced significant economic damage to Russia without changing Russia's political or military strategies.
- Second, we need to recognize that Putin is going to be in power for a long time because he is no more and no less than a person very good at understanding how Russian political culture values stability above all else. As noted by Matt Rojansky of the Kennan Institute, "Putin is a reflection of Russia. This weird notion that Putin will go away and there will suddenly be a pliant Russia is false."³
- Third, we can shape their behavior, but we cannot change their assumptions. The Russians fundamentally believe that the West is motivated by regime change and expanding its sphere of influence to dismantle Russia because that is the motivating principle to its foreign and domestic policies.
- Fourth, Russians respect strength and while they recognize the overwhelming material advantages of the West, they believe that they have limited the effects of those by continually testing our resolve along the spectrum of conflict across multiple domains. We need to have clear and defensible red lines that identify where we can agree,

³ Marvin Kalb, *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2015. Page 12.

disagree, or simply not engage with the Russians. We need to communicate clearly what we want and what we are willing to do when confronted by malign behavior.

- Finally, and most importantly, we should be confident in ourselves: name and shame their bad behavior (human rights abuses, online malfeasance, corruption and kleptocracy that reaches into the West, and so forth) and prohibit our citizens from handling dubious money or providing social cover, communicate our strengths and intentions inclusive of preparing for all sorts of contingencies in response to their probes and provocations, and find every opportunity to improve governance at home to show them and ourselves that our society and those of our allies have a brighter future ahead.

The Russian Federation is a young country, but Russia is an old place. Today's Russia is once again aggressive, resilient, and playing a significant role in regional, and at times international, affairs. It is a good spot for Russia because it has defined the rules of the game as its offense versus our defense. The theme of this meeting is "Competition, Deterrence, and Diplomacy." I might suggest a reverse order: clear politics at home combined with patient and vigorous diplomacy abroad—backed by military capabilities—can produce the deterrent effects to behaviors we do not like, and which will enable us to start imposing costs on them and thus reshape our long-term competition with Russia.

ACCEPTING RUSSIA AS IT IS: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP

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Past Mistakes

For the past 30 years, America's policy toward Russia has been organized around a strategy that in hindsight can be best described as *blind hope*: hope that Russia would miraculously reinvent itself as a liberal democracy, reemerge as a collaborative player on the international stage and transform itself into a responsible nation with respect for the rule of law and Western norms and values. Despite the initial suppression of democratic norms during the Yeltsin era, the steady dismantling of the free press and the rapid establishment of a thoroughly autocratic rule by Putin, and the enormous levels of corruption and crime that have taken hold in the Russian government, policymakers in U.S. and Europe have refused to recognize what Russia has become, choosing instead to hold onto the hope that Russia will one day remake itself in the United States' image. Hope indeed springs eternal.

Unfortunately, this strategy has resulted not only in dashed expectations but also in an ineffectual foreign policy—championed by Republican and Democratic administrations alike—that has cast the U.S.-Russia relationship into a state of permanent confrontation and continued escalation.

During the past 15 years, Russia has given the United States no shortage of issues to be outraged about:

- its military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine and forceful redrawing of borders in Europe for the first time since 1945;
- the systematic suppression of Russia's free press and the ongoing intimidation of independent journalists;
- the use of its powerful energy sector as a tool to blackmail European countries into acquiescence;
- its shameless interference with Western nations' democratic elections (including ours);
- its use of chemical weapons on civilians in violation of international law;
- global assassination campaigns targeting regime opponents;
- military interference in the conflicts in Syria, Libya, and other parts of Africa;
- the use of private military contractors and support for the human rights violations that they commit;
- its tolerance for ransomware attacks and the safe-harboring of cybercriminals;
- mounting threats to the Baltic states; aggressive moves in the Arctic;
- a growing closeness to China and support for authoritarianism the world over;
- President Putin's evident disdain for the rule of law and complete dismantling of any political opposition at home;
- and, the clear desire to play the spoiler to U.S. policies on the global stage.

The United States can and should remain concerned about this whole slew of issues, but it must acknowledge that, even with the support of its European allies—many of whom are loath to seriously confront Russian aggression—it will never receive an acceptable resolution to all or even most of these problems. Faced with this ever-growing list of areas of concern, the U.S. must prioritize the issues that are most important to its national and economic security and where it is possible to extract meaningful concessions from Russia. More importantly, in the era of renewed great power competition with the formidable and economically powerful adversary that is China, the U.S. can ill afford to be distracted by concerns that are not central to its core interests.

Russia's Future

The key to a new strategy to guide America's dealings with Russia is to accept the reality that Russia will not become a free and democratic nation in the foreseeable future, or even one

that will become a friend and partner to the U.S. in its efforts to solve global challenges.

The U.S. must appreciate that the managed autocratic political system that Putin has created with the help of the revitalized and empowered repression apparatus of his security services is likely to outlast him, just as the brutal dictatorial system former Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin had put in place long outlived him. Whenever Putin relinquishes power or dies in office, the people who are most likely to step into his shoes—including Defense Minister Shoigu, Secretary of the Security Council Patrushev or Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service Director Naryshkin—are just as hawkish, nationalistic, ruthless and autocratic as he is, if not more so. The U.S. must face the reality that there is no new reformist such as former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev waiting in the wings of the United Russia ruling party, nor does the Russian populace—exhausted by and terrified of the instability and economic plunge following the collapse of the Soviet Union—have much of an appetite to be ruled once again by a liberalizing reformer. Putin has established a durable model for Russian state leadership that has given him both outsized influence in global politics and political stability at home.

Outside of the pockets of dissent that flourish among the more educated and Westernized elites in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the majority of the Russian population remains obsessed with maintaining political and economic stability, as well as excited at the prospect of Russia returning to its former greatness on the world stage. This is the primary reason why Putin and his siloviki (strongman) allies remain broadly popular—even if not as popular as the sky-high approval ratings published by the Russian media might suggest. The absence of a free press certainly helps to sustain those ratings, but that absence alone is not sufficient to explain Putin’s broad and sustained popularity. Domestic press censorship and propaganda is rarely sufficient on its own to keep leaders’ popularity ratings high in the face of daily economic hardships and stagnation, such as ones that the Russian people have been experiencing since 2014. Against this background, any prospect of Russia evolving into a Western-style democracy anytime soon remains a fanciful dream.

Regardless of the type of political system that is governing Russia, the prospect of the U.S. and Russia developing a true strategic partnership—particularly one designed to confront China—is also a mirage. With Putin or without, any Russian leader will be expected to protect

the core interests of the Russian Federation. Many of those interests are not aligned—and in many cases are diametrically opposed—with those of the United States. Russia remains a very proud nation with centuries of history as a former great power, and it cannot and will not accept a world where the United States or its institutional proxies interfere in its sphere of influence. Having directly governed much of its near abroad for centuries, Russia has developed its own version of the Monroe Doctrine, according to which it refuses to accept the independent minded, pro-Western, and implicitly anti-Russian foreign policy of its former Soviet Union republic neighbors. The driver of this hardline policy is not only past visions of imperial grandeur but also a very real insecurity about the shrunken borders of the Russian Federation—their distance from Moscow being the shortest it has been since the 1700s—colored by the memory of centuries of land invasions from European powers. The prospect of any more former Soviet Union republics, beyond the three Baltics states, joining NATO or aligning themselves with the European Union and the West represents an existential threat for Russia’s political leadership, and nothing will convince them otherwise, no matter how irrational observers in the U.S. and Europe may think it to be. Russia will continue to pursue its own path on the international stage while continuously trying to find ways to diminish America’s power and influence, especially in what it perceives as its own backyard. And, as it has established over the last decade, it has plenty of resources and creativity to effectively pursue that strategy and cause significant trouble for U.S. policymakers.

Given these realities—that the U.S. does not have the power to change the Russian system of government and can ill afford to wait endlessly for it to do so on its own, and that U.S. and Russian interests will continue to collide in many areas—where can the U.S. go from here?

New Realist Strategy

The answer lies in accepting Russia and its interests as they are, not as we wish for them to be. From there, the U.S. must find ways to lower the temperature in the relationship and forge common ground with Russia to work with it where it makes sense to do so, to push back hard where it has no other choice, and to avoid engaging in wasteful and needlessly adversarial conflicts on issues that are not of key concern. After all, there are plenty of regimes around the world that the U.S. dislikes and whose many policies the U.S. opposes: Saudi Arabia,

Turkey, Pakistan and even North Korea come to mind. Yet despite these nations' very serious shortcomings, the U.S. accepts them for what they are and finds ways to work with them on areas of mutual interest. The American political establishment generally abhors authoritarian political systems and is outraged when they actively work against American interests, yet in these instances policymakers do not seek out active confrontation or insist on spurring fundamental regime change in the way that it continues to do with Russia.

Adopting this more realist attitude toward Russia is critical if the U.S. hopes to make progress in any of the numerous areas of critical concern to the U.S. interests. First and foremost, the U.S. should work with Russia to negotiate a new nuclear arms control agreement to replace the New START treaty, which is set to expire in 2026. Limiting the expansion of Russia's nuclear arsenal and reducing the risk of nuclear conflict should be a top U.S. priority, and it also happens to be an area where Russia's interests align with the U.S.

America and Russia must also work together to confront the catastrophic effects of climate change, which continue to displace populations within both countries, cost them billions of dollars in damages from national disasters, and threaten their national security infrastructure. There have been early signs of cooperation between the two countries on climate issues, including U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry's meeting in July of 2021 with Russian Special Presidential Representative on Climate Issues Ruslan Edelgeriyev, which resulted in a joint commitment to address a range of climate-related issues. Given that Russia is the fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, additional collaboration in this area could be a bright spot for the bilateral relationship.

The Arctic and the enormous economic opportunity for both countries arising from the development of the Northern Sea Route is another potential area of cooperation. While Russia has taken some unhelpful and concerning steps in militarizing parts of the region, Putin has proclaimed at the 2021 Geneva summit that the opportunity and geographic closeness 'should push [America and Russia] to join efforts' on this issue.

This attitude would also empower the U.S. to push back more vigorously on issues where successful collaboration between the two nations is either impossible or unlikely. For

instance, the U.S. should adopt a firmer stance on ransomware and other cybercrime originating from Russian borders, much of which enjoys the tacit support of the Russian government. Ransomware in particular has become a major economic and national security concern for the United States, whose various diplomatic efforts to persuade President Putin to crack down on these criminals have so far failed. The U.S. should make it clear to Vladimir Putin that it has reached a breaking point with regard to ransomware, and that it will soon take more aggressive steps to address it, with or without his cooperation.

The U.S. should adopt this same tough attitude on other issues where Putin has demonstrated that he is unwilling to make meaningful concessions. On Russia's use of chemical weapons, the U.S. should impose devastating penalties unless Russia agrees to the verifiable destruction of its chemical arsenal, as are its obligations under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Similarly, both the U.S. and Europe should have a zero tolerance policy on allowing Russia to conduct assassinations of political opponents on their soil and make it clear to Vladimir Putin of the severe repercussions of such reprehensible acts. On energy blackmail, the U.S. should work with its allies to develop alternative energy sources to curtail Europe's deepening dependence on Russia. In the Middle East, the U.S. must shore up its alliances with key strategic actors to prevent Russia from making further inroads.

Finally, a more realist attitude would allow the United States to avoid generating purposeless or even counterproductive conflicts with Russia. So long as Putin believes that the U.S. is intent on facilitating regime change in Russia—a belief that the U.S. has done little to dispel—no real progress can be made on these critical areas of mutual concern. Given that there is decidedly nothing that the U.S. can do to effect such a change, it serves no purpose to keep advancing such rhetoric except to further antagonize and provoke Putin. Similarly, providing unrealistic encouragement to Ukraine, Georgia and other former Soviet Union republics about prospects for joining NATO, the EU or becoming more embedded in the Western alliance system is contributing to Russia's insecurities and enragement. Moreover, that policy has already led to the start of two military conflicts, both of which Russia has decisively won, while demonstrating to the world the limited worth of vague Western promises of assistance.

Conclusion

We are again at a point where the benefits of limited cooperation with Russia far outweigh the costs. Indeed, the need to cooperate with Putin may be a bitter pill for the U.S. to swallow, but it should be no more bitter than those its leaders swallow every day. It is true that Putin is an autocrat, a thug, and an unrepentant killer—but is he more objectionable than Chinese leader Xi? Than Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed bin Salman? Than Turkey’s Erdogan? Than Duterte in the Philippines? None of these men are paragons of tolerance and democratic virtue, and yet the U.S. is willing to work with them on areas of mutual concern and avoid unproductive antagonization. Why make an exception for Putin?

PERSPECTIVES ON U.S.-RUSSIAN CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPACE OPERATIONS STABILITY

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In early 2021 the Biden administration agreed with Russia to a five-year extension of the New START Treaty without any preconditions. While policy analysts generally praised the decision to extend the treaty as an important effort to salvage strategic stability between the United States and Russia, policy-makers disagree over the best approach to deepening U.S.-Russian strategic stability beyond New START.¹ Some argue for a follow-on agreement that “addresses a broader range of nuclear delivery systems and China’s growing nuclear capability.”² The Biden administration prefers prioritizing Russian nonstrategic nuclear weapons and new nuclear delivery systems, in addition to including China in these discussions.³ The Russian government favors a comprehensive review of the overall strategic equation that

¹ The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was signed by the United States and Russia and entered into force on Feb. 5, 2011. The treaty continues the “process of verifiably reducing U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals.” For more detail on New START see Kingston Reif, “New START at a Glance,” Arms Control Association, February 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/NewSTART> (accessed September 24, 2021). Heather Conley and Roksana Gabidullina, “The Future of U.S.-Russian Arms Control: Principles of Engagement and New Approaches,” CSIS, March 12, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/future-us-russian-arms-control-principles-engagement-and-new-approaches> (accessed September 7, 2021). In fact, many now argue that the term “strategic stability” has lost its relevance. See for example, Frank Miller, “Talking About ‘Strategic Stability,’” Real Clear Defense, July 8, 2021, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/07/08/talking_about_strategic_stability_784613.html (accessed July 15, 2021).

² Frank G. Klotz, *The Military Case for Extending the New START Agreement* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE350.html>.

³ Kingston Reif and Shannon Bugos, “U.S., Russia Strategic Stability Meeting Held in Geneva,” Arms Control Association, July 30, 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2021-07/us-russian-nuclear-arms-control-watch> (accessed September 6, 2021).

incorporates a much broader definition of strategic stability. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov recently reinforced Moscow's view:

"We believe that the main objective of further efforts on the bilateral Russia-U.S. track should be the development of a new security equation that encompasses, without exception, all factors affecting strategic stability. I'm referring to nuclear and non-nuclear, offensive and defensive weapons."⁴

Others continue to debate the actual definition of strategic stability or what elements should be part of ongoing U.S.-Russia strategic stability dialogues.

This paper focuses on space operations stability as a vital and time-critical issue area in future U.S.-Russian talks. It explains why space operations stability warrants immediate attention in the broader context of strategic stability, offers a brief assessment of the state of U.S. leadership in space sustainability and security, and discusses the prospects for and significance of U.S.-Russia cooperation on space operations and security.

Why does space matter to strategic stability?

For over a decade, the United States has recognized that "space, a domain that no nation owns but on which all rely, is becoming increasingly congested, contested and competitive."⁵ Regarding the level of *congestion*, the number of objects on orbit has recently "skyrocketed" with the dawn of the era of mega constellations, such as Space X's Starlink and One Web, thus increasing the probability of collisions between objects in space.⁶ Moreover, space is a more *competitive* environment. Once the province of superpowers during the Cold War, the space domain is now characterized by space activity that includes dozens of spacefaring nations and companies.⁷ This increasing level of competition makes it harder for any one actor, like the United States, to control the activity in space. Most importantly, space is

⁴ Sergey Lavrov, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the 9th Moscow Conference on International Security," Moscow, June 24, 2021, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4798212 (accessed September 7, 2021).

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *National Security Space Strategy: Unclassified Summary* (January 2011), p. 5, available at: https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/2011_nationalsecurityspacestrategy.pdf.

⁶ Aaron Boley and Michael Byers, "Satellite mega-constellations create risks in Low Earth Orbit, the atmosphere and on Earth," *Scientific Reports* Vol. 11, Article no. 10642 (2021).

⁷ Bruce McClintock et. al., *Responsible Space Behavior for the New Space Era: Preserving the Province of Humanity* (RAND Corporation, 2021), p. 3, available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA887-2.html>.

becoming increasingly *contested*. Adversaries such as China and Russia recognize American dependence on space and openly discuss ways to exploit vulnerabilities that arise out of that dependence.⁸ Furthermore, China and Russia are doing more than just theorizing about counterspace capabilities. The last decade has seen a resurgence in Russian development of space weapons and China's rapid development of space systems that can hold U.S. space assets at risk.⁹

What is the state of U.S. leadership in space sustainability and security?

Perhaps not surprisingly, Russia and China have used the United Nations venues to call for binding treaties preventing an arms race in outer space or resolutions promoting "No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space," even as they develop and test counterspace weapons.¹⁰ Until recently, the United States and its allies had only arguments against the security proposals from Russia and China and possessed no alternative frameworks. As a result of a lack of U.S. or U.S.-allied alternatives to the repeated Russian-led calls for treaties, some within the U.S. and allied nations posited that U.S. leadership in space was waning.¹¹

This perception of U.S. decline in space leadership is noteworthy given the past leadership demonstrated by the United States in key space sustainability areas. For example, NASA's orbital debris mitigation standards were first issued in 1995, and they became the model for national and eventually UN-backed debris-mitigation guidelines in 2010.¹² U.S. cooperation with key allies has led to a renewed emphasis on U.S. leadership on space security issues, even if in a somewhat subdued role that allows others to lead. The United Kingdom's introduction and championing of United Nations Resolution 75/36 titled "Reducing Space Threats Through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviors" is the most prominent recent step and

⁸ See for example V. B. Zarudnitsky, "The Character and Content of Military Conflicts in Modern Conditions and in the Near Future," *Military Thought*, Vol. 1 (2021), p. 41: "...the main efforts will focus on disorganizing the enemy's command and control system by destroying ground infrastructure supporting the operations of space forces and assets. According to Russian military experts, this is one of the most vulnerable areas of the United States and NATO."

⁹ Defense Intelligence Agency, *Challenges to Security in Space* (January 2019), available at: https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Space_Threat_V14_020119_sm.pdf.

¹⁰ Almudena Azcárate Ortega, "Placement of Weapons in Outer Space: The Dichotomy Between Word and Deed," *Lawfare*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/placement-weapons-outer-space-dichotomy-between-word-and-deed> (accessed September 16, 2021). McClintock et al., pp. 6-10.

¹¹ Various governmental and non-governmental officials, Workshops on Responsible Space Behavior, RAND Corporation, virtual discussion held under Chatham House Rule, July 2020.

¹² McClintock et al., p. 29.

will likely provide the catalyst for more U.S. activity in this area.¹³ Still it seems clear that the “significant changes in the space domain and the lack of implementation and verification methods” demonstrate that the existing system for space operations governance is inadequate.¹⁴ More organizations are sounding the call for a “consolidated coordination and operational mechanism” for space.¹⁵

There are steps the United States can take to regain the leadership role and reinforce its credibility as the leading spacefaring nation and the exemplar for space safety, sustainability, and security. The following four recommendations are adapted and abridged for this article from McClintock et al.’s publication, *Responsible Space Behavior for the New Space Era*.

First, the United States can and should lead an effort to increase global awareness of the shared importance of space to all nations. The United States and its key allies are favorably positioned to be mentors to the growing number of emerging spacefaring nations and companies. The initial focus should be on the importance of space for all of humanity. The challenge for the United States is balancing the sustainability message with the security message more commonly heard from the leaders of the new military space organizations: U.S. Space Force and U.S. Space Command.

Second, as part of an effort to build global credibility the United States should lead an effort to increase the sharing of space situational awareness data, as appropriate for the New Space era. Greater transparency in space situational awareness data increases the ability for others to detect objects that used to hide in plain sight. Failing to be more transparent risks a loss of U.S. credibility as a responsible space actor.

Third, the United States should also continue to look for ways to get agreement on obvious safety considerations like maneuver notifications and proposals for bans on long-term debris generating activities. It is encouraging that these and other concepts are contained in

¹³ United Nations, “Report of the Secretary-General on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviors (2021),” July 13, 2021, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/topics/outerspace-sg-report-outer-space-2021/> (accessed September 10, 2021).

¹⁴ McClintock et al., p. 9.

¹⁵ Debra Werner, “UN space office seeks consensus on space traffic management,” *Space News*, September 7, 2021, <https://spacenews.com/un-space-office-seeks-consensus-on-space-traffic-management/> (accessed September 7, 2021).

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's July 2021 "Tenets of Responsible Behavior in Space" Memo.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the memo will result in tangible guidance and specific directives or if it is later seen as a restatement of many well-documented tenets already in place.

Fourth, the United States should continue to seek ways to develop security agreements with key competitors, such as Russia and China. Major space powers need to continue to work through existing international mechanisms while also continuing to seek bilateral understanding and ideally agreements on security activities in space. In this regard there is more history and hope for work with Russia.

Prospects for U.S.-Russia cooperation on space operations and security

Prior to 2019 there was little dialogue between the United States and Russia on specific space operations topics. That changed in 2020 when the two countries exchanged views during their first space security talks since 2013.¹⁷ There have been a few other engagements since 2020, but the view of some U.S. policymakers is that the Russians have not brought any substantive items to discussions and that progress has been slow.¹⁸ In spite of this slow start, there is hope that forthcoming negotiations will be more productive.¹⁹

Already, there are some unofficial roadmaps that could provide specific paths to improving U.S.-Russian cooperation on space operations and security.²⁰ The first and most time-sensitive step is creating a "direct channel of communication between Russia and the United States to share information on space situational awareness and safety concerns."²¹ The

¹⁶ Lloyd Austin, "Tenets of Responsible Behavior in Space," July 7, 2021, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jul/23/2002809598/-1/-1/0/TENETS-OF-RESPONSIBLE-BEHAVIOR-IN-SPACE.PDF> (accessed September 9, 2021).

¹⁷ Reuters Staff, "U.S., Russia to hold first space security talks since 2013," July 24, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-russia-space-idUKKCN24P2JU> (accessed September 16, 2021).

¹⁸ U.S. Government Space Policy Official, Discussion of U.S. Russia Space Strategic Stability Topics, comments to author, Colorado Springs, Colorado, August 2021.

¹⁹ Kingston Reif and Shannon Bugos, "U.S., Russia Expected to Continue Stability Talks," Arms Control Association, September 2021. As of September 15, 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-09/news/us-russia-expected-continue-stability-talks>

²⁰ The following steps are adapted from a Track-II Dialogue Roadmap presented to the U.S. and Russian governments in March 2021. McClintock et al., "Improving Space Operations Coordination and Security between the United States and Russia: Situation and Roadmap," Unpublished, March 29, 2021.

²¹ McClintock et al., Roadmap, p. 1.

United States considers this as a required first step given the more frequent close approaches between U.S. and international (including Russian) satellites. This channel is possible simply by exchanging contact information to allow regular, two-way email communication via the U.S. Space Situational Awareness (SSA) program and Russian military counterparts. One impediment to this channel is the United States "legal restrictions that limit, but do not completely prohibit, communication and cooperation with the Russian military."²² Russian interlocutors claim that Russia will not respond to offers to exchange two-way contact information until there is an "agreement at the highest level."²³ Given this context, the Biden Administration could directly propose to the highest levels of the Russian government the exchange of contact information and a commitment to share information on space objects and orbital events. The proposal could be presented as a first step on a path to a more extensive set of actions based on the roadmap.

Once the direct channel for this information exchange is established it could build confidence and trust and allow subsequent steps to be discussed. Subsequent steps include agreeing on common terms and definitions for operating in space and developing bilateral guidelines for space behavior based on the previous definitions and agreed consequences for failure to comply. These latter steps are more likely to materialize if there is already a means for communication on these issues and are necessary to overcome existing differences in lexicon and procedures.

Conclusion

Space operations and stability represent a very small subset of the overall strategic stability equation, but they are a critically important part of the equation and one with special relevance to the United States, Russia, and China. The United States, more than any other nation, depends on space operations for prosperity and security. However, the increasingly congested, contested and competitive nature of space has crucial security and economic implications for all nations.

²² Military "cooperation" with Russia was prohibited by provisions of the fiscal year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Despite the restrictions the U.S. and Russia signed a deconfliction MOU for air operations over the territory of Syria in 2015. More importantly, the NDAA was amended for fiscal year 2019 to clarify that the limitation on military cooperation should not be "construed to limit bilateral military-to-military dialogue . . . for the purpose of reducing the risk of conflict." See McClintock et al., Roadmap.

²³ Retired Russian military officials, Discussion of U.S.-Russian Space Implications for Strategic Stability, comments to author, Florence, Italy, various dates, 2020.

The United States must carefully balance its desire to be a leader in space sustainability with its imperative to provide a structure and capability to defend its interests in space. This paper provided insight into how the United States could simultaneously regain a leadership role in international space deliberations while also pursuing bilateral arrangements with Russia on space operations. Most of the obvious work on the various recommendations offered here resides within the State Department and the Department of Defense. Congress has a role to play with leadership, oversight, and future treaties. Congress could also have a role to play by helping move forward with the designation and appropriate funding for a lead agency for civil and commercial Space Traffic Coordination/Management and support for the ongoing efforts within the Department of State and the Department of Defense. It is in the mutual interest of Russia and the United States that they follow this path, especially in the face of China's rising power in space.

LEVERAGING RUSSIA IN GREAT POWER COMPETITION WITH CHINA

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SUMMARY CONCLUSION:

It is a strategic imperative for the United States to prevent any hostile power or coalition from exercising control over the two main foci of global economic and military power—the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific basins. As the United States endeavors to retain favorable balances of power in both these key regions, its interests are best served by having Russia remain an independent pole within the international system rather than grow even closer with China and forge a formalized, strategic Sino-Russian entente.

An Overview of the Situation

The United States retains its superpower status but has seen a decline in its ability to either compel or convince other major states in the international system to accept its preferences. Using the “Revised Geometric Index of Traditional National Capabilities (RGITNC),” as developed by Simon Saradzhnryan and Nabi Abdullaev, which includes “countrywide population, urban population, energy consumption, military expenditures and value-added manufacturing,” Russia’s national power has remained constant between 1999 and 2016 (a 0.98 percent decline); however, “the power of Italy, Germany, Britain, France and the U.S. decreased, respectively, by 34.17 percent, 29.6 percent, 29.6 percent, 26.85 percent and 18.47 percent. The same period saw the power of China and India ... grow by 106.53 percent and 29.84 percent, respectively.” The Lowy Institute’s criteria define China as an “emerging

superpower” based upon an analysis of military capabilities, economic resources and diplomatic relationships.

As Hal Brands and Evan Montgomery point out, the strategic challenge for the United States is how to maintain its position given a number of potential challengers spread out “across three separate theaters—Europe, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific”—where the United States cannot simultaneously impose its preferred outcomes in every region and where Russia and China, acting separately or in concert, can raise the costs for the United States and its allies.

Prior to his death, Zbigniew Brzezinski warned that the “most dangerous scenario” for U.S. security would be “a grand coalition of China and Russia.” Yet, over the last decade there has been a sense that taking steps that push Russia closer to China is not a problem despite the risks that a closer Russia-China entente pose to U.S. interests. Moreover, the dysfunction that has emerged in the relationship has led to a lack of prioritization, so that every Russian transgression or disagreement with Washington is seen as meriting an all-out response.

At present, Russia and China have more of a voice in European and Asian affairs and, by extension, in global affairs than the United States may like. Russia has fended off further NATO enlargement on the territory of the former Soviet Union and has forged partnerships with key U.S. European allies, such as Italy, Germany and Turkey, which allow for some of Russia’s preferences to be extended into the councils of the Western alliance. America’s partners in Asia are now more inclined to hedge between Washington and Beijing rather than automatically side with the United States in any dispute with China.

At the same time, neither China nor Russia have successfully breached any of America’s core red lines. No American ally in Asia has repudiated or denounced treaty commitments binding them to Washington, and NATO has no plans to dissolve at any point. If “democratic enlargement” further into the greater Eurasian core has been halted, the defensive perimeters in Europe and Asia remain intact, for now. The question is whether the U.S. focus ought to be on prioritizing responding to the Russian or the Chinese challenge—and which is the more dangerous for long-term U.S. interests.

A Strategic Approach for Russia

How does the U.S. relationship with Russia impact the maintenance of the vital American interests in the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific theaters? Given Russia's own sets of capabilities and interests, to what extent does the promotion of peace and stability—as well as a continuation of a U.S.-led regional order and coping with China's emergence as the world's second major power—require cooperation as opposed to competition and confrontation with Moscow? In short, where does Russia fit within the American conception of the balances of power in both Europe and Asia that are most advantageous to U.S. interests?

The principal conclusion is that the core mission of the U.S.-Russia relationship moving into the 2020s is to disincentivize further Russia-China convergence. Every new defense agreement, every new intelligence collaboration, every new diplomatic coordination in international institutions adds needless complication for U.S. and allied interests. Russian and Chinese officials are frank in their evaluations of areas where their interests overlap or converge, but also where the two countries have important differences in perspectives and priorities. China, for instance, has abstained on questions about the status of Crimea, neither recognizing nor condemning the annexation. China has also pursued its Belt and Road Initiative investments in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine that would compete with Russian desires to control access points between Asia and Europe. Similarly, Russia pursues its own policies—a close strategic partnership with India and Vietnam and a growing economic relationship with Japan, all of which have the secondary impacts of strengthening these three states vis-à-vis China. Russia and China have developed what we might term a “2-C” paradigm for their partnership: outlining areas of cooperation and setting down parameters for where, when and how they will compete. Yet there are clear limits as to how far this can go. Russia understands the finiteness of the “Chinese lifeline” Beijing was willing to offer to help Moscow deal with Western sanctions and pressure after the incursion into Ukraine, while China understands that Russia will not come to Beijing's defense or even necessarily promote China's claims—for instance, against Vietnam in the South China Sea.

In 2018, the dialogue for a “Sustainable Bipartisan U.S. Strategy Towards Russia,” informally known as the Mayflower Group, produced the outlines of what might be termed a “3-C” paradigm for the U.S.-Russia relationship: cooperate, compete and confront. It is designed to mitigate the current lose-lose dynamic where areas of disagreement or confrontation—over

Ukraine, Syria, election interference or energy sales—spill over to torpedo productive and even necessary cooperation (in areas such as arms control or nuclear non-proliferation). Not only does this create problems for the United States, this dynamic also negatively strains relationships with key allies. The U.S. desire to punish Russia for its transgressions, especially with regards to Ukraine, has not allowed discretion to recognize Germany's or Japan's need for balancing condemnation of Russian actions (such as the invasion of Ukraine) with economic and security interests that arise from the closer geographic proximity these countries share with Russia. In addition, key allies—starting with Germany and Japan—worry that a weakened Russia will be driven into an even closer embrace with China and that this threatens their own national interests—Germany's, because of the loss of markets and influence; and Japan's, because of Russia's increased willingness to sell even more high-technology arms and weapons systems, eroding Japan's qualitative advantages. For other allies, there is no desire to put the Ukraine issue at the center of their own relations with Russia—and yet they remain potentially subject to U.S. sanctions for continuing their business, economic and security ties with Russia. In turn, all of this serves as one of the major drivers pushing Russia closer to China.

The United States needs to regain a degree of flexibility in its relations with Russia—to incentivize progress in the areas of most divergence while holding the defensive line firm in Europe, especially in terms of honoring security guarantees. Here, American strategists should examine the German approach to reconciling competing imperatives regarding Ukraine and Russia in how Berlin handled the energy-transit question: authorizing the construction of the second NordStream pipeline but insisting that Russia commit to continued energy transit via Ukraine as one of its export routes. The compromise produced a Ukraine-Russia gas deal at the end of 2019 and the restarting of efforts to achieve a settlement to the Donbas conflict. One hope is that this type of diplomacy will help rebalance Russia's relations between China and the West—and create conditions for tapping down other areas of conflict.

Great power competition cannot be conducted on the basis of "shoulds"—what other powers "ought" to be doing. Instead, it must rest on the deft application of carrots and sticks. The United States enters the 2020s with considerable advantages: a global network of allies (which neither Russia nor China possesses), a dynamic and innovative economy, the world's reserve currency and a conventional military force unparalleled in its ability to deliver and sustain force far from the continental United States. Effective management of those resources

should permit the United States to remain the de facto chairman of the board of the international system while reducing the risk of destabilizing conflict.

For the immediate future, focusing on defensive balancing of Russia is the most sustainable approach. This strategy would build on the so-called “porcupine defense”—strengthening the capabilities of American partners in Europe to push back against both conventional and non-conventional forms of pressure from Russia without requiring a large presence of American forces and materiel, because the large-scale deployment of U.S. forces may prove more difficult in a more challenged Indo-Pacific security environment and in constrained budgetary environments. It would focus attention on promoting greater security self-sufficiency on the part of U.S. allies, in part so the United States could pivot to deal with crises in either part of the world and ensure that the two European and Asian coalitions would not fracture.

Adapted and condensed from *Russia's Impact on US National Interests: Maintaining a Balance of Power in Europe and Asia* (Russia Matters project of the Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, August 5, 2020)

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BUILDING COALITIONS TO BALANCE CHINA AND RUSSIA

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Today's geopolitical struggle is often framed as a competition between an alliance of like-minded democracies led by the United States and its autocratic opponents, particularly China and Russia. But the reality is that Washington, Beijing, and Moscow are not the center of gravity in this competition. Instead, it is the alignment decisions of third countries that will primarily determine the contours of the competition and degrees of success.¹

Some have suggested that an "alliance of democracies" will emerge to counter China and Russia. But it is increasingly clear that no single democratic alliance will emerge to push back against authoritarian powers. And the authoritarian powers themselves are unlikely to form a single bloc. Instead, coalitions will form around separate issue sets, specifically geostrategic, economic, technological, and governance issues. These coalitions will often be temporary, informal, and issue-specific, creating a much more multidimensional challenge than the Cold War.

Preparing for this new environment will require that the United States and other like-minded countries work together to develop this set of interlocking but separate coalitions. Although most countries will prefer to act more in some areas than others, the task for Washington will be to encourage countries to participate in coalitions in the most beneficial ways at the most favorable times. For example, encouraging European partners to talk about shared values and interests around global governance will get more traction than attempting to

¹ This paper expands on ideas first published by Hal Brands and Zack Cooper in an article entitled "The Great Game with China Is 3D Chess" that appeared in *Foreign Policy* last year.

coordinate with Europe on military issues in Asia. Conversely, many in the Indo-Pacific will work with the United States on security issues, but will remain hesitant to speak out on governance issues, since many regional players are not in fact democratic. The scope and scale of this coalition-building effort will require that Washington prioritize different coalitions with different countries at different times, particularly since U.S. resources are increasingly stretched thin.

From a Democratic Alliance to Shifting Coalitions

U.S. President Joe Biden has argued that “we are stronger and more effective when we are flanked by nations that share our vision for the future of the world.”² Indeed, the outcome of the U.S.-China and U.S.-Russia competitions will be determined, in large measure, by how adeptly Washington enlists like-minded nations to turn bilateral contests into multilateral ones. One might think that this coalition-building effort would be rather simple given that public polling shows substantial international concern about the malign activities of both China and Russia.³ But nothing could be further from the truth.

A key challenge is that many American conceptions of the competition rest on the false premise that this contest will be neatly bipolar—a replay of the East-West standoff in Europe during the Cold War. In reality, a much messier world is taking shape. Frustrated European leaders are charting their own course, with some advocating equidistance between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow.⁴ Important third countries in Asia are also exploring similar options.⁵ Some countries are scared to “pick sides” because they fear political or economic retribution from one of the major powers. Other countries desire to play Washington, Beijing, and Moscow off each other so that they can gain leverage over each simultaneously. As a result, this will not be a simple bipolar competition in which most countries align with one of the superpowers.

² Jennifer Rubin, “Biden Sounds like He Has Made a Choice on China,” *Washington Post*, December 29, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/12/29/biden-sounds-like-he-has-made-choice-china/>.

³ Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries,” Pew Research Center, October 6, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>.

⁴ Steven Erlanger, “Europe Wonders If It Can Rely on U.S. Again, Whoever Wins,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/22/world/europe/europe-biden-trump-diplomacy.html>.

⁵ Jonathan Stromseth, “Don’t Make Us Choose: Southeast Asia in the Throes of US-China Rivalry,” *Brookings*, October 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/dont-make-us-choose-southeast-asia-in-the-throes-of-us-china-rivalry/>.

Hopes for a “new alliance of democracies,” reflect a mistaken belief that a *single* alliance will emerge to counter China or Russia.⁶ That might be the case if the same group of countries saw them as military rivals, economic rivals, technological rivals, and ideological rivals. But in an environment characterized by fluid alignments, the makeup of the counter-China and counter-Russia coalitions will shift depending on the problem. Key countries will cooperate with America on some issues but not others.⁷ The countries that most fear Chinese and Russian military power are not always the same countries that most fear their authoritarian influence. Succeeding in a multifaceted competition will therefore require not one coalition but many. Unless the United States adopts a more sophisticated approach to coalition building, it will be stuck trying to re-create a world that no longer exists.

In short, the days when America could rally “the West” to its side are gone.⁸ At the outset of the Cold War, Winston Churchill explained that the “safety of the world requires a new unity” against the “Soviet sphere.” Building a united approach was not easy then, but it was simplified by the lack of good alternatives.⁹ Only U.S. military strength could protect Europe against Soviet domination and provide the climate of security in which former foes such as France and West Germany could reconcile. Only U.S. economic assistance could rescue faltering economies. For most of Western Europe, allying with the United States was not just the best option; it was the only option. The task of building this alliance network was simplified by the reality that most of Western Europe embraced—with American help—similar political values and economic institutions. By the mid-1950s, most U.S. allies in Europe were democracies with advanced industrial economies. America’s European allies therefore adopted similar approaches to handling the geostrategic, economic, technological, and governance challenges posed by the Soviet Union.

This model succeeded spectacularly in the Cold War, which is why U.S. policymakers so readily default to it when thinking about China and Russia today. But Chinese leader Xi Jinping’s

⁶ Michael Pompeo, “Communist China and the Free World’s Future” (The Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, July 23, 2020), <https://www.state.gov/communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future/>.

⁷ Orville Schell and Susan L. Shirk, *Course Correction: Toward an Effective and Sustainable China Policy, Task Force Report* (New York: Asia Society, February 2019).

⁸ Jochen Prantl and Evelyn Goh 2017, 'Why strategic diplomacy matters', *East Asia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2017).

⁹ Winston Churchill, "The Sinews of Peace" (speech, Fulton, MO, March 5, 1946), Churchill International Society, <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/>.

Beijing is not former Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's Moscow with Chinese characteristics.¹⁰ And the world America inhabits now is not that of the Cold War. Today, there is much less alignment across key issues than there was in Europe during the Cold War.¹¹ American allies such as Italy have signed up for China's Belt and Road Initiative, and Germany is a key partner in the Russian pipeline project Nord Stream 2. Many of the countries most troubled by China and Russia's brutal violations of human rights are not strategically prepared to challenge them. As a result, barring massive overreach by China and Russia, the United States will struggle to create a twenty-first-century equivalent of the Western bloc. Rather than building a single alliance of democracies, America will need four separate coalitions: geostrategic, economic, technological, and governance.

The Geostrategic Coalition

The first coalition is geostrategic and should focus on deterring China and Russia from using force or coercion in the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia, respectively. Washington cannot tackle this or any other aspect of the rivalry alone. Fortunately, elements of a geostrategic balancing coalition already exist: The United States has dozens of formal treaty allies in Europe and five in Asia. Unfortunately, these alliances were mostly built to contain Soviet communism and cannot simply be redirected to manage China's rise and Russia's aggression. The geostrategic coalition should instead comprise those countries that are inclined to balance where it matters most—along their territorial and maritime peripheries.¹² As regards Russia, this list begins with key NATO members. As regards China, it starts with Japan, Australia, India, and a handful of others.

Collectively, these countries would—with U.S. support—create barriers to adversaries' use of military power on important frontiers.¹³ By working together, these countries could ensure that Chinese and Russian military capabilities are offset by the development of countervailing coalitions. And if the balancing coalition shows promise, it could attract additional countries. This geostrategic coalition would not simply include NATO and its Asian version. The

¹⁰ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The Stealth Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2019).

¹¹ Ashley Tellis, "The Return of U.S.-China Strategic Competition," from *Strategic Asia 2020*, NBR, January 21, 2020.

¹² Evan Montgomery, "Reinforcing the front line: US defense strategy and the rise of China," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (2017).

¹³ Michele A. Flournoy, "How to Prevent a War in Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, June 18, 2020.

countries involved are too different—in geography, capabilities, and governance—to create the sort of formal, deeply institutionalized alliance Washington has long enjoyed with Europe. Tying these countries together will therefore require more flexible, and sometimes subtler, approaches.¹⁴

Quiet staff talks about how to help a given member in the event of conflict might be more common than formal security guarantees. New mechanisms would need to be constructed to allow countries to “plug and play” when they desire to take part in an exercise or operation.¹⁵ In NATO, this might mean relying on a subset of the body, which is most willing to push back firmly against Russia when necessary. Multilateral initiatives can start small, as was the case with the Quad (an informal but increasingly ambitious grouping involving the United States, Australia, India, and Japan), which initially coordinated on disaster relief. In fact, the Quad is already discussing whether additional countries might be added to cooperate on security issues, with South Korea, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom having all discussed the possibility with members of the Biden administration.

The Economic Coalition

Much of China and Russia’s geostrategic challenge is rooted in their economic leverage, so the United States will also require a new approach to economic competition.¹⁶ At its peak, the Soviet economy was perhaps one-third the size of the U.S. economy. China long ago surpassed that marker, and its economy dwarfs that of any American rival of the past century. Most Europeans now see China as the world’s leading economic power, not the United States.¹⁷ And Beijing is already the primary trading partner of nearly every country in the Indo-Pacific region. For its part, Russia is a critical trading partner to much of Europe, especially in the energy sector.

China and Russia have turned this economic clout into diplomatic advantage, using trade restrictions to punish countries that criticize their human rights abuses or resist their regional

¹⁴ Aaron L. Friedberg, “Competing with China,” *Survival*, 60:3, 7-64 (2018).

¹⁵ James Carafano, Dean Cheng, Walter Lohman, and Riley Walters, “Assessing Beijing’s Power: A Blueprint for the U.S. Response to China Over the Next Decades,” *Heritage*, February 10, 2021.

¹⁶ On this point, see Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, “Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion,” *International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2019), pp. 42–79.

¹⁷ Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang.

expansion. By dangling trade, loans, and investment to draw countries into the Belt and Road Initiative, China has leveraged its economic, diplomatic, and sometimes military influence.¹⁸ This state control over economic behavior, and the willingness to leverage it abroad, creates a set of strategic imperatives for the United States and other countries that desire to maintain their freedom of action.¹⁹ Countries that are highly reliant on Chinese or Russian trade will need to shield themselves from geopolitical coercion by diversifying their economic relationships. Many countries will need to selectively decouple from China and Russia in certain critical sectors—from energy to pharmaceuticals to components of sophisticated military equipment—to avoid dangerous dependencies.²⁰

After the Cold War, Washington pursued economic integration across geopolitical lines, in hopes of making those lines disappear. Now, Washington must pursue deeper economic cooperation within geopolitical lines: It must forge a broad coalition of countries committed to forcing China and Russia to play by a common set of rules and otherwise blunt their economic leverage.²¹ These countries could pursue a variety of complementary initiatives, such as a system of multilateral controls on sensitive exports to China, similar to the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls during the Cold War. Most ambitiously, the economic coalition might pursue trade agreements to boost growth among their members. Yet the lack of coordination speaks to the fact that the economic coalition has recently lacked its obvious leader—U.S. leadership is still vital to overcoming coordination problems and catalyzing collective action. Without it, the economic coalition will flounder.

The Technological Coalition

The geostrategic and economic challenges presented by China and Russia also point to the need for a technological coalition. If Chinese companies take a commanding lead in constructing the world's 5G networks, Beijing could gain access to substantial intelligence and

¹⁸ Jennifer Hillman and David Sacks, "China's Belt and Road: Implications for the United States," CFR, March 2021.

¹⁹ Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle, "China's Use of Coercive Economic Measures," *Center for a New American Security*, 2018.

²⁰ Hiroyuki Suzuki, "Building Resilient Global Supply Chains: The Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region," CSIS, 2021.

²¹ David Dollar and Ryan Hass, "Getting the China Challenge Right," *Brookings*, January 25, 2021.

economic leverage.²² Those advantages will only increase if China uses its early lead in 5G to bring additional countries, especially in the developing world, into its technological sphere.²³ Through these and other technologies, China and Russia might gain a geopolitical edge through their development and proliferation of techno-authoritarianism.²⁴ By creating advanced surveillance and censorship systems, leaders in Beijing and Moscow are trying to safeguard their hold on power.²⁵ By proliferating these systems, they are also helping to entrench autocrats around the world. And as they become more technologically sophisticated, autocratic governments will have greater success in setting global technology standards, such as cyber-sovereignty, that advantage autocracy.²⁶ Only a collective effort can offset these challenges.

A key objective of a technology coalition should therefore be to collectively accelerate the development and subsidize the adoption of alternatives to autocratic technology producers, beginning with 5G and expanding into other critical areas.²⁷ Such a coalition could counteract the inherent advantages of scale and unfair market access restrictions that China currently enjoys. Furthermore, by serving as a sort of common market for advanced technologies, a coalition of this sort could ensure a common set of technology standards, rules, and norms that can protect democracies. Leading countries might also cooperate in efforts to regulate technology firms operating in democratic countries and to ensure that investments are properly vetted from both an economic and a security standpoint.

Efforts to build a technological coalition should be centered on advanced economies. The G-7 countries—the United States, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, United Kingdom, and Italy—all qualify.²⁸ So, too, do techno-democracies such as Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands,

²² Elsa Kania, "Securing Our 5G Future," CNAS, November 7, 2019; Kieron O'Hara and Wendy Hall, "Four Internets: The Geopolitics of Digital Governance," Centre for International Governance Innovation, December 7, 2018.

²³ Jonathan Hillman and Laura Rivas, "Global Networks 2030: Developing Economies and Emerging Tech," CSIS, 2021.

²⁴ Maya Wang, "China's Techno-Authoritarianism Has Gone Global," *Foreign Affairs*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-04-08/chinas-techno-authoritarianism-has-gone-global>.

²⁵ Jon Lindsay, "The Impact of China on Cybersecurity: Fiction and Friction," *International Security*, 39. pp. 7-47 (2015).

²⁶ Christopher A. Thomas and Xander Wu, "How global tech executives view U.S.-China tech competition," *Brookings Institution*, February 25, 2021.

²⁷ Danny Crichton, Chris Miller, and Jordan Schnieder, "Labs over fabs: How the U.S. should invest in the future of semiconductors," FPRI, March 15, 2021.

²⁸ Kristin Shi-Kupfer and Mareike Ohlberg, "China's Digital Rise: Challenges for Europe," MERICS, Apr 8, 2019.

South Korea, Israel, and Taiwan. The group might also include India, which is less of a technological power but does offer a massive market and has recently become more worried about technological dependence on China. Some have proposed a construct explicitly focused on technology: the T-12. But the challenges associated with creating such a technology coalition are numerous. Among other things, it would necessitate broad cooperation on long-term challenges despite a recent global move toward protectionism. Yet the idea has nonetheless been gaining traction in the Biden administration, on Capitol Hill, with technology leaders, and with several U.S. allies.

The Governance Coalition

The competition with China is not just about geostrategic, economic, and technological rivalry; it is also inescapably ideological.²⁹ As Chinese and Russian policymakers and scholars have themselves argued, autocracies cannot feel secure in a world where universal values and a democratic superpower are preponderant.³⁰ Their leaders are thus seeking to fashion a system in which authoritarian rule is protected.³¹ They have done so by supporting dictators from Eurasia to Latin America, proliferating the tools and techniques of repression to illiberal rulers around the world, and striving for greater control of international organizations that set global governance rules and norms.³² In response, the United States must rally a coalition of democracies committed to protecting democratic principles and universal values.

This final coalition should be transregional because it is defined by political philosophy rather than geography. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has proposed one version of this coalition: an expanded G-7 called the D-10. The coalition might also draw in other democracies from South Asia, Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere, as long as those states are willing to speak up for democracy and human rights, even at the risk of offending Beijing or Moscow. This governance coalition would be something less than the global alliance of democracies some

²⁹ Hal Brands and Zack Cooper, "U.S.-Chinese Rivalry Is a Battle Over Values," *Foreign Affairs*, March 16, 2021.

³⁰ David Shambaugh. "China's Soft-Power Push: The Search for Respect." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 4, 2015, pp. 99–107.

³¹ Jessica Chen Weiss, "A World Safe for Autocracy: China's Rise and the Future of Global Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019).

³² Jude Blanchette, "Ideological Security as National Security" (Washington D.C.: CSIS, December 2, 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ideological-security-national-security>.

have proposed. Like the geostrategic coalition, it might initially feature a “coalitions of the willing” approach to key issues, with the hope of building toward more institutionalized cooperation over time. This coalition could, for example, improve the democratic world’s resilience against political influence operations by exchanging insights on the tactics Beijing and Moscow have used abroad and by coordinating multilateral responses.³³

The strategic value of this type of governance coalition would be considerable. By highlighting shared political values, it could help bring new partners into the fold. Many European countries have no interest or ability to balance China in East Asia, but they can and will push back against Beijing’s human rights abuses and coercive tactics against democracies. The same disconnect exists with many Asian partners and Russia. A broader coalition would help put autocrats on the defensive by spotlighting and penalizing the most repugnant aspects of their behavior. Finally, forging such a coalition would underscore to audiences around the world that this is not simply a struggle for power between China, Russia, and the United States. Rather, it is a struggle over the future of the international system and over how people will be governed.³⁴ Of course, creating a governance coalition is difficult. Key democracies have different views of the level of threat from China and Russia. Plus, America’s ability to lead an explicitly democratic coalition has come under doubt in recent years. Yet these obstacles are not insurmountable.³⁵ Despite the difficulties of coordinating a geographically and geopolitically diverse group of nations, stark ideological threats tend to have the benefit of reminding democratic nations that they will hang separately if they do not hang together.³⁶

³³ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, “Surveillance, Security, and Liberal Democracy post-COVID,” *International Organization* (2020).

³⁴ Michael Mazarr, Timothy Heath, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *China and the International Order* (RAND, 2018).

³⁵ Michael Beckley, “China’s economy is not overtaking America’s,” *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance*, May 18, 2020; Ryan Hass, “China Is Not Ten Feet Tall: How Alarmism Undermines American Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 3, 2021.

³⁶ Jessica Brandt, Zack Cooper, Brad Hanlon, and Laura Rosenberger, “Linking Values to Strategy,” *Alliance for Securing Democracy*, 2020.

CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS: ALIGNMENT WITHOUT ALLIANCE

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Western assessments of the China-Russia relationship generally reach one of two conclusions: hyperventilation about a Beijing-Moscow alliance that aims to upend the existing international order or a blithe dismissal of a temporary meeting of minds and interests. Neither position accurately characterizes the current relationship, which is best understood as a genuine convergence of national interests despite powerful centrifugal forces. From a Chinese perspective, at least, a third option — alignment without alliance — can endure, especially if both sides agree to align themselves while maintaining a safe distance from each other, so that the competitive elements of their relationship can play themselves out without derailing the partnership.

Common Interests Despite Suspicions

China-Russia relations have been on a very positive trajectory since Chinese President Xi Jinping assumed supreme leadership in 2013. He and Russian President Vladimir Putin meet frequently in bilateral settings and in the expanding number of multilateral venues in which the two countries hold membership, such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

When they meet, the two men see the world through similar prisms and reach similar conclusions about their respective country's strategic position. They both believe themselves to be at a strategic disadvantage relative to the United States and the West. Putin believes Russia's great power ambitions are thwarted by the West, and he is seizing every opportunity to

reassert Moscow's interests. China sees the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy at best as a denial of strategic space and access to the western Pacific and at worst an attempt to contain China.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Ukraine crisis have provided additional momentum for close ties. For China, the crisis forced the U.S. to refocus on Europe. Beijing enjoyed more leverage within its relationship as Russia's vulnerability and isolation increased. In addition to strengthening China's hand in energy negotiations, it pushed Moscow to cooperate with Beijing in sectors previously seen as off-limits or restricted, such as arms sales, cyber security, aerospace industries, and hydroelectricity. More recently, the great power competition narrative as the central theme of U.S. national security strategy has pushed the two countries closer to each other. From the South China Sea to Afghanistan, from Syria to the Arctic, the shared threat perception about hostile U.S. policy has pulled Russia and China increasingly closer to each other.

Some Chinese had feared that the Ukraine situation could set a precedent for similar 'separatist' movements, while others worry that Russia cannot be a sufficient distraction to "shield" China from U.S. pressure. In the Chinese mindset: "faced with the Western hegemon, China always wishes for Russia to share the burden, yet reality is cruel, and a wolf cannot take a bullet for the lion," according to Zhang Jian, a Russia specialist at China's Diplomatic Academy.

Moreover, there are powerful mutual suspicions between the two countries. The Chinese remember that "however much we hate the U.S., it is Russia who took the most of our lost territory during the Qing dynasty."¹ Putin's nationalism targets not just the West but China too. Within South and Southeast Asia, China is suspicious of and antagonized by Russia's strategic-military ties with India and Vietnam. As an energy importer, China also believes its interests fundamentally differ from that of Russia, an energy exporter. These factors speak to why Putin has been reluctant to boost arms sales (especially military technologies) to China, to pursue trade/investment liberalization in economic cooperation with China, to follow through on oil/gas pipeline deals signed with China, to allow more Chinese participation in the Russian Far East, as well as why Moscow has introduced Japanese and Korean competition in its trade with China.

¹ "Is there a possibility to retrieve the 1.5 million square kms Russia stole from China?" Sohu History Channel, February 28, 2021. <https://m.sohu.com/n/481890663/>.

Nevertheless, China will continue to make nice with Russia. As the Chinese have conceded, “we have worked closer with Russia for less,” according to Zhang Jian. From the Chinese perspective, strategic alignment with Russia has many concrete benefits, and the negative factors can be managed. This is particularly true when China deals from a position of strength and Russia is at a strategic disadvantage. From Beijing’s perspective:

- With a 3,000-mile-long border, Russia has the largest impact on China’s immediate security environment, and vice versa. Sino-Russian hostility is unthinkable and unlikely;
- Of all countries, Russia shares China’s strategic interest most. Both have domestic political issues and foreign policy aspirations that make them targets of the U.S. Therefore, China and Russia share a common interest in establishing a new international order and fending off Western attacks or isolation;
- Among all major powers, Russia and China have the most similar authoritarian ideology. Both insist on their own political systems and economic development paths. Both reject Western color revolutions and military interventions. There is ample common ground for cooperation;
- Russia and China are strategically complementary. Russia is good at boxing (hard war) while China is good at tai-chi (maneuvering). One is an exporter; the other is an importer. One has resources; the other has capital;
- The border has been settled for decades so no one should realistically expect China to reclaim what was given to Russia years ago. That case is closed.

An Alignment Driven by External Factors but Lacking in Internal Strength

As China and Russia survey the geopolitical landscape, there is much to unite them. History has taught them the perils of alliance, however. Their former alliance damaged both sides’ confidence in the wisdom and feasibility of a similar relationship today. That does not mean, however, that China and Russia will not align positions on issues of common interest. Such an alignment will enhance the security and economics of both China and Russia, and it is

beneficial to maintain the balance in the world order as viewed by Beijing and Moscow. Alignment between China and Russia against the West while maintaining a safe distance from each other would be more effective than an alliance. This middle-ground option, between alliance and enemies, is potentially the most worrisome for the West.

Since 2013, Sino-Russian relations have demonstrated a clear positive trend featuring close alignment on key regional and global issues. Due to similar geopolitical concerns, ideological reasons, and the regional balance of power and motivated by practical military and energy cooperation, China and Russia have been coordinating their positions to counterbalance what has been perceived as a U.S. encroachment on their traditional sphere of influence. A key factor that underlined the Sino-Russian rapprochement has been U.S. policies such as those in reaction to the Ukraine situation and the strategy of rebalancing to Asia. However, every time there is a change of government in Washington, Beijing worries severely about Washington's possible "new thinking about Russia" and potential cooperation between the U.S. and Russia that leaves China the odd man out.

The experience during the Trump presidency is a terrific example of this phenomenon. From Beijing's perspective, President Trump had demonstrated a strong desire to create major improvement of relations with Moscow before his inauguration. Combined with his "unfriendly" gestures on China through issues such as negotiability of the U.S. "One-China Policy" and on the South China Sea, speculations were rampant in China that a new shift in the U.S.-China-Russia triangle was emerging by the time that Trump became president. The majority of the Chinese policy community sees the potential improvement of relations between Washington and Moscow as directly undermining Russia's need and desire to pursue cooperation with China and, therefore, as directly impacting the balance of power within the triangle.

China's expectation of an improvement in U.S.-Russia relations was largely based on the pivotal nature of the 2016 election and President Trump's unique approach. In the Chinese perception, Trump had apparently demonstrated a favorable feeling toward Putin, as did key cabinet members, such as Trump's first Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who had ample experience working with Russia during his tenure at Exxon. China saw a natural desire on the U.S. part to change its disadvantaged position within the U.S.-China-Russia triangle due to strained relations with both powers and the alignment between China and Russia. It was also duly noted that the U.S. and Russia enjoyed certain potential areas for cooperation, including

nuclear nonproliferation, counterterrorism, and the Syrian civil war. Especially on easing the international sanctions and isolation from the Ukraine issue, Russia was believed to have been eager to improve ties with Washington.

However, China would like to believe that the improvement of U.S.-Russia relations has innate drawbacks and systematic weaknesses. Internally, the anti-Russia voices within the U.S. remain exceedingly strong. This is not only because many Democrats hold an ardent perception that Russia played an intrinsic role in Trump's victory in the 2016 election but also due to a widespread perception among U.S. elites that Russia is an evil empire. Therefore, any tendency on the U.S. part to recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea or to slow down the expansion of NATO would meet ardent opposition from its European allies. Psychologically, China sees a persistent anti-Russia gene in American politics because Russia fundamentally represents a geopolitical threat to the U.S. national interests and vice versa. Concrete cooperation might be desired but is also difficult on specific issues, especially on missile defense systems, cyber-security, etc.

The most important question for China is what impact potential U.S.-Russia rapprochement would have over Sino-Russian relations. The majority of the Chinese policy community seems to subscribe to hard realism on the issue. In their policy deliberations, since the foundation of Sino-Russian rapprochement has been the strategic threat posed by the U.S., if the U.S. changes its position and decides to pursue a more cooperative relationship with Russia, the strategic demand by Russia on China would decrease significantly. If Russia's primary agenda is to improve its external relations, and if the West, especially the U.S., holds the most important leverage over its international sanctions and isolation, regardless of the close alignment with China, Beijing is not in the position to deliver Moscow's most desired outcome, nor could alignment with China resolve Moscow's most acute security threat. In other words, with the alleviation of external security pressures and hostility, China's importance in Russia's overall strategy decreases. This group of Chinese realist strategists also firmly believes that the Russian elite's ultimate goal is to maximize Russian national interests, even at the cost of China's own.

In contrast, the idealists in China would like to believe that the U.S.-Russia-China relationship should transcend the past wisdom of a great triangle and the instinct to counterbalance. The ideal version would be a stable new triangle where the three parties enjoy

good relations with each other. In the idealist belief, the improvement of ties between the U.S. and Russia does not necessarily lead to a degradation of relations between China and Russia. China should treat the three bilateral relations separately and not let them interfere or undermine each other.

The debate about the impact of U.S.-Russian rapprochement on China reflects two fundamental contradictions that the Chinese policy community has struggled to square but so far has failed to do so. Essentially, Chinese analysts cannot explain whether the strategic cooperative partnership between China and Russia originates from exogenous or endogenous factors. Although China has persistently emphasized that Sino-Russian partnership has its internal strengths, such as energy, arms sales, economic cooperation, global governance, and ideology, the fundamental factor they cannot deny is that the most important reason for their alignment lies in the U.S. factor. Even when China keeps propping up the narrative touting the internal strength of Sino-Russian relations, it cannot avoid the most important deficiency of the relationship, which lies in the common security threat perception and a shared agenda to counter the U.S. However, the key question is: how long will this alignment survive if the common security threat no longer exists or, more interestingly, if the security threat is no longer a shared one?

As for whether it is the endogenous or the exogenous factor that determines the nature of Sino-Russian relations, the debate and articulation of concerns in the Chinese policy community reflect a clear understanding in China that exogenous factors have played the determining role in deciding the course of China's relations with Russia. No one is trying to deny that Sino-Russian relations have their internal logic, which would not completely disappear if the external conditions change. However, the more important question is whether the internal strengths of their relations are sufficient to support the same level of alignment and cooperation when the external threat is mitigated. The prevailing concerns demonstrated by China clearly show that the internal strengths are not sufficient.

One way the Chinese have tried to convince themselves of the long-lasting antagonistic nature of U.S.-Russian relations is that both the conflicts between Russia and the U.S. and between China and the U.S. are structural, meaning that the conflicts are deeply embedded in the structure of international relations. The implied conclusion is that, due to their structural nature, the conflicts between Russia, China, and the U.S. as the hegemon are irreconcilable.

The logic continues that since the conflicts between Russia and the U.S. are irreconcilable, any improvement of relations between the U.S. and Russia must be temporary and superficial. However, the structural conflict is usually used to describe the relations between a rising, revisionist China and a status-quo superpower, the United States. Yet few have attributed U.S.-Russian relations as the same type of conflict. Russia is apparently a declining rather than rising power. Whether its relations with the U.S. also exemplify a structural conflict remains to be seen. In this sense, although China would like to define the U.S.-Russia relations as irreconcilable, the argument is more self-serving rather than objective.

The Possibility to Undermine Sino-Russian Alignment

Beijing has maintained the same concern about potential U.S.-Russian improvement of relations since the inauguration of President Biden. For example, when the U.S. and Russia completed the first round of their strategic stability dialogue in Geneva in the summer of 2021, the Chinese policy community demonstrated a high level of anxiety that “rearming of ties between Washington and Moscow might exceed Beijing’s expectations.” The general trend of U.S.-Russian relations could be difficult in general, but all administrations start Russia policy from a tough position.

Within the U.S.-Russia-China triangle, if China is identified as the most important challenge for the U.S., and if pragmatism prevails, then presumably one could argue that the U.S. needs to counter and undermine Sino-Russian alignment where the two powers work together to oppose American interests regionally and globally. However, the reality is far from ideal. What we may end up with is further deterioration of relations with Russia as domestic political factors drive both countries toward more confrontational strategies. China might be the more substantial and systemic challenge for the U.S. in many ways. But Russia is a much bigger risk-taker and, therefore, an acute and urgent problem.

More interestingly, U.S. policymakers don’t view China and Russia, as well as the threats they present, in a synchronized manner. Although it is understood that Beijing and Moscow are colluding on many, if not most, security and strategic issues, the tendency in Washington remains one that treats China and Russia independently. The bureaucratic setup of the administration’s China team and its Russia team also precludes more coordinated thinking about the two countries.

China and Russia are both transactional countries, and they can't have a real alliance. Perhaps they are not aiming to build one. The imbalance of power between China and Russia dictates the frictions between the two. However, they can still cooperate because they perceive a common security threat from the United States. The U.S. will have to think more strategically and systematically about the danger and threats presented by the alignment between China and Russia. Both powers worry about being the "odd man out" in the triangular relationship. How to exploit the vulnerability and disagreements within the Sino-Russian alignment should be a priority for strategic planning.

U.S.-RUSSIA POLICY: A PROBLEM FROM HELL?

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Today, observers generally agree that U.S.-Russia relations are at their worst point since the end of the Cold War. Though broadly correct, this framing obscures some of the ways in which our current relationship is worse than that of the late-Cold War period. Major arms control treaties have fallen apart, both sides are locked in a damaging tit-for-tat of asymmetric strikes and sanctions, and while the Biden administration has begun initial outreach to Russia, the two sides have barely spoken over the last few years. Worst of all, there is no obvious off-ramp from this stalemate. With both sides increasingly dug in, there is little prospect of a successful 'reset' of U.S.- Russian relations. What may be possible, however, is a more limited approach that prioritizes deterrence and relationship management. This paper provides an overview of how we got to this point, explores the mistaken assumptions that helped to shape today's flawed policies, and looks at how a more pragmatic approach to Russia might fit within a revitalized U.S. foreign policy framework.

I. A Brief History of US-Russian Relations

In 1991, U.S. policymakers regarded the newly-born Russian Federation with a sense of optimism. Western experts flooded into Moscow to offer advice on constitutional reforms and economic restructuring. But where Westerners tend to remember this period as one of hope and reform, Russians often remember it as one of hardship, as the rapid transformation of the communist economic system left many Russians struggling even to feed their families. It is perhaps no surprise that that sense of early optimism surrounding U.S.-Russian relations quickly began to fade. What replaced it was a cycle: disagreement and dispute, followed by reconciliation by new administrations at 'kiss-and-make-up' summits, before a rapid return to

disagreement. On the Russian side, NATO expansion to the states of the former Warsaw Pact, Western intervention in the Balkans, the Magnitsky sanctions, and the drastic impact of shock therapy on the Russian economy all served to sour the relationship. On the U.S. side, meanwhile, concerns about corruption and human rights abuses inside Russia grew as it became apparent that Russia was not truly democratizing. The relationship was further soured by disagreements over Iraq, Libya, and Syria. The rare moments of cooperation—such as U.S.-Russian antiterror cooperation after the 9/11 attacks, or the signing of the New Start Treaty under the Obama administration—were largely squandered.

Still, this cycle was relatively stable until 2014, when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, and initiated a shadow conflict in the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine. The situation worsened when Ukrainian separatists armed with Russian anti-aircraft weapons shot down a Malaysian Air passenger plane traveling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. In response, the United States and Europe opted for sanctions, placing restrictions on key Russian government officials, as well as substantive financing restrictions on Russian energy companies and Russian arms manufacturers. Since then, U.S.-Russian relations have been in a steady downward spiral: Russia continues to stoke the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, has participated in a brutal civil war in Syria, murdered dissidents on the streets of Western cities, and engaged in cyberattacks. Each of these has been met with condemnation and further sanctions from the U.S. and Europe; sanctions have done little to prevent further Russian intransigence.

During the 2016 election, Russia shifted from a foreign policy problem to one with domestic political ramifications. The business connections of various Trump campaign officials—such as his campaign manager Paul Manafort—to the former Soviet bloc and potential Russian involvement in the hacking of candidate Hillary Clinton’s emails led to allegations that Russia had tried to rig the election for Donald Trump. This gave rise to a two-year investigation under Special Counsel Robert Mueller, which produced a few major indictments, but shed only limited light on the extent of Russian actions. President Trump’s first impeachment only added to this problem, as prosecutors argued that his administration illegally withheld congressionally mandated aid to Ukraine in its fight against Russian-backed forces. The details of these incidents are less important than their practical impact, which was to render it nearly impossible to engage Russia on any of a number of vexing issues during the Trump administration. The relationship thus drifted. Though the president himself appeared positively disposed towards Moscow, Congress added further sanctions, including the wide-ranging CAATSA bill (*Countering*

America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) is a U.S. law that imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea, and Russia). Today, U.S.-Russian relations are largely stuck in an unhealthy stalemate, though President Biden initiated a round of strategic stability talks with Russian president Vladimir Putin in July.

II. The Legacy of Failed Assumptions

In the thirty years since the end of the Cold War, U.S.-Russian relations have gone from bad to worse. While Russia's choices bear much of the blame, the relationship has also been worsened by Washington's embrace of several misleading assumptions about Russia. As we consider how to reformulate policy toward Russia in a more productive way, it is worth re-considering these assumptions and how they have shaped our approach to Russia.

Assumption #1: That Russia would become a western-style democracy.

The heady post-Cold War period raised hopes in Washington that the coming era would be one of democratic consolidation and expansion. And when the Clinton administration enthusiastically embraced this idea, Russia was one of the lynchpins of its strategy: Washington poured money, expertise, and influence into helping the Yeltsin government strengthen democracy and reform the economy. Yet the democratic gains made during the 1990s slowly unraveled after 2000 and it became increasingly apparent that reforms had not produced a free-market democracy, but rather a corrupt semi-autocracy. Even then, policymakers in Washington continued to hope that Russia might be nudged back onto a more democratic trajectory, overlooking the structural corruption and deep economic distortions that had caused the democratic experiment to fail in the first place. Worse, U.S. foreign policy during this period rested heavily on the notion of the democratic peace, i.e., that democracies typically cooperate and rarely fight. Assuming that Russia would democratize was therefore implicitly to assume that Russian interests would not conflict with America's in the future. Even before Russia backslid into authoritarianism, however, that assumption had already been proven false by disagreements over issues like NATO expansion.

Assumption #2: That Russia, as a declining power, is largely insignificant and poses no real threat to the United States.

The Russian Federation spent much of the 1990s in catastrophic economic decline. Even as rising oil prices enabled the Russian economy to recover after 2001, the country continued to experience demographic decline. When compared to the larger and more powerful Soviet Union, this led many in Washington to write Russia off as a declining power, one which might be able to meddle in its 'near abroad' (i.e., the countries surrounding Russia's borders), but could do little to threaten the United States or its core allies. Almost none of this was true. Russia today is stagnant, but not in decline; its population is falling, but that is generally a poor metric by which to assess military power. The country has seen substantive improvements in living standards and human capital in recent decades. And the last decade in particular has been a cogent reminder of the fact that a declining power can still act as a spoiler in world affairs. Despite its diminished status, Russia has successfully invaded two of its neighbors, engaged in expeditionary warfare in Syria, maintained complex diplomatic and economic ties with much of the non-Western world, and repeatedly interfered in Western societies and elections. In short, Russian 'decline' has not produced a compliant Russian state, nor one that can be ignored. And of course, Russia retains the world's largest arsenal of nuclear weapons. It is the only country capable of utterly destroying the United States, and remains a vital interlocutor on issues such as nonproliferation and the global arms trade.

Assumption #3: That domestic politics are the key to Russian foreign policy.

There is a broad tendency in the West to associate the negative aspects of Russian foreign policy with Vladimir Putin. Some argue that it is Russia's authoritarianism that makes it hostile to the West, while others argue that Vladimir Putin's personality drives him to pursue a conflictual foreign policy. There are some elements of truth here. Putin has benefitted personally from some of his more assertive foreign policy choices, with Russian public opinion generally supporting moves like the annexation of Crimea. And regime security remains a central foreign policy concern for the Kremlin. There is evidence that some of Putin's overt hostility is driven by his fear of so-called 'color revolutions' in places like Georgia; reports suggest he genuinely believes these to be a Western plot. At the same time, Russian foreign policy is not driven entirely by domestic politics. As George Kennan famously noted, there was substantial continuity in Russian foreign policy between the tsarist era and the Soviet era. So

too are there elements of continuity between the Soviet period and the post-Cold War period. In particular, Russian fears about territorial integrity and security remain a consistent concern. Faced with NATO expansion, it is entirely possible that Russia's recent interventions in Georgia and Ukraine might have happened under a different regime. This suggests that while Putin will inevitably exit the stage sometime in the next few decades, it is not likely to shift Russian foreign policy interests substantially.

Assumption #4: That coercion is the most effective way of dealing with Russia

Since 2014, the United States and Europe have taken a largely coercive approach to Russia, relying heavily on the use of economic sanctions to force Russia to give up its aggression in Ukraine, its cyber-meddling, and its mistreatment of dissidents at home. U.S. and EU sanctions have penalized Russian energy companies, arms manufacturers, and banks. Unfortunately, the episode has also been an object lesson in the limitations of sanctions—and of coercive policies more generally. As academic research has long shown, sanctions are often ineffective in creating policy change, particularly in national security issues. Exceptions, such as the Iranian sanctions that preceded the negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), are typically multinational and explicit in stating the criteria under which policy change would yield sanctions removal. That U.S. and European sanctions on Russia have been far less successful should not come as a surprise. To be sure, they have caused some economic pain: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessed in 2015 that sanctions would likely be responsible for about a 1.5 percent loss per year in Russia's GDP. Yet recent oil price increases—and the advent of the OPEC+ deal linking traditional Gulf oil producers with Russia—allowed the Russian economy to return to modest, if anemic, growth. Meanwhile, the sanctions have produced no concrete policy gains, and have strengthened Putin politically. On both economics and foreign policy, Russia has been able to circumvent these restrictions, cooperating with non-western states instead. In short, the last few years have made clear the limits of coercive policy aimed at a major global power like Russia.

Assumption #5: That the U.S. and Europe are of one mind on Russia.

In 2014, the United States and its NATO allies responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine with a united front. Coordination on diplomacy and sanctions during this period allowed for a common approach, with France and Germany taking the lead in negotiating the Minsk

Agreement to try and resolve the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. And despite obvious tensions on the questions of sanctions, even those European states whose markets are strongly exposed to Russian pressure have remained on board with the sweeping sanctions packages negotiated during this period. Yet it would be a mistake to interpret this unity in the face of clear military aggression with general European support for a more assertive or coercive approach to Russia. As the Nord Stream II pipeline debacle has shown, states like Germany have business, energy, and political ties that push them to work with Russia on specific issues. Washington today is more aligned with the policy preferences of the Eastern European and Baltic states directly threatened by Russia; these are also some of the smaller and poorer members of the European Union, and the least capable of contributing to common defense. The European Union's most influential states—particularly Germany and France—have repeatedly called for a more nuanced and pragmatic approach to Russia policy which places them at odds with current U.S. policy.

III. A broader reorientation of U.S. foreign policy? Where does Russia fit?

Some of these assumptions are not specific to Russia, but rather problems with U.S. foreign policy writ large. In particular, the notion of inevitable democratization, the prevalence of the belief that democracies don't fight, and the belief that coercion in the form of military strikes or sanctions is typically effective have all shaped U.S. foreign policy in recent years. Instead, failures of the war on terror, the rise of China, and growing partisan polarization at home have all helped to create a vibrant debate about the future of U.S. foreign policy in Washington, with the result that these assumptions are being tested and revised in many spheres of U.S. foreign policy, not solely with regard to Russia. Criticisms of the status quo come on the one hand from 'restrainers' (those who advocated a foreign policy that focuses on diplomatic and economic engagement over military intervention), and on the other hand from America First-style conservatives (who reject nation-building, while advocating for U.S. military primacy and sovereignty). Thus while President Donald Trump's record was defined by dysfunction as much as any coherent strategy, he did wind down the war in Afghanistan, raise doubts about the value of U.S. alliances in Europe and Asia, and question the wisdom of military intervention and democracy promotion.

President Joe Biden, for his part, has ended the war in Afghanistan, initiated a review of the United States' global military posture, and argued for the U.S. to embrace "relentless

diplomacy” over “endless war.” A rethinking of U.S. policy towards Russia therefore fits within the scope of the broader rethinking of U.S. foreign policy that is underway. Indeed, it will be challenging to redirect Russia policy without a broader restructuring of U.S. foreign policy, while reforming policy towards Russia—one of the largest and most important states in the international system—is itself be a core component of that broader restructuring.

IV. Back to Basics: Interests, Means, and “muddling through” incrementally with Russia

To consider the future of U.S.-Russia policy, it is helpful to shift our viewpoint away from continuity and towards a more robust understanding of our interests and potential means of influence towards Russia in the 2020s. To put it another way: it can be helpful to consider our interests and objectives in the abstract, rather than solely through the lens of existing policies. At the most basic strategic level, therefore, the United States has a clear interest in preventing Russia from dominating Europe militarily—however unlikely that prospect may be. The United States also has a clear interest in preventing Russia from meddling in our domestic politics and in the domestic politics of our closest allies, whether that takes the form of hacking, election meddling, or other violations of sovereignty. On the other hand, the United States also has an interest in avoiding conflict with Russia, particularly over issues less critical to U.S. national security, including in Syria and Ukraine. In these cases, though Washington’s broader stake in regional and global stability may extend to diplomatic engagement, it is not sufficient to risks of inadvertent escalation with Russia. Finally, the United States has an interest in maintaining engagement with Russia on key global issues, such as nonproliferation, Iran, and North Korea.

The good news is that these narrow interests are likely achievable. By shifting away from today’s coercive policies towards a mixture of deterrence and engagement, Washington can lower tensions, create effective deterrence on issues of critical importance, and reengage on topics of mutual interest. First on the to-do list is to re-establish redlines. One of the biggest problems in U.S.-Russian relations in recent years has been a failure to effectively communicate U.S. interests. There is ambiguity over whether NATO will expand further, whether Washington will respond to cyberattacks, and whether the U.S. will go to war to defend non-NATO members such as Georgia and Ukraine. A clearer indication of redlines would help here. President Biden has begun this process by setting clear cyberspace boundaries around U.S. critical

infrastructure, but further elaboration will be needed on core issues such as meddling in U.S. elections, violations of U.S. sovereignty, and Russian military action against a NATO treaty ally.

Violations of these lines should be met with responses that are flexible and creative. Rather than imposing another pointless round of sanctions or focusing on military buildup, for example, the United States could react to future election meddling by using its extensive global financial intelligence network to publicly release information implicating key Kremlin figures in corruption. Diplomatic expulsions and financial restrictions on Russian state companies, meanwhile, may be a proportionate and effective response to meddling in the domestic politics of allies. Military options—from troop deployments to arms sales—should always be the last resort.

Second, Washington needs to understand that many of Russia's actions against Western countries in recent years would not have been possible without the existence of vulnerabilities within the West, whether the increasingly partisan nature of politics in the United States, weak cybersecurity provisions, or a NATO alliance in which members rarely contribute to the common defense. Although some of these problems are easier to fix than others, they nonetheless suggest that defense and building our resilience at home is essential—and likely more effective than changing Russia's behavior. Working to counter disinformation and strengthen cybersecurity will be critical components of this strategy. It will also be necessary to build on recent improvements in NATO members' military spending to spread the burden of defense more equally across the alliance. Military spending should not be the only metric here; building core national competencies and interoperable military capabilities will help to make NATO less a U.S.-led organization and more an alliance of equals.

Finally, U.S. policymakers must reengage with Russia; the heated rhetoric of the last few years has seen the virtual dissolution of U.S.-Russian diplomatic ties and has inhibited our ability to resolve crises and work together on mutual interests. President Biden's overture to Russia in mid-2021—and the opening of a new strategic stability dialogue—has begun the process of re-normalizing relations, but it is critical to seize this opening to address urgent challenges in arms control, cybersecurity, and crisis resolution. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more important national security issue than avoiding nuclear conflict or miscalculation. This strategic stability process will be slow, and there will almost certainly be setbacks. But the only way to slow the downward spiral in U.S.-Russia relations is to jettison the flawed assumptions

of the past, address key questions head-on, and engage in a process of confidence-building. Russia today may represent a policymakers' problem from hell, but with a careful balance of deterrence and engagement—and with more realistic expectations—it is a problem that can be managed.

U.S. RUSSIA POLICY – HOW TO BUILD BACK BETTER

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In September of 2021, Russia-watchers have little room for optimism. Repression in Russia is at levels not seen in decades. In the lead-up to Russia’s Duma elections this month, we have witnessed the harshest crackdown against journalists, activists, and even non-political civil society organizations since Vladimir Putin took power. The Kremlin continues to run a secret chemical weapons program it has used to target regime opponents both inside and outside the country. Russia-based criminal organizations have unleashed a wave of ransomware attacks against U.S. companies and government agencies. The Russian military continues to fuel a deadly conflict on Ukrainian territory...the list continues, and it does not become more encouraging.

This demoralizing state of affairs persists despite the fact that in recent years, the U.S. has sanctioned hundreds of Russian individuals and dozens of Russian entities linked to this harmful and destabilizing activity. These sanctions are among the most severe the U.S. has imposed—only Venezuela and countries under comprehensive sanctions such as North Korea are subject to more extensive sanctions regimes. The Biden administration has pursued further sanctions, including restrictions on Russia’s Nordstream 2 pipeline. President Joe Biden has also announced increases to the U.S. forward-based presence in Europe to counterbalance Russia’s military activity in the region. The U.S. has shuttered Russian consulates and cut staff in response to Russia’s destabilizing actions, and with Putin’s retaliatory moves, U.S. diplomatic presence in Russia—and vice versa—is at a historic low. The State Department has issued unprecedented guidance urging American citizens not to travel to Russia.

Yet countless critics insist that these U.S. actions haven't produced the desired behavior change in Moscow simply because they are insufficiently "tough".¹ These criticisms fail to take into account the Kremlin's current occupants' demonstrated willingness to absorb (or, rather, allow the Russian population to absorb) significant economic and diplomatic consequences in the service of its goals.²

These goals fall almost entirely into three categories: 1) ensuring a "sphere of privileged interests" in its "near abroad"; 2) securing recognition as a global great power; and 3) shaping the international system in ways that are more favorable to Kremlin interests. Each of these goals ultimately feeds into President Putin's desire to keep other major powers, especially the United States, away from Russia's borders and out of its domestic affairs, especially where the regime's survival is at stake.

Over the course of two decades managing Russian affairs, Putin's view of the United States as the primary threat to the Kremlin's interests has become intractable. At the same time, Russia's significant ground, air, naval, space, cyber, and nuclear capabilities constrain potential U.S. military responses, while Russia's integration into the global economy, especially as an energy supplier, and its economic importance to a number of U.S. allies and partners, limits the scope of punitive economic measures.

The unexpectedly intense protests in Belarus, Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny's exploding international stature and domestic influence, Russia's ongoing struggle to control COVID, and Moscow's failure to boost economic growth have all contributed to deepening discontent at home. The Kremlin's anxiety is clear from the unusually harsh steps and unprecedented levels of fraud most recently used to achieve control of Russia's strictly managed and manipulated political system.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Engagement with Russia in areas such as nuclear non-proliferation, strategic stability, and political resolution of regional conflicts remains essential; and the U.S. must continue to

¹ <https://www.hudson.org/research/17007-it-s-time-for-biden-to-get-tough-on-russia>

² Russia's GDP never recovered from the 2014 imposition of joint U.S./EU sanctions, and its rate of growth remains stunted. "World Economic Outlook Database, October 2020."

calibrate pragmatic options for deterrence and response. However, it is unrealistic and unproductive to concentrate U.S. efforts on achieving a level of “toughness” that gets a Kremlin focused on survival to behave in line with U.S. interests. This period of escalation stagnation can instead be an opportunity to “build back better” by 1) ensuring a greater focus on building resilience within the United States and among its global partners in order to minimize the impact of the Kremlin’s destabilizing activity; and 2) devoting some bandwidth to long-neglected and comparatively inexpensive soft power moves that maximize the potential of U.S.- Russia policy to succeed in the event of changing dynamics or power structures.

Building Resilience

- ***U.S. Global Standing.*** Pushing back on Russian behavior requires a restoration of U.S. moral leadership. Russian propaganda and global political interference efforts rely heavily on discrediting the U.S. government and the liberal international order. The nationalism and divisiveness of the Trump administration, its indifference to international and domestic norms and institutions, and its inability to lead in times of crisis, severely damaged U.S. global standing and moral authority, furthering Kremlin goals. Rebuilding the credibility needed to promote a vision of the rules-based international order and undercutting Russia’s cynical approach will be a challenging but critical aspect of U.S. Russia policy.³
- ***Cybersecurity.*** Some critical work has already begun. In May, the Biden administration issued an ambitious executive order on improving U.S. cybersecurity, and has already begun to implement a “zero trust” cybersecurity strategy for federal agencies, shoring up their security architecture. It has also directed the U.S. Cyber Command and National Security Agency to step up efforts on cyber threats. These are exactly the steps that are

³ Though George Kennan’s “Long Telegram” is now over six decades old, it is still instructive in advocating for an affirmative U.S. vision: We must “formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of [the] sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in past . . . the degree to which the United States can create among the peoples of the world generally the impression of a country which knows what it wants, which is coping successfully with the problems of its internal life and with the responsibilities of a world power, and which has a spiritual vitality capable of holding its own among the major ideological currents of the time.”

needed, and the U.S. government should prioritize this work and ensure it is fully resourced.

- ***U.S. Electoral System.*** While there has already been some steady investment in securing U.S. election infrastructure since 2016, many systems remain vulnerable. Elections experts have highlighted a number of critical steps that should be taken by electoral systems at all levels nationwide, including replacing paperless voting machines to ensure voter-verified paper backups of each vote, upgrading voter registration databases, and providing cybersecurity training for election workers and campaign staff.
- ***U.S. Citizens.*** The U.S. should partner with the tech sector on a digital media literacy strategy across all age groups to build citizens' understanding of and resilience to disinformation, propaganda, hate speech, and incitement online. Here, it is worth examining similar efforts that have been successfully implemented in partner countries—particularly in Sweden, which has made digital literacy efforts a national priority in response to Russian interference in Swedish and European affairs.
- ***Financial Transparency Requirements and Anti-corruption Measures.*** Strengthening financial transparency rules—in particular, instituting stronger disclosure requirements of beneficial ownership information—would curtail Russian operatives' ability to operate in the U.S. financial system. The Mueller indictments revealed substantial gaps in U.S. financial disclosure requirements that facilitated Russian interference in the 2016 elections. There are also a number of additional anti-corruption measures that would degrade the Kremlin's ability to undermine the United States and other democracies; these include building additional transparency into business structures such as limited liability companies and seeking international agreement to implement Foreign Corrupt Practices Act-like legislation in allied and partner nations.
- ***USG Russia Expertise.*** Across all agencies, there is a need for a larger number of U.S. policy experts who have spent significant time in Russia, have strong Russian language skills, and maintain contacts in-country who can provide additional context and insight into Russian actions and decision-making. One way to address this is to boost Russian

area studies at universities, which have provided a base for many government Russia experts in prior years. These programs have seen dramatic cuts in funding and a precipitous fall in the number of graduates.⁴ The administration should work to reverse this trend and expand funding for programs such as the State Department's Critical Language Scholarship with a focus on the Russian language⁵. Another approach could be to increase the size of U.S. diplomatic missions in countries with large Russian-speaking populations.

- ***European Energy Resilience.*** In addition to building resilience through providing support to NATO and cooperating with Europe on shared priorities, including climate change, the United States will need to help Europe shore up its energy resiliency. Russia has used European reliance as a lever in the past, manipulating prices and supply and using advantageous deals and pipeline construction contracts with individual European Union member states to undermine European cohesion. In addition to new pipeline interconnections, liquid natural gas terminals, and stricter oversight of natural gas supply contracts, the Administration should demonstrate a commitment to supporting key European energy security priorities such as the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement. By prioritizing transatlantic agreement on higher climate targets, on reaching them earlier, and on energy efficiency and renewable energy, the U.S. will rebuild trust with key Allies while reducing European energy dependence on Russia.
- ***Non-NATO European Security Initiatives.*** The administration should reject longstanding U.S. scepticism of collective European defense efforts outside of NATO and welcome initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the

⁴ For example, the number of degrees conferred in Russian language and literature fell from 715 in 1971 to 340 in 2011, and funding for Russia-related research and exchanges from private grant-making foundations has been slashed by 50% or more in many cases. Kenneth Yalowitz and Matthew Rojansky. "The Slow Death of Russian and Eurasian Studies." National Interest, May 13, 2014. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-slow-death-russian- Eurasian-studies-10516>.

⁵ The State Department's Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) aims to "expand dramatically the number of Americans studying and mastering critical foreign languages" and encourage students to "continue their language study beyond the scholarship period, and later apply their critical language skills in their future professional careers." CLS participants are viewed as "citizen ambassadors, sharing American values and promoting American influence abroad." Right now, the program awards about 600 scholarships annually, selecting from 5200 applicants. Additional funding can help publicize the program more broadly and allow for more applicants to participate. <https://clscholarship.org>.

European Defense Fund (EDF), which are aimed at collaborative development and acquisition of new capabilities between member states. These projects, if successful, would promote investment in defense technology innovation and enhance European Allies' NATO capabilities, reducing reliance on the United States. The new administration should strongly encourage European partners to raise the level of ambition on these initiatives.

Reinvigorating Soft Power Initiatives

Engage the Russian People. The battered relationship between Russia and the U.S. has had spillover effects on ordinary Russians living in and visiting the United States, who report facing hostility and discrimination. Some of these Russians are already fleeing persecution at home or seeking to bring talents to the United States and are the very people the U.S. should be actively supporting. This unfortunate trend also feeds into Putin's narrative that the United States hates and fears Russia and Russians. Engaging these Russians is a key element of U.S. soft power: building a bench of pro-U.S. Russians who can push back on the official narratives their family and friends in Russia are still receiving, and who may return to Russia to lead under different leadership. We should seek to separate the adversarial relationship with the Kremlin from Russian people.

Boost Cultural Diplomacy. Moscow has made it harder in recent years for Russians to maintain contact with the outside world. It has imposed substantial censorship on internet communication and prohibitions on international travel for millions of government personnel. COVID has exacerbated these dynamics, wiping out Russians' disposable income and dampening enthusiasm for travel. This makes it all the more critical to continue to look for avenues to ensure Russians can continue to have positive exposure to the United States and to the American people, which is most feasible outside of Russia.

Cultural exchanges, such as tours of U.S. artists in Russia and high school and university exchanges should receive additional funding. The administration could also consider visa-free travel for young Russians to travel and study in the United States (current nominee for Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Toria Nuland suggested last year that all Russians between the ages of 16 and 22 be granted visa-free travel subject to appropriate security

screening.⁶) A lighter lift could be to make F1 student visas valid for 5 years and multiple entries. In the short term, the administration should work to reduce wait times for visas. Right now, Russians wait months—and often have to travel to countries such as Poland or Belarus—to obtain a U.S. visa.

These opportunities would provide what is already the most independent-minded generation of Russians an opportunity to see what the United States represents by traveling, studying, and working here. The Kremlin recognizes the potential challenge posed by this generation and has been working hard to indoctrinate and isolate young Russians, who get their information online and are therefore less susceptible to media propaganda. Russian universities and professors now have to report foreign contacts. Most recently, the Russian Defense Ministry has administered the Youth Army group Yunarmiya, a “youth military-patriotic movement” that has grown to over 500,000 in part by coercing military personnel to enroll their children and offering preferential college admissions.⁷ This makes it all the more crucial that the United States is able to project its affirmative message directly to these young people.

Conclusion

With Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin—and, more broadly, under the current system of power—Russia is not likely to abandon its view of the United States as its most dangerous adversary or its concomitant inclination to counter U.S. power. This limits the effectiveness of deterrent, coercive, and punitive measures in the short- to medium-term. This is why prioritizing American resilience, soft power, and sustainable alliances, will ultimately best serve American interests.

⁶ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2020-06-09/pinning-down-putin>

⁷ See, e.g., “Ceremony of introduction of children into Yunarmiya, the all-Russia military-patriotic movement (main base of the Northern Fleet, Gadjiyev).” Russian Ministry of Defense. <https://eng.mil.ru/en/mcis/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=32878@cmsPhotoGallery>.

