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Stephen Blank
J. Michael Cole
Balkan Devlen

KNOW THY ENEMY

Understanding the threat posed by Russia and China in the post-COVID era

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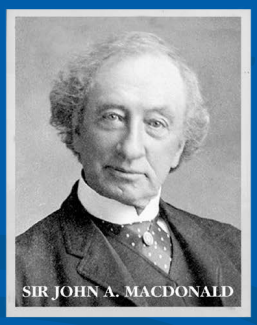
MLI 10 A DECADE OF TRUE NORTH IN CANADIAN PUBLIC POLICY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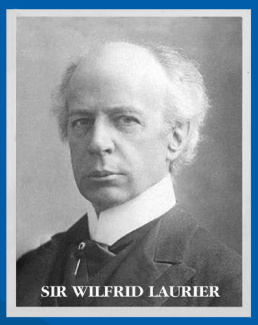
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Executive Summary

Despite decades of efforts by western nations to bring China and Russia into the world as legitimate partners, both countries have sought to take advantage of the West's good will and the openness of the international system.

For its part, China sidelined democratic allies of the West, developed intelligence networks and foreign influence operations, and brought numerous developing countries under its sway. China lied about COVID-19 at massive expense and suffering in the world, and then positioned itself to take advantage of the crisis. Similarly, Russia has sought to weaken NATO and the EU, driving a wedge between democratic allies. From its aggressive actions in Ukraine and the Baltics to its foreign interference across Europe and beyond, the Kremlin has undermined the global order on a massive scale.

In this report, *Know Thy Enemy: Understanding the threat posed by Russia and China in the post-COVID era*, three distinguished researchers take a close look at the threat Russia and China pose to the democratic states in the world. Collectively, they promote a clear-eyed understanding of what these adversaries want, what they do, and how we could and should respond to their aggression.

Stephen Blank makes the case that Russia's foreign policy is inextricably linked with its domestic governance structures. As he puts it "Russia's fundamental or overriding objective is to make the world safe for its autocracy." He then goes on to describe the nature of Putin's regime, the tools and strategies it uses internationally to sustain Putin's rule, and the role nuclear weapons and doctrine play in Russia's "permanent war" against the West. His prognosis is pessimistic as he points out "[t]his war never ceases – and it cannot so long as Russia's state structure and accompanying outlook remain the same. The idea of a new détente, pursued by many in the West, is therefore a complete chimera."

Given this state of affairs, what should the West do? As Russia's strategy is about mobilizing the entire state and using cross-domain coercion, our response must also "be whole-of-state, multidimensional, coordinated." Blank

highlights the need to revitalize Western leadership that brings together the US, Canada, and the EU to tackle global issues from climate change and COVID-19 to countering subversion of our democratic institutions and reducing European reliance on Russian energy resources.

J. Michael Cole explores "the ideology behind China's strategic ambitions under Xi Jinping, the various means at its disposal – political, economic, military, 'grey zone' – to exercise its growing power and influence, and the implications of this resurgence for the international community." Cole sets the stage by discussing the domestic and international context of Xi's rise to power. Here he highlights the belief among the CCP leadership that "China's moment had finally arrived" and the rapid modernization and the newfound assertiveness of the PLA, particularly towards other regional powers.

> *"China lacks the soft power that the US and other Western countries enjoy across the world.*

Despite its economic clout, China lacks the soft power that the US and other Western countries enjoy across the world. Therefore, Cole argues, CCP resorts to "sharp power" through its United Front Work Department with the aim of eroding and undermining "transparency and accountability in targeted countries and organizations." China weaponizes trade, tourism, and investments to coerce others and bend them to its will. It interferes with elections in other countries, and uses a broad set of political warfare and lawfare tools to undermine target societies.

Much like Blank, J. Michael Cole also highlights the need to have a clear understanding of the threat posed by a revisionist, despotic regime to the global order. Cole ends his chapter with a series of recommendations on how to face this multifaceted threat from China and a plea to the West that "we must regain our footing and self-esteem by ignoring Chinese propaganda about the "inevitability" of the West's decline and through a reinvestment in our human capital and belief in the wisdom of our democratic ideals."

Lastly, Balkan Devlen looks at the commonalities between CCP and the Kremlin's subversion of international order. He starts with identifying the three main drivers behind the authoritarian challenge to international order, "namely their neo-authoritarian ideology, the imperative of regime survival,

and the shifting global balance of power." He then goes on to describe what a world of Putin and Xi would look like – a hierarchically-organized kratocracy where "might makes it right" – and identifies political warfare or subversion as being the primary tool of the Kremlin and CCP. As Devlen concludes, "[i]t would be a bleak future where the progress of human rights and democracy in the last three decades is rolled back."

Devlen ends his chapter with a series of recommendations that include the necessity of a clear-eyed understanding of the authoritarian challenge, better study of political warfare and subversion, and the importance of developing societal resilience. As he argues "[i]f we wish to defend our freedoms and values against authoritarian subversion and preserve and protect the rules-based international order that enabled those freedoms as well as our prosperity, we should stand together. In other words, as Benjamin Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

Sommaire

Malgré les décennies d'efforts consentis par les pays occidentaux pour intégrer la Chine et la Russie en tant que partenaires légitimes dans le monde, ces deux pays ont tenté d'abuser de la bonne foi de l'Occident et de l'ouverture du système international.

Pour sa part, la Chine a tassé ses alliés démocratiques occidentaux, mis en place réseaux de renseignement et activités d'influence étrangère et soumis à son autorité de nombreux pays en développement. La Chine a menti au sujet de la COVID-19, causant d'énormes souffrances dans le monde, puis s'est positionnée de manière à profiter de la crise. Quant à la Russie, elle a cherché à affaiblir l'OTAN et l'UE en semant la discorde au sein des alliés démocratiques. Depuis ses actes d'agression en Ukraine et dans les pays baltes jusqu'à ses actes d'ingérence dans toute l'Europe et au-delà, le Kremlin a lourdement fragilisé l'ordre mondial.

Dans le présent rapport, trois éminents chercheurs examinent de près la menace mondiale posée par la Chine et la Russie pour les États démocratiques dans l'après-COVID. Collectivement, ils s'attachent à bien nous faire comprendre les volontés, les actions et la manière de se défendre de ces adversaires.

Stephen Blank démontre que la politique étrangère de la Russie est inextricablement liée à ses structures de gouvernance intérieures. D'après lui, la Russie poursuit l'objectif fondamental et prioritaire de rendre le monde plus sûr pour son autocratie. Il décrit ensuite la nature du régime de Poutine, les

outils et les stratégies que Poutine utilise à l'échelle mondiale pour maintenir son pouvoir et le rôle de la doctrine et des armes nucléaires dans la « *guerre permanente* » de la Russie contre l'Occident. Son pronostic est pessimiste puisqu'il souligne qu'il n'est pas et ne sera jamais possible d'arrêter cette guerre aussi longtemps que la structure étatique de la Russie et les conceptions qui en émanent demeurent inchangées. L'idée d'une « ***nouvelle détente*** », à laquelle beaucoup adhèrent en Occident, est donc totalement illusoire.

> *« La Chine n'a pas de « soft power » (pouvoir d'attraction) contrairement aux États-Unis et à d'autres pays occidentaux.*

Compte tenu de cet état de fait, que devrait faire l'Occident? Dans la mesure où la stratégie russe mobilise l'État au complet et repose sur la coercition inter-domaine, notre réponse doit également être « pan étatique, multidimensionnelle et coordonnée ». Blank souligne qu'il faut revitaliser le leadership occidental réunissant les États-Unis, le Canada et l'UE pour résoudre les problèmes mondiaux, notamment en matière de lutte contre les changements climatiques, la COVID19 et la subversion de nos institutions démocratiques, ainsi que pour atténuer la dépendance européenne à l'égard des ressources énergétiques russes.

J. Michael Cole explore l'idéologie derrière les ambitions stratégiques de la Chine sous Xi Jinping, les divers moyens à sa disposition – politiques, économiques, militaires ou courants (« zone grise ») – pour exercer son emprise croissante et les conséquences de cette résurgence pour la communauté internationale. Cole commence par présenter le contexte national et international de l'ascension politique de Xi. Ce faisant, il met en lumière la conviction partagée par les dirigeants du Parti communiste chinois (CCP) voulant que le « moment de la Chine soit enfin arrivé », la rapide modernisation de l'Armée populaire de libération (PLA) et la nouvelle assurance affichée par cette dernière, en particulier vis-à-vis d'autres puissances régionales.

Malgré son poids économique, la Chine n'a pas de « *soft power* » (pouvoir d'attraction) contrairement aux États-Unis et à d'autres pays occidentaux. Par conséquent, soutient Cole, le Parti communiste chinois a recours au « s*harp power* » (pouvoir de subversion) par le biais du Front uni chinois pour éroder et affaiblir la « transparence et la reddition de compte dans les pays et les

organisations qu'il cible ». La Chine militarise le commerce, le tourisme et les investissements en vue de contraindre les autres et de les plier à ses volontés. Elle s'ingère dans les élections à l'étranger et utilise un large éventail d'outils de guerre politiques et juridiques pour affaiblir les sociétés.

Tout comme Blank, J. Michael Cole souligne la nécessité de bien comprendre les dangers qu'un régime révisionniste et despotique fait peser sur l'ordre mondial. Il termine son chapitre avec une série de recommandations sur la façon de faire face aux multiples menaces émanant de la Chine et un appel à l'Occident nous implorant de reprendre pied et de retrouver notre estime de soi en ignorant la propagande chinoise sur « l'inévitable » déclin de l'Occident et en réinvestissant dans notre capital humain et la valeur de nos idéaux démocratiques.

En dernier lieu, Balkan Devlen fait ressortir les points communs entre la subversion de l'ordre international exercée par le Kremlin et celle du Parti communiste chinois. Il commence par établir les trois principales conditions qui circonscrivent le défi autoritaire pour l'ordre international, à savoir l'idéologie néo-autoritaire, l'impératif de survie et la redéfinition des équilibres internationaux. Il décrit ensuite ce à quoi ressemblerait un monde à la Poutine et Xi – une cratocratie organisée hiérarchiquement, la manifestation de la « *Loi du plus fort* » – et explique que la guerre politique et la subversion sont les principaux outils du Kremlin et du Parti communiste chinois. Comme le conclut Devlen, ce serait là un avenir sombre où les progrès des droits de la personne et de la démocratie au cours des trois dernières décennies seraient perdus.

Devlen termine son chapitre avec une série de recommandations par lesquelles il nous exhorte, notamment, à bien comprendre le défi autoritaire, la guerre politique et la subversion dans leurs fins détails et l'importance d'accroître la résilience sociétale. Comme il le fait valoir, si nous souhaitons défendre nos libertés et nos valeurs contre la subversion autoritaire tout en protégeant l'ordre international basé sur le droit grâce auquel ces mêmes libertés et notre prospérité ont vu le jour, nous devons faire front commun. En d'autres termes, comme Benjamin Franklin l'a dit : « *Nous devons tous nous serrer les coudes, ou bien nous finirons, à coup sûr, par nous écraser les uns les autres* »..

Russian Goals, Strategy, Instruments of Aggression: How Should We Respond?

Stephen Blank

Russia's fundamental or overriding objective is to make the world safe for its autocracy. That goal entails not only domestic autocracy but also external war and inherent imperial aspirations. Thus, Russian "national security policy" and its global war against the West derive from its governmental structure. Russian policy is inextricably connected to the regime's unconstrained exploitation of Russia and its international partners' resources. To understand Russia's war and its objectives, we must first grasp the nature of this state. In effect, Putin has rebuilt the medieval Muscovite patrimonial autocracy. Putin and the state exist beyond any legal or institutional account-

ability to anyone. The state (and especially Putin) owns the entire national economy either directly or indirectly; it assigns rents to or takes rents from anyone in return for state service without accountability for reasons of state. Property is held only conditionally on the basis of state service. Neither property, nor civil or human rights exist in law. Rule by law supplants the rule of law. Religion is an arm of the state, which also controls most, if not all, forms of media dissemination, excludes foreign media, and constantly seeks ever more power for itself at home and abroad (Robinson 2011; Hellie 2005; Baker and Glasser 2005; Rosefielde 2004; Poe 2003; Hedlund 2005; Pain 2005; Kotkin 2004).[1] This unending quest for power and wealth for their own sake represent the state's *raison d'être*.

Empire (diminished sovereignty of neighbours) both justifies and logically extends autocracy. Empire and autocracy are inextricable. Autocracy can only be sustained through imperial dominion of neighbours and subversion of their sovereignty, integrity, and independence. Therefore, Russia exists in a permanent state of siege with its neighbours and interlocutors. Russia's elites duly insist that if Russia is not a great power (i.e., a global great power as well as empire), it is nothing. Thus, autocracy's quest for ever greater power and legitimacy at home and legitimating status abroad are bound up with the eternal search for power for purposes of enrichment, legitimation, and the never-ending quest for status. This is the only conceivable state for Russia's current elites. Today, as in Tsarist times, "the lure of something erotic in the borderlands," as described by Tsarist minister of the interior Petr Valuev in 1864, drives Russian political leaders.

Concurrently, Russia's system of competing patron-client vertical state structures that are fused with Russian organized crime – something of a new departure – resembles nothing so much as a Mafia state with similar mores, norms, and structures. Vladimir Putin is the *capo di tutti capos* ("boss of bosses"), and rival gangs or factions compete viciously for rents and power at home and abroad. Indeed, the fusion of the state and organized crime facilitates the employment of organized crime syndicates for foreign policy missions (Belton 2020).

We thus confront a criminalized state whose basic attributes still elude most Western analysts and governments. Russia is a much more protean system than imagined abroad. It can simultaneously embrace elements of Fascism and Leninism without violating its essence. Common to both Fascism and Leninism are the pervasiveness of an all-encompassing police force, state control of the media, and the lack of any legal constraints on the regime. The Leninist model tends toward greater state control of the economy, 70

[1] These are only a few of the authors who now see the vitality of the Tsarist metaphor as a means of explaining Putin's Russia. See Pipes (1975), Blank (2007a), Balzer (2005).

percent of which is in its hands, while the Fascist model tends toward the cult of Putin or, in its most extreme case, the *Fuhrerprinzip* in Nazi Germany. Meanwhile the current invocation of the three elements of Nicholas I's "official nationality" is reminiscent of classic Tsarist autocracy. The mélange of all these charateristics attests to the protean, shape-shifting, and label-defying nature of Russian autocracy. Russia, in the minds of Putin and his courtiers, also possesses a strongly implanted and deeply rooted self-image as a providential and uniquely spiritual society (notwithstanding its behaviour), whose purpose is to bring the true religion to debauched and corrupt West, which hates it and permanently attacks it. Thus, this permanent state of siege is a deeply ideologized confrontation over values.

Russia's war on the West began in 2005, if not earlier (Gareyev 2010, 729, cited in Vorobyov and Kiselyov 2014). The Kremlin believes it is at war with a West that seeks by kinetic and non-kinetic means to undermine its ruling system, corrupt its spiritual essence, steal its natural resources, and frustrate its supposedly foreordained recovery of empire and the global status it enjoyed as the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Indeed, Russian threat assessments remain strongly Leninist in nature (Blank 2014). Putin even frequently invokes Yalta as an example of this recognition of Russia's status (Meister 2018; Golts 2018).

Threats, Objectives, and Strategies

Since the leadership knows its legitimacy is permanently at risk, it has linked domestic and foreign enemies. This classic Leninist assessment reflects the leadership's origin in the KGB and its threat perception. Putin's Russia can never feel secure and, much like the Tsarist regime of old, "it must expand its frontiers to defend them." Specifically, European integration, particularly under democratic and American auspices, has long been viewed as the greatest geopolitical threat to Russia (Ivanov 2006; Orenstein 2019). Russia believes Western military superiority is employed to undermine its system, promote externally arranged democratic movements, and prevent its imperial recrudescence by threatening it with superior force. Russia's strategic objectives are therefore to destroy the cohesion of NATO, the EU, European integration more broadly, and the transatlantic alliance, recreate its empire in the form of a sphere of influence, and secure lasting leverage throughout Europe to prevent European cooperation against it.

To that end, the Kremlin also seeks to subvert and corrupt European socio-economic, financial, media, and political institutions by simultaneously applying synergistic kinetic and non-kinetic forces. Russia's strategy, given its strategic and technological inferiority, is an asymmetric one of cross-domain coercion to undermine Western cohesion, subvert and corrupt Western institutions, enrich Russia's elites, and preserve its system from outside influence and criticism. Success here would eliminate the threats of ideological war-

fare, democracy promotion, and Western military superiority, thereby leaving Russia the strongest power on the continent. This asymmetric strategy plays the long game while aiming to exploit opportunities wherever possible as a matter of deliberate strategic choice.

Force is used as a last resort and then in swift overwhelming, decisive patterns, combining and building upon all the instruments of power: diplomacy, information, military, and economics (DIME, to use US military parlance). But this war is constantly being waged on all fronts, using these instruments globally to undermine allied cohesion, subvert neighbouring and key governments, and exercise an unremitting psychological pressure on Western regimes. Nuclear weapons are essential to this kind of warfare, which is often (albeit misleadingly) termed "hybrid warfare."

Russia's asymmetric strategy entails mobilizing and deploying the entire state on a permanent basis, if necessary. This mobilization, in turn, offers it a broad range of choices in the weapons it can use against specific targets (Monaghan 2014, 2017; Blank 2010; Cordesman 2020). Thus, nuclear weapons, along with the huge conventional buildup, play a key strategic role in Russia's strategy. As Dmitry Adamsky observes, "The nuclear component is an inseparable part of Russian operational art that cannot be analyzed as a stand-alone issue" (2015, 9). Nuclear weapons and threats of use facilitate Russian conventional threats and aggression by deterring adversaries' counteraction to that aggression. Similarly, US Major Amos C. Fox (2017, 18-19) writes that Russia's nuclear weapons and integrated air defence system facilitate attainment of all of Russia's conventional warfare objectives: deterring NATO expansion into Russia's historic sphere of influence, retaining regional hegemony in Eurasia, and demonstrating improvements to Russian military capabilities. Moreover,

> [t]he presence of nuclear weapons is perhaps the first critical component for modern hybrid warfare. Nuclear weapons provide insurance against a massive ground response to an incremental limited war. The offensive nation that possesses nuclear weapons knows that the adversary or its allies will not likely commit large ground forces to a conflict for fear of the aggressor employing those weapons against ground [or naval] forces. This dynamic emboldens the aggressor nation. In the case of Russia, its possession of nuclear weapons emboldens leaders to take offensive action because they know that even the threat of nuclear employment forces potential adversaries to a standstill. (Fox 2017, 56)

Moscow's behaviour and apparent nuclear strategy corroborate these findings. This is because the document detailing that strategy and conditions for nuclear use is classified and its doctrinal statements are hardly revealing (Russia 2020). Nonetheless, the newly released strategic guidelines of 2020

and subsequent statements definitively articulate an offensive, first-strike, and launch-on-warning strategy (ibid.). Indeed, Russian writers often discuss using nuclear weapons in a pre-emptive mode (Blank 2011; Schneider 2017). Hence, Russia's nuclear behaviour goes beyond nuclear grandstanding to generate real anxiety. As Colin Gray (2017) observes, despite the unlikelihood that Russia will use nuclear weapons to defeat NATO in a limited nuclear scenario, Moscow talks as if it can achieve this outcome. Thus, he writes,

> In a manner that is ominously reminiscent of Adolf Hitler, Putin and others have chosen to introduce explicitly ruthless threats, including nuclear threats, into Russian reasoning about acute international crises. They hypothesize about the high political value that would accrue as a result of nuclear use on a limited scale. The hoop, apparently, is that the NATO enemy, certainly the less robust members, at least, would be out-gunned either by the actuality, or more likely only by the credible threat of nuclear use [especially in a first-strike mode].

Not surprisingly, Gray concludes that Russia seeks escalation dominance.

> In the language of now-classic strategic theory from a past generation of theorists, the Russians currently are talking with apparent seriousness about nuclear escalation dominance. Russian theorists claim, perhaps expect, they could win a war wherein Russia employs nuclear weapons only a very modest scale. This expectation follows from a Russian belief that Moscow's employment of a few nuclear weapons would give them a decisive coercive edge in the diplomacy that should follow. Russian authors have advised us ironically that the use of these weapons would prove to be a decisive de-escalatory move – de-escalatory because NATO would be expected to capitulate. The high determination shown unmistakably by the fact of Russian nuclear use would surprise, even shock, audiences politically around the world. Thus, with unmatched boldness Russia should achieve a considerable political, perhaps even military, victory. (Gray 2017)

Therefore, nuclear procurements go far beyond "nuclear grandstanding" and deterrence of superior Western forces in order to enable Russia to wage this multidimensional warfare with impunity.

Meanwhile, the buildup of conventional weapons transcends simply intimidating NATO or deterring it from launching a supposed invasion or using military pressure against Russia and neighbouring post-Soviet states. Indeed, that buildup places the entire former USSR and other neighbours (e.g., Turkey) behind another "iron curtain" of Russian military force, not only to subordinate those states to Moscow but also to provide a springboard for what has become a multidimensional strategy of global power projection, albeit on a "shoestring."

Despite numerous assertions to the contrary, Russia has developed a strategy, forces, and strategic objectives for global power projection since 2006, when President Vladimir Putin advocated creating forces for global, local, and national contingencies and began training them (Russia 2006; Johnson 2006). By then, Moscow was already organizing and training forces for takeover of ethnically diverse territories adjoining Russia (ibid.). It began creating private military forces for use abroad in the 1990s (Sukhankin 2019; Arnold 2019, 10-11). By 2010, elements of Russia's airborne forces participated in an EU operation to support UN peacekeepers in Chad (*ITAR-TASS* 2010).

Today, Russian forces or proxies are deployed or fighting in Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Venezuela and have participated in failed coups in Montenegro, Greece, and Macedonia. Moscow even offered to send peacekeeping forces to Afghanistan after the recent US-Taliban accords (*Ariana News* 2020). Importantly, Moscow can also sustain these forces abroad. Moreover, Russia has obtained, has been offered, or seeks air and navy bases in Venezuela, the Levant, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel. It may also covet bases in South Asia, as it clearly seeks an enhanced presence there (Kuprianov, Wijayabahu, and De Silva 2019). Meanwhile, Russian military literature discusses power projection forces because contemporary war largely occurs in the Middle East, Africa, Venezuela, and other failed states (Gerasimov 2019a, 2019b; Tucker 2019; Dvornikov 2018).

> *Russia has developed a strategy, forces, and strategic objectives for global power projection since 2006.*

The ambition to project power beyond Russia dates back to at least 2003 (Russia 2003; Trifonov 2003). But it has materialized only recently due to Russia's military reforms, buildup, and lessons from operations in Crimea, Donbas, and Syria. Russia sees these wars as laboratories for future military developments, going beyond the innovative use of weapons (Gerasimov 2019a; Dvornikov 2018). The confluence of domestic development in the developing world and Russian trends offers Russia numerous opportunities to exploit failing states and civil wars in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, either through its regular forces and instruments, such as arms sales and covert deals with competing elites, or with innovative instruments of power like its private military companies (e.g., the well-known Wagner Group). Those instruments impart plausible deniability to Russian activities and are financed by oligarchs seeking to maintain their status as state servi-

tors and ensuing access to state or foreign rents, thereby shielding the state budget, while reducing casualties among serving soldiers that could embarrass the government (Marten 2019, 2020; Blank 2020). These forces, along with other Russian operatives and oligarchs, also conduct what can only be called political warfare abroad (ibid.).

But beyond these instruments of DIME, the most potent and unrelenting daily expressions of this strategy are embodied in Russia's economic and informational tools of warfare. In economics, energy and raw material revenues have long since become the foundation for the elite's predatory rent-seeking at home and abroad. These revenues not only fund state activities but are also a means of gaining lasting influence and leverage within foreign states on key industries, including energy, media, banking, finance, power generation, and real estate. Here, too, state motives may have begun with seeking safe havens for all the illegally gathered billions the Kremlin has stolen from the Russian people, but those motives soon morphed into subverting and corrupting elites and elite institutions in these sectors throughout the world (Belton 2020; Conley et al. 2016; USA 2019).

Thus, billions of dollars steadily coming from Russia in multiple directions – through the state, *silovye struktury* (Structures of Force, i.e., army, police, and other military forces), banks, corporations, and organized crime – are flooding American and European banks, companies, finance institutions, and government figures' accounts (Conley et al. 2016; USA 2019; Belton 2020). These systematic programs of subversion and corruption interact with a massive expansion of Russian espionage (often using the same people for both tasks), influence peddling, and social media probes to corrupt American and European elites, elections, political institutions, etc.

As the many investigations in the US and elsewhere show, these activities are coordinated from Moscow with the systematic use of military intelligence (GRU) and other hackers, such as the Internet Resources Agency (IRA), to launch incessant information operations and cyberattacks to polarize and divide targeted states and influence their political trajectories (ibid.). Meanwhile this dirty money goes on to buy political influence and media to further Moscow's agenda. These information warfare activities and so-called active measures also combine with a pattern of cyberattacks on key infrastructure and other targets across the US, Canada, and Europe, such as Ukraine, Germany, Estonia, France, Spain, among others. Simultaneously, numerous and constant naval and air probes and nuclear threats against American, Canadian, and European (not just NATO members') military targets, along with regular threats of nuclear use, continue as part of Russia's overall war of nerves or attempt to exercise an unrelenting psychological pressure on the West.

This War's Nature and Purpose

This war never ceases – and it cannot so long as Russia's state structure and accompanying outlook remain the same. The idea of a new détente, pursued by many in the West, is therefore a complete chimera. Moscow's criminalized leadership, formed out of the KGB and its heirs, cannot conceive of a world where Russia is at peace, because it lives under the constant shadow of its own illegitimacy and addiction to more wealth and power. Thus, this war not only is a "war in permanence" but also, like the Soviet Union, entails whole-of-state action against both the Russian people and the world (Cordesman 2020). Moscow can never feel secure and has no vision beyond the untrammelled accumulation of ever more wealth, power, and possibly territory. In other words, its vision of a future world order is more of the same.

The world order that Moscow promotes is one lacking any equilibrium other than the inherently unrealizable search for power, a legitimate status, and wealth. Furthermore, it inherently regenerates the necessity for a state of siege for Russia's leaders to retain their power. For instance, Moscow repudiates the entire post-Cold War settlement. Despite its treaty obligations, it rejects the idea that any former Warsaw Pact member is truly independent or that its territorial integrity is inviolate. Therefore, it permanently challenges the post-1990 status quo in Europe, especially as it is waging a war against the West and believes one is being conducted against it (Sherr 2013; Stewart 2014; Blank 2007b; *Kommersant* 2008; *Moscow Times* 2008; *Polskie Radio* 2008).

> *The idea of a new détente, pursued by many in the West, is therefore a complete chimera.*

Given this posture and its imperial prerogatives, Russia feels free to attack any state that challenges it, based on calculations of expediency and using its military or other means. Russia's aggressions against Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014, respectively, were thus parts of a chain. That chain began in 2007 when Russia launched cyber-strikes against Estonia. Since then it has launched unrelenting cyber and information warfare – two sides of the same coin in Russian thinking – at virtually every European, North American, and even African countries, if not elsewhere. It has also been involved in coups in Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Greece (Blank 2020). Putin's Russia believes in empire, i.e., diminished sovereignty and integrity for all these states, including those of every European state east of Germany.

They should all be subordinate to Russia, which should have a permanent sphere of influence that encompasses all of Europe (if not governments further afield). Subversion and corruption are employed to reach these goals, because Moscow believes Western states are inherently corrupt and decadent, while it is rising from its knees.

Consequently, Russia's preferred order is a great power concert where each great power is utterly sovereign in its neighbourhood and neighbours are suborned, i.e., an internationalization of its autocracy that also silences smaller states. Moreover, Russia permanently stands on guard against democratic "infection" and mobilizes for military and political warfare (Monaghan 2014, 2017; Cordesman 2020; Blank 2010). International law is a slogan behind which great powers conceal their own unlimited acts of power, and the UN is critical to these plans, thanks to Russia's ability to use its veto power in the Security Council to prevent any unwanted action. This supposed multipolarity is self-evidently a recipe for permanent warfare and civil strife both within "Russia's sphere" and among the rival great powers. In fact it replicates the Cold War system where Moscow regarded itself as a "system-forming" state without whose participation nothing could be solved in world affairs (Lavrov 2007). Russia craves this great power status in this order, due to the misplaced belief that its leadership will then enjoy a legitimacy that it can never truly have enough of. Thus, its preferred order actually invokes the Cold War in a revenge-fuelled quest for restoration of its earlier status and power, albeit in the service of a Mafia state.

The Western Response

Russia's war and the state structure that engenders it represent serious multidimensional threats to Europe, Canada, and the US. Since 1945, if not earlier, Canadian governments have shared a common threat assessment with the US and its allies in NATO that the domination of Europe by a hostile force like contemporary Russia represents a vital threat to Canadian interests. Insofar as Russia strives to be the strongest actor in Europe and to disaggregate NATO and the EU, it conforms to that designation. One of the major factors permitting the expansion of German and Soviet power in 1933-1948 was the lack of a European security structure capable of rebuffing these challenges. A disaggregated Europe revives possibilities for the return of this phenomenon, and the nature of the Russian state here in such a vulnerable Europe would not let it remain content with its current frontiers. In addition, we see that in the Arctic, Russia's threat assessment partakes of its Leninist threat assessment. Indeed, it openly avows that Western states seek to take over Russia's energy resources, a claim that is utterly mendacious (Blank 2014). Consequently, Russia has continued not only to build up its conventional and nuclear forces in the Arctic but also to launch probes in the North Atlantic and against Canada's NATO allies in the High North, as well as Sweden. These probes even extend into these countries' air space and territorial waters.

As Russia's strategy is one of cross-domain coercion or a whole-of-state strategy, so must our allied response be whole-of-state, multidimensional, coordinated. Inasmuch as Europe remains Bismarck's "geographical notion," we must find a basis for a more concerted and unified response embracing the EU and the Atlantic Alliance, including Canada. It is equally apparent that no state other than the US can play the requisite leadership role here, so we need either a fundamental change of policy or of leadership in Washington to overcome the current disarray. Simultaneously, we must reverse the course and consequences of the current COVID-19 pandemic to reinvigorate state capacity, morale, and thus societal resilience across the West.

We must reverse the course and consequences of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the first step in any coherent Western strategy must be a concerted, multilateral, and sustained international effort – that can and should involve Russia, if possible – to discover and transmit a safe and effective vaccine while re-establishing strong international agencies that can do a better job than the World Health Organization (WHO) has done and that can be better shielded from partisan politics. Simultaneously there must be a campaign, hopefully led by the US but deeply involving Canada and the EU, to forge a deeper partnership. Various proposals have already been made for efforts to establish a functioning league of democracies or some analogue thereof (see Jain and Kroenig 2019). Considerations of space preclude a detailed discussion of these organizations here, but there are specific missions they need to pursue.

This group must take the lead and coordinate (and go beyond) existing efforts to root out dirty money, subversion, and corruption of Western institutions with severe criminal penalties attached to malefactors. This should not only be aimed at Moscow but include all those other actors abroad who have been inspired by Russia's example. And they should be subjected to public naming and shaming. Canada, the US, and Europe should strengthen their relationship by returning to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and strengthening its powers to reduce trade disputes, and they should also move strongly toward the earlier idea of a transatlantic trade protocol, but perhaps endow it with an expanded remit to deal with investment. Concurrently, Washington and Ottawa should support not only sub-regional integrative mechanisms like the Three Seas Initiative in Europe but the further democratic integration

of Europe, much as the EU had done in its recent decisions to facilitate the economic recovery of its southern members (see Bergmann and Judah 2020). These initiatives must take place in harmony with sufficiently large programs to reinvigorate and regrow Western economies and make them more democratic, a trend that would also allow them to deal more successfully with immigration issues and thus strike at the sources of anti-liberal disaffection.

The West should also launch concurrent major diplomatic initiatives. Washington should rejoin the *Paris Agreement* on climate change and Western states should concertedly push for additional (albeit still gradual) moves away from hydrocarbons. During this transition, we should move toward expanding the number of suppliers of gas to Europe, in order to offset Russian energy inroads into that continent. This means opening markets for Canadian and American natural gas in lieu of Russian gas, which would help to wean Europe from some of its energy dependence on Russia. It should also entail launching a diplomatic initiative encompassing Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, Egypt (and Lebanon if possible) to open up the Eastern Mediterranean to genuine exploration and exploitation so that its gas can supply European and Middle Eastern markets and benefit all concerned. Doing so would not only reduce tensions with Turkey in NATO and around the EU; it would also help stabilize the Levant. And, again, it would limit Russian opportunities to leverage its role as an important energy supplier to these countries. The transition to a new climate regime would also help reduce our dependence upon Russian gas and reduce the likelihood of the Arctic – due to its vast energy reserves – becoming another arena of confrontation. And, of course, this course of action would also force economic-political reform in Russia.

While we should invite Moscow to participate in climate change and global health initiatives, we must contain its efforts to revise the post-Cold War status quo and subvert European institutions. This means sustained invigoration of NATO's conventional deterrent in Central Europe and the Balkans to thwart Russia's escalation dominance and hybrid war strategy at the lowest level of escalation. This also means a substantially upgraded effort to deter Russian information operations and cyberattacks, if necessary, by making clear that retaliation will be swift and disproportionate. While national governments will remain reluctant to yield their ability to conduct independent operations here, much greater coordination and concerted activities of retaliation are needed along with exposure of Russian activity.

Russian violations remain the real reason for the breakdown of the arms control regime, whether the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) or the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaties. While arms control is needed, past experience shows it can only come by genuine deterrence and steadfast Western unity. This may mean not only rebuilding NATO's conventional capabilities but also deploying INF-type weapons in Europe or equivalents thereof to compel Moscow to negotiate on this issue. Nuclear superiority matters, and

Russia cannot be allowed to succeed in controlling escalation or intimidating Europe (Kroenig 2018). This does not mean spurning arms control talks, but it does mean that we cannot settle for bad treaties like the New START treaty. This treaty's counting rules allowed an enormous Russian buildup, whose fruits we now must contend with, and also allowed Moscow to build new counterforce and countervalue weapons that it regularly brandishes to threaten members (Trachtenberg 2020). A new treaty, preferably involving China – this author believes the Trump administration is correct here – should be negotiated and stringent verification measures must be part of that treaty or treaties.

This is a comprehensive, multidimensional, and whole-of-state strategy encompassing not only DIME but also issues and urgent global threats such as global health care and climate change. It aims to regenerate the Atlantic Alliance and foster still greater European integration under democratic auspices (including both the US and Canada). Unfortunately, no European entity can lead Europe on its own against Russia's threats or contain its power. There is no substitute for American power or leadership, but it must be exercised wisely, continuously, and in concert with its allies, who are America's greatest strength and asset. Moreover, the threats to international security are growing across the board. A fractured West cannot deal with them, and unless these global threats are confronted jointly, sooner rather than later, we will return to a period where the nihilistic quest for power rules and where, as Robert Kagan (2018) warned, "the jungle grows back."

Stephen J. Blank is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Eurasia Program. He has published over 900 articles and monographs on Soviet/Russian, US, Asian, and European military and foreign policies, testified frequently before Congress on Russia, China, and Central Asia, consulted for the Central Intelligence Agency, major think tanks and foundations, chaired major international conferences in the US and in Florence; Prague; and London, and has been a commentator on foreign affairs in the media in the US and abroad.

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China's Strategic Ambitions in the Xi Era and Threat to the Global Order

J. Michael Cole

Since the elevation of Xi Jinping to General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has embarked on an accelerated process of national consolidation which left behind his predecessors' more gradual approach to China's re-emergence (as Beijing sees it) as an equal among superpowers. Accompanied by hardened authoritarian rule in China and greater assertiveness within what it considers its sphere of influence, Xi's ambitious program has shaken the international order, causing apprehensions among the communi-

ty of democracies at a time when its principal flag bearer, the United States, seemed increasingly unable, or unwilling, to maintain that role.

Weakened by the economic crisis of 2008-2009, many democracies worldwide appeared to have lost their momentum and self-assurance. This created an opportunity for China to position itself – its despotic system of governance and Marxist political economy – as a better performing alternative to a sclerotic order. Meanwhile, the Obama administration's reluctance to push back against China's greater assertiveness in the South China Sea (SCS) emboldened Beijing to create new facts on the ground within its sphere of influence. Perceived retrenchment by Washington from the international stage, from its pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership to leaving the World Health Organization, added to the Trump administration's perceived undermining of an alliance system and withdrawal from international institutions, engendered new openings, which Beijing immediately seized.

> *Xi's ambitious program has shaken the international order, causing apprehensions among the community of democracies.*

By the third decade of the 21st century, as the world struggled to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, China seemed unstoppable. For far too long, European countries and Canada seemed oblivious that a resurgent China would have a transformative effect, not only in their own affairs, but just as consequential, on the very world order that had allowed them to prosper since the end of World War II. By 2020, it had become impossible to ignore the challenges that authoritarian China poses to our societies, institutions, businesses, and values. From efforts to corrode our democratic institutions to higher risks of armed conflict involving a would-be superpower that seems intent on flexing its muscles, China is no longer the distant, poor abstraction that it once was: It is now a reality, one which we all must learn to conjugate with.

This paper looks at the ideology behind China's strategic ambitions under Xi Jinping, the various means at its disposal – political, economic, military, "grey zone" – to exercise its growing power and influence, and the implications of this resurgence for the international community. It concludes with recommendations on how to respond to this challenge.

Xi Jinping and the "China Dream"

The rise of Xi Jinping coincided with a period when the Chinese believed that, after a century of humiliation, China's moment had finally arrived. Weakened by foreign powers and Mao Zedong's disastrous Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, China had to bide its time while it undertook economic reforms, launched under Deng Xiaoping, to regain its footing. For years afterwards, China set aside the rigid ideology that had characterized Mao's rule and began experimenting with free markets. Over time, it became a participant – eventually an indispensable one – in the global economy.

When ideology threatened to interfere with the rebuilding of China, such as during the Tiananmen Square Massacre in June 1989, leading to international sanctions, or in 1995-1996 when it bracketed Taiwan with missile exercises, Beijing pulled back and succeeded in regaining the confidence of the international community. Throughout the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao years, China ostensibly embraced the international system, joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001, while continuing to emphasize its commitment to a "peaceful rise" – a profession of benignity, to which much of the international community, distracted as it was by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, willingly subscribed despite evidence of rampant abuse of China's minorities.

> *"As the world struggled to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, China seemed unstoppable.*

During that period, displays of US military prowess during the Persian Gulf War (1991) and dispatching of two carrier battle groups near Taiwan during the Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis (1995-1996) convinced Beijing it should keep its expansionary ambitions in check until it had accumulated sufficient military capability to challenge the US military within its sphere of influence. Two years after the Gulf War, the Central Military Commission (CMC) adopted new military guidelines for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) which abandoned longstanding, army-centric commitments to defending continental China against foreign invasion and shifted to "winning local wars under modern especially high-technology conditions." The new doctrine, which would drive the modernization of the PLA over the coming three decades, emphasized the need for China to be able to "wage wars over limited aims that would be characterized by new ways of fighting" (Fravel 2019, 182).

All these dynamics converged in 2012 or so, with Xi's ambitions of "national rejuvenation," fuelled by an ebullient nationalism that had been cultivated since the early 1990s, giving rise to dreams of an imperial restoration of sorts – a "Chinese world order reassembled," as author Michael Schuman (2020, 309) characterizes it. Despite Beijing's greater assertiveness in the SCS and East China Sea (ECS) around the time of Hu's Work Report to the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the Obama administration's strategy toward China (and Russia) was one of "integration through diplomatic contact and membership in international institutions," with elements of "implicit containment, balancing, or deterrence" playing a secondary role (Dueck 2015, 72).

American (and Western) policy toward China around the time of Xi's emergence also reflected public perceptions of China that were far more favourable than they are today. According to the Pew Research Center, the year before Xi became CCP general secretary, 51 percent of Americans had a favourable view of China, against 36 percent who had an unfavourable one; the following year, as many Americans (40 percent) held a favourable view as those who did not. By 2020, only 26 percent perceived China favourably, compared with 66 percent who had a negative view (Pew Research Center 2020).

Throughout the years, Beijing has maintained it has a defensive military posture, combined with a foreign policy which revolves around Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (和平共處五項原則), namely: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, the origins of which date back to December 1953, when Premier Zhou Enlai held negotiations with the Indian government (CPC News 2014).

However, difficulties arise from Beijing's interpretation of "sovereignty," "territorial integrity," and "non-interference," terms which it has used to defend its claims of sovereignty over contested areas, among them Taiwan, the ECS, and SCS, as well as other areas where it has territorial disputes with its neighbours.[1] Informed by expansive (and oftentimes revisionist) historical claims rather than international law, China's ambitions incorporate peripheral territories (such as Taiwan), which, while not belonging to its sovereignty under international law, it treats as such and therefore would theoretically compel a "defensive" response by the PLA if challenged by external or local forces. How China defines sovereignty is therefore problematic and a source of potential military clashes with neighbouring countries as well as the US. This attitude also led Beijing to ignore a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague stating that China had no legal basis to claim historic rights to most of the SCS.[2]

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1 This includes Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tajikistan.

2 Cui Tiankai, the Chinese ambassador to the US, accused the tribunal of "professional incompetence" and "questionable integrity" (Hunt 2016).

The new guidelines implemented in 1993 also incorporated the first elements of a strategy that is increasingly aimed at deterring a US military intervention in a contingency within China's sphere of influence. Acquisitions of foreign military technology (primarily from Russia and Ukraine) and indigenous development – assisted by espionage,[3] theft,[4] and academic exchanges as part of the Thousand Talents Plan (千人计划)[5] – have been prioritized by the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Navy (PLAN). The PLA's missile arsenal is also aimed to deter "Taiwan independence" while threatening US Air Force bases in Okinawa. Later on, China's development of anti-ship ballistic missiles strengthened its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, designed to prevent US military access into the Western Pacific and deny its ability to safely operate in the theatre.

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3 A 2018 report by the US National Counterintelligence and Security Center notes, "China has expansive efforts in place to acquire U.S. technology to include sensitive trade secrets and proprietary information. It continues to use cyber espionage to support its strategic development goals — science and technology advancement, military modernization, and economic policy objectives" by using a "complex, multipronged technology development strategy that uses licit and illicit methods to achieve its goals." The report warns that China and other countries rely on "non-traditional collectors ('individuals for whom science or business is their primary profession to target and acquire US technology'), joint ventures, research partnerships, academic collaboration, science & technology investments, mergers & acquisitions, front companies, talent recruitment programs, intelligence services and finally laws and regulations to disadvantage foreign companies and give an advantage to its own companies." Cyber espionage activities prioritize the energy/alternative energy industry, biotechnology, defense technology, environmental protection, high-end manufacturing, and information and communications technology. The report identifies 49 priority sectors and technologies targeted by cyber espionage, from advanced pressurized water reactor and high-temperature, gas-cooled nuclear power stations to smart grids, biopharmaceuticals, new vaccines and drugs, aerospace, radar and optical systems, energy-efficient systems, 3D printing, high-performance composite materials, space infrastructure and exploration technology, artificial intelligence, high-end computer chips, and quantum computing and communications (see USA 2018).

4 Writing in *Exercise of Power: American Failures, Successes, and a New Path Forward in the Post-Cold War World*, the former US defense secretary Robert M. Gates (2020, 23) states that China has used "multiple lines of attack against the United States, Japan, and Europe," to acquire sensitive technology, some with military application, "including acquisition of companies with useful or cutting-edge technologies; agreements requiring foreign companies wanting to manufacture or do business in China to share sensitive processes and technology; hacking foreign companies' and governments' computer systems; planting moles in foreign companies; and outright theft."

5 According to Alex Joske (2020) of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, "China's prodigious recruitment of overseas scientists will be key to its ambition to dominate future technologies and modernise its military. Participants in talent-recruitment programs also appear to be disproportionately represented among overseas scientists collaborating with the Chinese military. Many recruits work on dual-use technologies at Chinese institutions that are closely linked to the People's Liberation Army." Conversely, another recent study notes that although "concerns over China's recruitment of science and technology experts for military-supporting roles are legitimate, the vast majority of YTTP awardees receive civilian-oriented job offers" (Fedasiuk and Feldgoise 2020).

By the close of the second decade of the 21st century, and after more than a decade of double-digit growth in defence spending, the PLA presented an altogether different challenge to regional powers and the US, the longstanding security guarantor in the Indo-Pacific. Equipped with an increasingly capable blue-water navy, one operational aircraft carrier (*Liaoning*), another recently commissioned (*Shandong*), and more on the way (Chan 2020),[6] a modern air force, a very capable (thanks to Russia) air defence architecture (S-300, S-400 missile systems), high-altitude surveillance, a more robust expeditionary force, and a formidable cruise and ballistic missile arsenal, the PLA was now seen to be able to prevail against regional powers while having a credible deterrent capability against the US. The Resolution of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on the Report of the 18th Central Committee in October 2017 states:

> Confronted with profound changes in our national security environment and responding to the demands of the day for a strong country with a strong military, we must stay committed to the Chinese path of building strong armed forces, fully implement Xi Jinping Thought on strengthening the military, adapt military strategy to new conditions, build a powerful and modernized army, navy, air force, rocket force, and strategic support force, develop strong and efficient joint operations commanding institutions for theater commands, and create a modern combat system with distinctive Chinese characteristics. With this we can fully advance the modernization of national defense and the military and transform our people's armed forces into world-class forces. (China 2017)

Interestingly, this was the first time the phrase "Xi Jinping Thought on strengthening the military" (习近平强军思想) appeared in official CCP declarations (CPC News 2018). Indicative of the prominence that "Xi Jinping Thought" now played in China's affairs, a "Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military" was inaugurated in 2018 at the PLA's Academy of Military Science (Qian 2020). Among other things, "Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military" calls for "a strong military that submits to the Party's command … in the process of working to realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" amid "containment and suppression by some Western countries." It continues: "A big country leading the world must be backed by a powerful military force. Looking at the history of human development, the rise of every country and nation is the result of its comprehensive national strength reaching the level of leading the world. One of the important factors is its strong national defense and military." This new military, Xi says, must "dare to fight and win wars." Only one other centre dedicated to a specific aspect of "Xi Jinping Thought" exists today, launched

6 China reportedly intends to have at least six carrier battle groups by 2035 amid plans to equal US naval power in the region.

in July 2020. That is the "Center for Research of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy," located at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the phrase "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy" [习近平外交思想] was first used by Foreign Minister Wang Yi in 2017; Qian 2020). (More below.)

Beijing has also used psychology (and the threat of its nuclear arsenal)[7] to remind the US that it takes its own objectives (e.g., the "reunification" of Taiwan) far more seriously than Washington ever could.[8] Armed with a modernized PLAN and PLAAF, the Chinese military has ramped up its transits along the Strait of Miyako between Japan and Taiwan, and the Bashi Channel between Taiwan and the Philippines. In early 2013, China also unilaterally declared an ADIZ in the ECS, raising tensions with Japan, over whose parts of its own ADIZ China's now overlapped, as well as Taiwan and the US (Osawa 2013). It now conducts regular live-fire military exercises beyond the First Island Chain in the West Pacific, has increased the frequency of its passages in the Taiwan Strait (including occasional incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ and the median line in the strait; Chen and Ko 2020), and has conducted regular intrusions in the ECS and SCS, in the latter of which it has built artificial islands and deployed various military assets. Besides relying on traditional navy vessels and submarines to shadow or expel foreign "intruders," China also relies on a "maritime militia" – ostensibly civilian fishing boats – to harass claimants in the SCS and ECS, thus blurring the line between civilian and military assets and complicating its adversaries' ability to respond (see Erickson and Kennedy 2015).

Intent on pushing the US further out of its sphere of influence and to extend its adversary's sea lines of communication, China has also used diplomacy, infrastructure investment, loans, and elite capture to strengthen its presence in the strategically important Pacific Islands. In September 2019, Beijing succeeded in convincing the government of the Solomon Islands to switch allegiance from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the PRC.[9] Elsewhere, China has also endeavoured to give its navy the ability to operate globally. Among other things, it has built and is now expanding, following its launch in 2017, a fortified naval support base at Djibouti in the Horn of Africa (Sutton 2020).

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7 According to Fravel (2019, 266), China has approximately 60 ICBMs (some equipped with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles, or MIRV) capable of hitting the US, with a total of about 80 nuclear warheads, and 60 shorter-range missiles equipped with a single nuclear warhead.

8 "Americans care more about Los Angeles than they do about Taiwan," Xiong Guangkai, a future PLA deputy chief of general staff, warned the former US assistant defense secretary Chas Freeman in 1996.

9 Soon after the diplomatic move, revelations emerged that the Solomon Islands' Central Province and China Sam Enterprise Group, a state-owned enterprise, had signed a secret deal for the long-term lease of the entire island of Tulagi to the Chinese company. Tulagi hosted American bases in World War II. The central government ruled the deal "unlawful," which led to its cancellation (see *Reuters* 2019).

The new assertiveness of the PLA, the hybrid nature of the assets involved in asserting China's territorial claims along its peripheries, hypernationalism cultivated by the CCP,[10] and an unproven chain of command in times of crisis all increase the risks of miscommunication, accidents, and military escalation in East Asia. Dynamics within China and the CCP stemming from a nationalist/victim sentiment could also make it difficult for Xi, who heads the CMC, to de-escalate for fear that he be accused of weakness.

Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics

Military power is only one component of China's rise to near-great-power status under Xi. Other elements, such as diplomacy, economics, and grey zone activities, have played an equally important role in taking China to the position it occupies today. Discussing "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy" in August 2020, Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated:

> Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, socialism with Chinese characteristics has marched into a new era with its head high, and the long-suffering Chinese nation has ushered in a great leap from standing up, getting rich, and getting stronger. Today's China is approaching the realization of the dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as never before, and approaching the center of the world stage as never before. At the same time, the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century. … Facing a turbulent international situation, General Secretary Xi Jinping used the vision of a great strategist to accurately grasp the laws of human social development, comprehensively judge the trend of the international situation and the historical position of our country, and put forward a series of Chinese initiatives reflecting the spirit of the times. (*CPC News* 2020a)

Xi Jinping Thought, he continues, "is a major achievement of epoch-making significance in the construction of new China's diplomatic theory. This *important ideological system* is clearly scientific, contemporary, advanced, and practical, and we should study it thoroughly and fully understand it." Wang underscores the centrality of Xi Jinping,[11] who appointed himself president for life in 2018 (*BBC* 2018), and of the CCP to China's foreign policy.[12]

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10 The best study of how the CCP has cultivated nationalism since the early 1990s is Zheng Wang's (2020) *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*.

11 His assertiveness has not been without its critics within the CCP, many of whom have suffered the consequences of voicing their opposition. Recently, Cai Xia, who was expelled from the Central Party School, stated that Xi's "unchecked power" has made China "the enemy of the world" (see Kuo 2020b).

12 No Chinese leader since Mao Zedong has had such a grip on every aspect of Chinese foreign and military affairs.

Xi Jinping Thought reaffirms a commitment to an *ideology* distinct from the Western-led liberal-democratic order:

> Promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind and promoting the construction of a new type of international relations constitute the core concept of Xi Jinping's diplomatic thinking, which incorporates the "eight clear" and "fourteen perseverances" of Xi Jinping's thinking on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the greatest political advantage of China's diplomacy. *Strengthening the party's centralized and unified leadership and overall coordination of foreign work is the fundamental political guarantee for the diplomatic cause from victory to victory*. Xi Jinping's diplomatic thinking adheres to dialectical materialism and historical materialism, scientifically uses Marxist standpoints and methods, pays attention to the combination of theory and practice, and the unity of epistemology and methodology. It has a deep insight into world development trends and a comprehensive review of China's interactions with the world. … General Secretary Xi Jinping adheres to the people-oriented value orientation of Marxism, using the living soul of Marxism, seeking truth from facts, combining the basic principles of Marxism with the practice of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, and enriching and developing Marxism with a series of original major ideas. The theory of international relations has achieved a historic leap in the field of diplomacy in the sinicization of Marxism. [italics added]

Xi Jinping Thought also calls for, or celebrates, "the establishment of a new international political and economic order." Xi still refers to the aforementioned Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. However, his insistence on the establishment of a new political and economic order signals that the Chinese model now presents a credible alternative to the Western-led system, one that, he argues, is in fact superior to its competitor. Nevertheless, under Xi's paranoid style of governance, laws have been passed that have severely curtailed the ability of foreign NGOs to operate in China, or to fund Chinese NGOs working on a variety of issues, including non-political ones.[13] Beijing's assault on the media (see RSF 2018) and academia, where more rigorous ideological guidelines have been implemented, has also constrained the ability of Chinese nationals to interact with foreign counterparts.

With the exception of territories it regards as part of its "core interests" (e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Xinjiang, and Tibet), Xi's vision does not aim to

13 The law, known as the Law of the People's Republic of China on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in the Mainland of China (中华人民共和国境外非政府组织境内活动管理法), came into force on January 1, 2017 (China 2017b).

impose China's model on other societies, nor to spark revolutions within the capitalist world for the eventual development of a Marxist economy.[14] Rather, China seeks to shape the international system in ways that favour its own model of development and governance, one which the philosopher John Keane (2020) describes as a "new despotism." Peaceful coexistence therefore remains a principle of China's foreign policy. However, when and where a different model threatens to derail its ambitions, China now believes it has the capacity to co-opt, compel, dissuade, and, if necessary, threaten. All this now occurs in a worldview in Beijing in which a specific hierarchy of nations, where China sits at the pinnacle, permits large countries to lord it over smaller ones.

It is at this juncture, where the old model and institutions, such as the United Nations, meet China's new ambitions, that the Western-led order faces its greatest challenge – a clash of ideologies that has led some commentators to refer to a "new Cold War."[15] At the UN, for example, Beijing has been playing a long game and using its growing influence to reframe the definition of human rights by diminishing the importance of political, civil, cultural, and minority rights that, under the China model, are "inconvenient and disruptive to their one-party control of society" (Piccone 2018). Besides the friction generated by this collision of two systems, which is far more complex than the Cold War between the West and the USSR (due in large part to the role China plays in the global economy), the other threat to the longstanding global order stems from the appeal of China's "new despotism" to a number of developing countries.

The attractiveness of a state-controlled economy and more authoritarian form of governance should not be underestimated, nor should we ignore the impact that China's development aid and infrastructure investment – the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB, 亚洲基础设施投资银行), and Eastern-Central Europe's 17+1 Initiative – can have on countries that either have grown disillusioned with Western-led institutions, such as the IMF or the World Bank, or whose governments are looking for infrastructure assistance without the usual Western conditions of democracy and transparency. China, as Gates observes, "seems especially adept at using its development projects to cultivate (and reward) the leaders of recipient countries and convert assistance into access and influence" (2020, 34). Consequently, China has sustained authoritarian regimes – chief among them those in Iran and North Korea – while forming alliances of convenience, or "special relationships," with a variety of others, including Cambodia, Pakistan, and Russia.[16] Chinese institutions have also provided assistance in such

14 Nevertheless, in an article published in the 16th issue of *Qiushi Journal*, Xi maintained that Marxist political economy must be studied to uphold and develop the concept of Marxism (see *Xinhua* 2020).

15 Beijing has often denigrated its critics by accusing them of having a "Cold War mentality."

16 Testifying before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in January 2019, US

areas as the establishment of surveillance networks in Uganda and Zambia (Parkinson, Bariyo, and Chin 2019), or training programs (along with the necessary indoctrination) for foreign journalists (Crismundo 2019).

China's "Grey Zone" Toolkit

The attractiveness of its economy notwithstanding, China has rather awkwardly deployed its "soft power" to cultivate friends within the international community. Attempts to do so, such as Confucius Institutes (*VoA* 2020), caused a backlash in schools worldwide amid fears that such institutes served as nests of propaganda and censorship. Reflecting China's greater assertiveness and perceptions of its place within the community of nations, Chinese ambassadors have also engaged in "wolf warrior diplomacy" (Westcott and Jiang 2020) and often threatened or acted rudely toward their host countries, a type of behaviour that became particularly prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic – when China's global "mask diplomacy" lost ground against Taiwan's – and after the passage of a new National Security Law (香港国家安全法) in Hong Kong (Wintour 2020).

Unable to turn its culture into an instrument of "soft power" in a manner similar to how the US did after World War II, China has therefore needed to rely on other instruments when traditional diplomacy fails. Much of this falls in the category of activities known as "sharp power."[17] And in 2016, Xi ordered a more robust strategy (Groot 2016) for the worldwide implementation of United Front Work.[18]

These tools have helped Beijing shape the environment in China's favour by undermining transparency and accountability in targeted countries and organizations. Through acquisitions, investment, and inserts, China has exported its propaganda and model of censorship to media abroad, taking special aim

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Director of National Intelligence Daniel R. Coats (2019) observed, "China and Russia are more aligned than at any point since the mid-1950s, and the relationship is likely to strengthen in the coming year as some of their interests and threat perceptions converge, particularly regarding perceived US unilateralism and interventionism and Western promotion of democratic values and human rights."

17 For recent studies of the global impact of Chinese "sharp power," see Hamilton and Ohlberg (2020) and Hsu and Cole (eds.) (2020).

18 The CCP's overall strategy of political warfare is set by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC, 中国人民政治协商会议), which brings together the various participants in this effort: intelligence officers, diplomats, propagandists, party elders, military officers, workers with the United Front, academics, media workers, and businesspeople. Under the CPPCC Standing Committee, the Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Affairs Committee (港澳台侨委员会) is in charge of orchestrating that strategy, which is then implemented by various agencies, among them the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office (国务院台湾事务办公室), the People's Liberation Army (中国人民解放军), the United Front Work Department (中共中央统一战线工作部), various ministries, and a plethora of other actors within society (foundations, think tanks, organized crime, private individuals) and enterprises.

at Chinese-language outlets (censorship within China also demonstrated, in the early weeks of COVID-19 in December 2019, how hiding information can exacerbate a global pandemic). China, which has invested heavily in film production,[19] has been normalizing the censorship of Hollywood films as a prerequisite for distribution in the Chinese market (Pen America 2020). The CCP has co-opted foreign academics who rely on Beijing's "goodwill" for their access to China, often through seminars, research funding, or all-expenses-paid visits by benign-sounding entities with links to the United Front Work Department or the PLA. It has also captured foreign government officials, retired military generals, intelligence chiefs, and diplomats – often through "corrosive capital" (see Hala 2020) or the offer of lucrative positions at Chinese enterprises, casinos, and so on.

All of this has facilitated China's ability to shape policy-making in targeted countries. Corruption and lack of transparency have given Beijing ample opportunities to capture and influence senior officials in developing countries through the promise of infrastructure investment.[20] China has also leveraged its economic might to encourage foreign companies to influence the policies of their governments and the focus of research conducted at think tanks they sponsor. Bribery and elite capture with UN member states (particularly in the developing world; see USA 2019) have contributed to a much greater influence by China at the UN General Assembly and in the election of several Chinese nationals to head specialized UN institutions (see USA 2020a; Lee 2020). Often, these institutions have subordinated themselves to Beijing's policy preferences, such as its "one China principle," resulting in Taiwan's inability to participate, even as an observer – a blind spot whose folly became apparent during COVID-19 (USA 2020b).

Chinese embassies and consulates, along with United Front organizations, have mobilized overseas Chinese to protest government policies seen as "anti-China," while Chinese officials and various proxies (including organized crime) have conducted surveillance against and intimidated various overseas minorities, among them Falun Gong practitioners, Hong Kong activists, Taiwanese, Tibetans, and Uighurs (Tsavkko Garcia 2019). China has also used its influence to infiltrate and divide those organizations. Troublingly, the CCP has also stated that ethnic Han Chinese, wherever they are, and whatever nationality they may have acquired, continue to have a responsibility "to serve the motherland" (Parker 2020), which can both engender a national security

19 A new guideline for the production of science-fiction films in China, released in August 2020 by the National Film Administration and the China Association for Science and Technology, states that the first priority is to "reflect Chinese values" and "thoroughly study and implement Xi Jinping Thought" (see Davis 2020; see also *CPC News* 2020b).

20 A good example of Chinese use of capital to co-opt the leadership of a foreign country is the case of the Shanghai-based China Energy Fund Committee in the Czech Republic (see Karaskova 2018).

threat for host countries and contribute to suspicion and xenophobia toward the great majority of perfectly law-abiding members of the Chinese diaspora.

Whenever "lesser" countries in China's hierarchy of states have challenged Beijing's dictate, China has retaliated by weaponizing trade or tourism, or by threatening to reduce the flow of full-tuition-paying Chinese students to cash-strapped universities (Bagshaw, Hunter, and Liu 2020). In more extreme cases, it has resorted to outright kidnapping of foreign nationals, such as Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, following the December 2018 arrest and possible extradition to the US of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver (Connolly 2020). In recent years, individuals with Swedish (Gui Minhai), Australian (Feng Chongyi, Cheng Lei, Yang Hengjun), and Taiwanese (Lee Ming-che) nationality or permanent resident status have also been detained by China, on charges that would not stand scrutiny in an independent court system (see Kuo 2020a; Greene 2017; Bagshaw 2020; *Al Jazeera* 2019; *BBC* 2017). Following passage of the Hong Kong National Security Law in June 2020, fears increased of the increasingly extraterritorial nature of China's domestic laws, which threatens individuals wanted by the CCP whenever they travel to countries that have close relations with Beijing (see Freedom House 2020).

China has also interfered with elections in foreign countries through money transfers (using business channels) and by launching disinformation campaigns using social media, content farms, and traditional proxy media within the targeted societies. "Internet armies" and revisionist content farms have been used to counter the narrative surrounding reports of concentration camps in Xinjiang (Allen-Ebrahimian 2020) and unrest in Hong Kong in 2019-2020 (Li 2019). Chinese entities have also resorted to "lawfare" – the use or threat of legal action – to intimidate and censor its critics in the media and academia.

All these activities occur in the grey zone of our legal systems; some, albeit not all, are illegal, which poses a challenge to law enforcement and intelligence agencies, while making prosecution more difficult. In the aggregate, China's "sharp power" has eroded our democratic institutions and belief therein, and, in some cases, put into doubt the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. China's efforts have encouraged corruption and undermined transparency, while disinformation and "whataboutism" have served to confuse and create (false) moral equivalences in which the objective truth no longer matters. Propaganda efforts, meanwhile, have attempted to demoralize our societies and deflate the West by emphasizing notions of its supposedly inevitable demise.

Recommendations

In order to successfully counter the threat posed by a revisionist, despotic superpower, democracies must first acknowledge that this challenge is unprecedented in its complexity, and that it represents a fundamental menace to the longstanding rules-based liberal-democratic order – that what we are facing today is *a clash of ideologies*. Before they can appropriately push back against China, democracies must first get their own affairs in order through intelligent and courageous leadership, a renewed commitment to democratic ideals, transparency, and accountability, and a reinvigorated effort to lead and shape international institutions where our inattention – and US retrenchment – has created a vacuum that China has willingly filled.

The alliance of democracies must be repaired and tailored to meet contemporary challenges, and member states must be more willing to do burden-sharing in areas where the US may no longer be interested in, or capable of, leading. Other measures include:

- Deepen investment in programs and institutions that are engaged in the study of, and combating, authoritarian influence. Key fora, such as the G7 and the Five Eyes intelligence community,[21] must redouble their cooperation and widen the tent of membership by including other important partners – among them Taiwan, which sits on the frontline of the clash of ideologies and where China's military and "grey zone" flexing is at its most focused. These institutions must also re-evaluate their priorities to reflect today's greatest challenges, which signifies a reorientation of resources to ensure a collective response to China.
- Increase collaboration among foundations with global reach engaged in democracy promotion and human rights protection. Amid the Western hubris that followed the Cold War, many states defunded or shut down government-sponsored NGOs involved in democracy promotion. Given that history did not end in 1991, and that democracy once again finds itself challenged by an alternative model, governments should consider reversing those policies. Those efforts should also be combined with reenergized public diplomacy and counter-propaganda campaigns, instruments which have also been neglected since the end of the Cold War.
- Adopt or update laws governing our law enforcement and intelligence agencies to reflect the "grey zone" nature of the challenge that China poses to our democratic societies; implement more robust anti-influence mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of elite capture by Beijing.

21 Japan has recently expressed the desire to be included in an enlarged "Six Eyes" community (see Abe and Miki 2020).

- Acquire a better understanding of Chinese strategic thinking, its aims, and the mechanisms by which it wields its power. This should be accompanied by a greater willingness to challenge Beijing when doing so is in the national interest, or suitable to the defence of human rights and democratic principles.
- Reduce our dependence on the Chinese economy to increase our room to manoeuvre and mitigate our vulnerability to espionage and hacking.
- Increase engagement with the Chinese diaspora to both reassure and learn from it, and build a firewall between those communities and entities that are involved in activities that are antithetical to our values.
- Increase defence spending and acquisition of systems that are suitable for current and future contingencies; "pivot" to reflect the fact that the Indo-Pacific is now the most important region on the planet and the likeliest stage for major armed conflict; and increase cooperation and operational jointness with allies and partners in the region.
- Improve infrastructure aid packages, loans, and grants to the developing world, especially in areas targeted by China's BRI; increase collaboration among global partners (e.g., US' Millennium Challenge Corporation, Japan International Cooperation Agency, etc.) with a proven track record of implementing such programs; and ramp up strategic communication.

Finally, we must regain our footing and self-esteem by ignoring Chinese propaganda about the "inevitability" of the West's decline and through a reinvestment in our human capital and belief in the wisdom of our democratic ideals.

J. Michael Cole is a Taipei-based senior fellow with the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, senior fellow with the China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham, associate researcher with the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, chief editor of *Taiwan Sentinel*, and assistant coordinator of the Forum 2000's China working group. Michael was deputy news editor and a reporter at the *Taipei Times* from 2006 to 2013. Prior to moving to Taiwan in 2005, he was an intelligence officer for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service in Ottawa.

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The Sino-Russian Subversion of the International Order

Balkan Devlen

The international order has been under tremendous strain for some time now, and the COVID-19 crisis exacerbates those tensions. The security, freedom, and prosperity of Canadians and Europeans, alongside other democracies in the world, rely heavily on repairing and strengthening this order. However, revisionist authoritarian states such as China and Russia have also intensified their efforts to subvert the current global order and replace it with one in which spheres of influence are the organizing framework and "might makes it right" is the normative principle. Understanding this challenge is essential if democracies are to emerge from this competition victorious.

This paper aims to provide a sketch of this authoritarian challenge to the international order. First, it explores the three drivers behind the Kremlin and Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s challenge, namely their neo-authoritarian ideology, the imperative of regime survival, and the shifting global balance of power. Second, the paper discusses the features of an international order that is shaped by Russia and China. Third, subversion and political warfare – as the primary ways in which this contest between democracies and autocracies is being carried out – are discussed with examples of Russian and Chinese political warfare during the COVID-19 crisis. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations on what is to be done to deal with this challenge.

Understanding the Drivers

What drives the Sino-Russian challenge against the West? Although Russia and China have their own specific reasons to challenge and undermine the rules-based international order (RBIO), there are three common drivers that underlie the challenge posed by these authoritarian regimes: Both regimes are neo-authoritarian in their ideology, perceive the RBIO as an existential threat to their domestic regime survival, and are convinced that the shifts in global balance of power favours them and not the West.

The ruling ideology of both Putin and Xi can be best described as a form of neo-authoritarianism (Friedberg 2017; Wright 2017; Belton 2020). In the beginning, Putin's regime was more personalized in nature and Xi's rule was based on the CCP's institutional power. However, starting with the CCP's 19th Congress in 2017 and continuing with the abolishing of term limits in March 2018 and the enshrining of Xi Jinping Thought in the country's constitution, Chinese neo-authoritarianism is getting closer to the Russian model, with Xi at the centre of everything.

The essence of this ideology is the belief in the necessity of a strong leader to promote economic growth, protect the regime, and advance the national interest abroad. Here the personal fortunes of the leader are assumed to be one and the same with the national interest and thus any threat to Putin's or Xi's rule is perceived to be an existential threat to Russia or China. Such regimes cannot tolerate dissent, at home or abroad. They are characterized by suppression of free speech, tight control of traditional and social media, repression against political and religious dissident groups, and, especially in the case of PRC, a vast surveillance infrastructure that reaches every aspect of political and social life. As discussed in the next section, this shared neo-authoritarian ideology enables Putin and Xi to frame their common opposition to RBIO as existential and surmount the lingering suspicions between the two countries dating back to the Cold War.

Russia and China share a common interest in undermining the RBIO, as they perceive it as an existential threat to the ruling regimes in both countries.

This imperative of regime survival is crucial to understand the Sino-Russian alignment at the international level. More than anything else, it is this perceived common threat to the survival of neo-authoritarian regimes in these countries that makes the strategic partnership between Russia and China an enduring one, despite tensions in other areas (Wright 2017; Ferrari and Ambrosetti 2019). The CCP explicitly identifies values and norms such as liberal democracy, freedom of press, freedom of expression, and human rights as threats to its rule in its own internal documents (Greer 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Rolland 2020a, 2020b; Tobin 2020). The existence of a thriving democracy right across the straits in Taiwan makes the undermining of the international order led by liberal democracies even more urgent in the eyes of the CCP.

Putinist notion of "sovereign democracy" (Lipman 2006) intentionally positions itself against liberal democracy and the Kremlin's propaganda about a decadent West in decay and decline, in part due to the expansion of civil rights to previously marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ communities (Foxall 2017), is meant to warn the Russian people of the dangers of liberal values. The emergence of free and democratic societies that are prospering in the post-Soviet space, the place the Kremlin labels "near abroad," is a constant threat to Putin and his regime, much like the dynamic between the CCP and Taiwan, since they are proof that an authoritarian kleptocracy is not the only way for former communist countries.

It is important to note that the Kremlin and CCP's perception of the threat to their regime survival is asymmetrical vis-à-vis liberal democracies. In other words, liberal democracies do not perceive the existence of authoritarian regimes per se as a threat to their survival. It is the actions of those regimes at the international level and their attempts to subvert the international order as well as domestic politics of democracies that are the threat. The same is not true for authoritarian regimes. The very existence of functioning, prosperous liberal democracies, regardless of whether they engage in promoting their values elsewhere, is the threat for authoritarian regimes. Those neo-authoritarian regimes cannot afford alternative, democratic narratives to challenge their own legitimizing narratives at home.

It is crucial to emphasize this point because the consequence of this asymmetry is that the fundamental interests of democratic nations are irreconcilable with those of authoritarian regimes. Unless democratic countries repudiate what makes them who they are, they will remain a threat to authoritarian regimes. The notion of a "grand bargain" with China and Russia, where they will stop trying to undermine and subvert democratic nations in return for "non-interference" and recognition of "spheres of influence," is an illusion.

It is an undeniable fact that China's military and economic power is on the rise and this process has sped up in the last decade. As China becomes more powerful, it also becomes more aggressive in its dealing with other countries

– from maritime bullying in the South and East China Seas to its territorial aggrandizement along the Sino-India border to its economic blackmail and hostage-taking against Canada (and others).[1] Especially under the presidency of Xi and since 2017, a more emboldened CCP believes that time has come for China to stop following Deng's dictum of hiding its capabilities and biding its time and instead shape a new international order with CCP-led China at the centre (Greer 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Rolland 2020a, 2020b; Tobin 2020). Xi's grand project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), would be the centrepiece of this new international order (Rolland 2020b). Underlying all this is the belief in Beijing that a power transition is happening and the West is facing inevitable decline.

Russia, in contrast, is not a rising power but a recovering power. Furthermore, this recovery was and will be limited. Putin recognizes that he only has a short window of opportunity where Russia can still punch above its weight and thus shape the emerging international order. So for different reasons – for Xi impatience and for Putin necessity – both China and Russia believe that they need to speed up this shift in global power away from the West and restructure the international order to their liking. Engaging in political warfare and subversion against the West, as discussed below, is a crucial component of this strategy.

The World of Putin and Xi

What kind of a world would we live in if China and Russia successfully undermined the existing international order? Although their specific foreign policy aims differ from each other's, Putin's and Xi's visions share four common features in terms of the international order they would create.

First, it would be a tiered international order where not all states are "truly" sovereign. This is most clear in Putin's (2017) thinking regarding the former Soviet Republics, but Xi also displays a similar understanding of an international order that is divided into great powers, who have "real" sovereignty, and others, who are not "quite" sovereign. I call this the "Animal Farm" understanding of sovereignty, after George Orwell's famous novel. In other words, all are sovereign but some are more sovereign than others.

Second, it would be a kratocracy in which "might makes it right," both domestically and internationally. The CCP and Kremlin's normative worldview is predicated on an understanding that being in power in itself bestows a legitimacy and moral authority and thus challenges to that authority are both illegitimate and immoral. Criticism and dissent, domestically and internationally, are seen as threats that need to be quashed. Those who dared to oppose

1 On hostage-taking by the CCP, see, for instance, Bagshaw (2020) and Connoly (2020) for recent examples where Canadian and Australian citizens are detained by the CCP.

the Kremlin or the CCP would be bullied into submission as others look away lest they attract the authoritarians' ire themselves.

Third, it would be a world in which millions of people living in the self-declared spheres of influence of Russia and China are subject to the whims of powers-that-be in Beijing and Moscow. Their foreign policy choices would be constrained; their domestic politics and economy would operate under the shadow of the Kremlin or the CCP; their political classes would be co-opted by or forced to appease Beijing or Moscow. Political and civil liberties would be curtailed, dissenting voices stilled, and democratic institutions corrupted, since the presence of liberal and democratic regimes on the borders of Russia and China would be constant reminders that one is not destined to live under a dictatorship.

> *"China and Russia believe that they need to speed up this shift in global power away from the West.*

Lastly, it would be a world in which genocide, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes would go unpunished, dictators could jail, torture, and prosecute their opponents with impunity as long as they kow-tow to the Kremlin or the CCP, and defending human rights of others would become a subversive, almost a criminal, act. This would be justified and legitimized with reference to non-intervention and sovereignty principles. Those who objected would be accused of undermining international peace and stability and subverting the international order.

In this divided world – between great powers and others, those within Russian and Chinese spheres of influence and the rest – relations would be purely transactional, economic and political blackmail common, and the threat of military conflict ever present. It would be a bleak future where the progress of human rights and democracy in the last three decades is rolled back.

It is true that neither the Kremlin nor the CCP seems to be interested in exporting their respective regimes abroad. However, the argument that therefore this is not an ideological confrontation and we should come to some sort of a grand bargain with Russia and China to avoid another Cold War misses the point. It misses the point because, as argued above, the aim is not to make other countries, including Western democracies, authoritarian but to undermine them to a degree that they cease to exist as viable alternatives for the people under the yoke of the CCP and the Kremlin. In other words, the

presence of successful liberal democratic societies will continue to be a threat to both regimes as long as they can inspire their own people and show them that a better, freerer society is possible. China's snuffing out of freedoms in Hong Kong and its ongoing political warfare against Taiwan (Cole 2020) and Putin's continued support for the Belarusian dictator Lukashenko in the face of unprecedented massive protests after the rigged elections in August 2020 are but the most recent examples of this worldview. It also misses the point because acceding to such an international order would also corrode our liberal democracies. It would represent a betrayal of our most cherished values and principles. It would mean accepting that there are second-class peoples in the world who do not deserve to live in a free society. It would play into the hands of our adversaries who argue that the Western defence of freedom, democracy, and human rights is nothing but a facade.

This is not alarmism, as some argue, nor is it a call for regime change in China or Russia. It is clear that any change for those regimes should come from the people in China and Russia. It is, however, both in the interest of and a moral obligation for liberal democracies to support those who resist Chinese or Russian subversion, to somewhat paraphrase President Harry S. Truman.

Subversion as Statecraft: Russian and Chinese Political Warfare Against the West

Political warfare, or subversion, is the primary tool used by China and Russia against the West in their struggle to reshape the international order. The use and the threat of use of military force remain the last resort for both China and Russia, since they are still militarily weaker than the West.[2] Furthermore, both China and Russia want to avoid a military confrontation with a West that retains military superiority. Therefore, they resort to measures short of war (Wright 2017), and primary among them is subversion or political warfare.

What is political warfare? George Kennan (1948) defines political warfare as "the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives." As Robinson and Cohen (2018) argue in their primer on modern political warfare, "Political warfare spanned a range of overt and covert activities, across all elements of national power diplomatic, informational, military and economic—to coerce an adversary and achieve contested ends below the threshold of conventional conflict."

A closely related concept is subversion. Breitenbauch and Byrjalsen define it the following way:

> Subversion is best understood as a state's purposive destabilisation and undermining of the authority and functioning of other states in

2 See Cole's and Blank's chapters in this report.

> order to achieve significant political gains. It involves a number of different instruments below the threshold of war but above the level of diplomacy, employed by state actors to advance political objectives. These instruments include cyber attacks, election meddling, assassinations, espionage, disinformation campaigns, seizure of foreign territory without using traditional means of warfare, strategic investments abroad, and external sponsorship and support of repressive autocrats. Political objectives, in turn, may include creating confusion and sowing discord, gradually eroding the legitimacy of a political system, nourishing counter-elites, facilitating regime change, and exerting far-reaching control over the foreign-policy decisions of other states. (2019, 31)

As both J. Michael and Stephen Blank describe in their chapters in this report, Chinese and Russian subversion campaigns against the West have been going on for at least 15 years. Much has been written on Chinese and Russian political warfare activities against the West, especially since the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014.[3] Among the "active measures" (Rid 2020) employed by Russia and China have been: election interference (USA 2020; Kolga, Janda, and Vogel 2019; Rid 2020), assassination of regime dissidents on foreign soil, disinformation campaigns to exacerbate tensions in Western societies (Rid 2020; Kolga et al. 2019; Galeotti 2019; Polyakova and Boyer 2018; Hamilton and Ohlberg 2020), support of anti-democratic extreme right- and left-wing parties (Butt and Byman 2020; Gyori and Kreko 2017), coercion against diaspora communities (Hamilton and Ohlberg 2020; Chen 2018; Hsu and Cole 2020), corruption (Galeotti 2019; Chen 2018, 2019; Hala 2020; Hamilton and Ohlberg 2020), and, of course, cyberattacks (Wilner et al. 2019; Kolga et al. 2019). In other words, Russia and increasingly China use the whole arsenal of subversion to attack liberal democracies around the world.[4] The purpose is to weaken liberal democracies to make them unable or unwilling to stand up to Russia and China as they reshape the international order.

The COVID-19 pandemic that started in Wuhan, China, and spread around the world, in part due to the concealment, corruption, and ineptitude of the CCP (Teich 2020), provided another opportunity for subversion for both Russia and China. Although the Kremlin and the CCP both launched disinformation campaigns, their goals and tactics were different.

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3 The literature on political warfare is having a renaissance in the past five years. In this expanding literature, for Russian political warfare, among others, see Galeotti (2019), Rid (2020), Wright (2017), Robinson and Cohen (2018), Conley et. al (2016), Fox (2017), Sherr (2013), Chivvis (2017), Polyakova and Boyer (2018), and Dickey (2015). For Chinese political warfare, among others, see Chen (2018, 2019), Hamilton and Ohlberg (2020), Cole (2020), Weitz (2020), Michta (2020), Suri (2020), Hala (2020), and Hsu and Cole (2020).

4 Especially see Hamilton and Ohlberg (2020) and Hsu and Cole (2020) for a detailed account of China's political warfare.

China's primary goal with its COVID-19 disinformation campaign is to shape the narrative around the emergence of and the fight against the virus. The CCP needed to create a narrative that portrayed China in a positive light, erasing the regime's culpability in turning an epidemic into a global pandemic, while hailing it as a saviour of other nations through "gifts" of personal protective equipment (PPE) – which were almost always paid for and in many cases defective – as well as other medical materials. In this narrative, the CCP recognized the problem early on, took all the necessary precautions, and when "unfortunately" it became a pandemic, the regime acted swiftly and decisively to contain and suppress the spread of the virus. China is *the* success story through its "superior" policies and "farsighted" leadership in this narrative. The slowness of the initial Western response, particularly the Trump administration's denial of the seriousness of the situation, its failure to act swiftly and decisively in the early stages of the pandemic, and its bungled response afterwards, provided an opportunity that the CCP could exploit in advancing its preferred narrative of success.

"Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, China continually obstructed attempts to investigate the origins of the virus.

As a part of this narrative strategy, China turned to its "wolf warrior" diplomats (Kuwahara 2020; Westcott and Jiang 2020) to denounce anyone who criticized the CCP's handling of the COVID-19 crisis. They spread conspiracy theories about the origin of the novel coronavirus in order to shift blame away from the CCP and its handling of the pandemic (Miller 2020; EEAS 2020). China even successfully managed to water down a European Union report on disinformation during the COVID-19 crisis and censored an op-ed written by EU officials for a Chinese newspaper (Jozwiak 2020). After hoarding PPE all around the world, China conditioned the sending of PPE to other countries to publicly thanking China and posing with the delivery of supplies as a part of a PR campaign. Many of those supplies and tests turned out to be defective or below the acceptable standards (*BBC* 2020). What made it even worse, in most cases the countries actually purchased that PPE from China after donating PPE to China in the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, China continually obstructed attempts to investigate the origins of the virus and threatened such countries as Australia and Canada with economic repercussions when they advocated

the establishment of a special commission to investigate the responsibility of local and national CCP authorities in the mishandling of the initial stages of the pandemic (Needham 2020).

These attempts, although they stifled open and direct criticism of the CCP by those who are more vulnerable to China's blackmail, were rather unsophisticated and so ham-handed that they led to the opposite of what the CCP hoped to achieve. Alarmed by the aggressiveness of Chinese information operations, together with increasing awareness of the oppression in Hong Kong and the ongoing cultural genocide against Uyghurs in Xinjiang (East Turkestan), many in the West – including several European and Canadian policy-makers – had a rude awakening regarding the true nature and purpose of the CCP regime in China (Michta 2020; Suri 2020; Baer-Bader 2020). The full extent and the consequences of this backlash are yet to be seen; however, it is clear that policy-makers and the public in liberal democracies are more alert to the Chinese subversion since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

"Policy-makers and the public in liberal democracies are more alert to the Chinese subversion since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

Russia, on the other hand, pursued a different strategy. For the Kremlin, COVID-19 presented yet another opportunity to sow confusion, distrust, and discontent in the West and undermine the public's trust and confidence in their governments and institutions. Russia did not have a particular need to shape the narrative like China did (except with regards to painting the Kremlin as competent and on top of things in dealing with the novel coronavirus), so instead it promoted a multiplicity of narratives and conspiracy theories. Those narratives depicted European governments as impotent in the face of the pandemic and the EU as a dysfunctional, remote institution composed of members who do not care about or help each other (EEAS 2020; Bordachev 2020). Russian troll accounts promoted all sorts of conspiracy theories regarding the origins of the virus and efficacy of different treatments, and agitated against the lockdown measures adopted by several countries in response to the pandemic (EEAS 2020; Weitz 2020; Sukhankin 2020; Emmott 2020). Given the increasing role of Russian bots and trolls on social media in pushing the anti-vax conspiracies in the United States, there is no doubt that Kremlin disinformation will try to undermine the public's confidence in the safety and efficacy of the vaccines once they become available.

What Is to Be Done?

How should the West respond to the attempts of subversion and constant waging of political war by Russia and China?

First, democracies need to recognize the nature of the threat we are facing from the authoritarian regimes of Russia and China. This clear-eyed view is essential in developing defences against subversion and to counter political warfare. As argued above, understanding how and why the Kremlin and the CCP want to transform the international order remains key to bringing the community of democracies together in defence of the rules-based international order.

> *"The West needs to develop counter-subversion policies at home that are in line with liberal and democratic values.*

Second, democracies need to develop a better understanding of subversion and political warfare, since these are and will be the main tools of statecraft that the authoritarian regimes will use against us. As Breitenbauch and Byrjalsen (2019) argue persuasively, we need to think of subversion and counter-subversion as a distinct type of statecraft alongside diplomacy and war. The West needs to develop counter-subversion policies at home that are in line with liberal and democratic values, on the one hand, and explore subversion as statecraft against our adversaries, on the other.

Third, societal resilience is essential in dealing with shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic as well as subversion by hostile actors. Improving digital literacy to fight disinformation, fighting corruption and increasing transparency and accountability in politics and business, exposing elite capture, and, most importantly, instilling a sense of pride in our values among the public and standing up to defend them against authoritarian onslaught are all crucial elements of developing societal resilience.

Fourth, we should reduce our exposure to Chinese and Russian economic and technological blackmail. This means, among other measures, we need to reduce European dependence on Russian natural gas and diversify Europe's energy supply. Canadian LNG can and should play a role in such a strategy. It also means reducing our dependence on China for our critical supply chains,

as the COVID-19 crisis and the scramble for PPE clearly demonstrated. We should also not allow Chinese state-controlled companies, such as Huawei, into our critical infrastructure. Allowing Huawei into the 5G infrastructure would have serious national security implications (Chen 2020) and would provide the CCP with an enormous leverage against the West in future crises.

Lastly, democracies should have each other's backs when faced with threats and bullying from authoritarian regimes. Both China and Russia prefer to deal with others in bilateral settings, where they can exert greater political and military pressure. In other words, the Kremlin and the CCP prefer to pick us off one by one. That is something we should not allow. For instance, Canada and Australia should not face Chinese economic coercion and hostage diplomacy alone. The West should stand with Taiwan against the CCP's bullying and political warfare. We should continue to support Ukraine in the face of the ongoing illegal occupation of Crimea and Russia's invasion in eastern Ukraine. If we wish to defend our freedoms and values against authoritarian subversion and preserve and protect the rules-based international order that enabled those freedoms as well as our prosperity, we should stand together. In other words, as Benjamin Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

Balkan Devlen is a Senior Fellow at Macdonald-Laurier Institute, Adjunct Research Professor at Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, and Superforecaster for Good Judgment, Inc. He is also the publisher of Hindsight 20/20, a newsletter on uncertainty, foresight, and geopolitics. His primary research interests are: geopolitics from the Baltics to the Middle East, foreign and security policies of Russia, and Turkey, decision-making under uncertainty, and forecasting and strategic foresight. Previously he was Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, a Marie Sklodowska Curie Fellow, Ozerdinc-Grimes Fellow at Carleton University, Black Sea Young Reformers Fellow, and Levin Institute Fellow.

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