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American Hegemony and China-Russia Entente Cordiale

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Dr Shahid Hameed¹

Abstract

The American unipolar hegemony over global order has begun flickering in just a decade after the Soviet Union's dissolution. Russia has resurged and China has risen, and an informal alliance has emerged between the two against the American-led axis to contain both powers. China and Russia have not been natural allies, but a joint threat is fusing their common interests. The so-called Global War on Terror (GWOT) was a phase that profoundly altered global politics and led China and Russia to two broad common objectives i.e., rationalize US-led world order and fragment unipolarity into controlled regions. China is played as the primary and Russia as the secondary bogey to Western dominated global order, but the reality may be different. Status quo in the international order suits the US because addressing Russian "will" and so-called "offensive character" are ostensibly a bigger challenge than containing China. This paper offers an analysis that the US faces a bigger challenge to curtail Russian objective of building controlled regions than containing China's economic and strategic maneuvers. Russian and Chinese grand strategies to rationalize global order have some congruent and independent objectives.

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Introduction

Blackwill defines the world order as “a shared understanding among the major powers to limit the potential for serious confrontation, including among competitors and adversaries.”² Before discussing the contemporary shake-up in international power politics, one must explore a basic question: who decides the world order? Is this a structurally dictated phenomenon with a natural rise and fall, or can states control, maintain, and revive it? Mearsheimer defines “an order” as essentially comprising major powers and international institutions that ensure a comfortable interaction among states. Incidentally, each state in the international system does not have an essential role in making an order.³ Wealth and power in fact shift from one state or region to another over time. Likewise, the focus of major powers may also shift from one region to another. This can be considered an inextricable part of changing orders.⁴ States make institutions to regulate the international system; however, once an order begins to function, it transforms and influences all active members.

When major powers find themselves in trouble, they feel that they are not contented with regulations anymore and attempt to enforce rules by force.⁵ The use of force or threat

2. Robert D., and Thomas Wright. “The End of World Order.” *The End of World Order and American Foreign Policy*. Council on Foreign Relations, (2020) p.8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25044.7>.

3. Mearsheimer, Jhon J. Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of Liberal International Order, *International Security*, Vol. 43, No.4 (Spring 2019) p.9.

4. Ikenberry, G. John. “The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism after America.” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (2011): 56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23039408>; Also see Ikenberry, G. John. “Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order.” *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 1 (2009): 71–87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40407217>; Blackwill, Robert D., and Thomas Wright. “The End of World Order.”

5. See Mearsheimer, Bound to Fail, p.9. He argues “...the great powers write those rules to suit their own interests. But when the rules do not accord with the vital interests of the

to use force creates turmoil in the existing order and a conflict of interest between or among major powers, which creates a dangerous security situation that makes it difficult for member states to breach the status quo. This interdependence of systems versus states weakens international institutions and supporting organizations, ultimately leading to the demise of an order. The comparatively recent demise of the bipolar world order can be understood through a simple gauge of the failure of institutions and international organizations, and the failure of major powers to perform satisfactory roles in maintaining stability and order. Thus, world order refers to the role of influential organizations and powerful states in conducting contemporary international affairs.

The diminishing role of the United Nations (UN) as the keystone in the contemporary order created space for major powers to pursue the idea of controlled power structures through regional organizations and connectivity. Although the emergence of new organizations and efforts to reform international organizations has been termed as oxygen for the so-called existing liberal international order, these developments betray the looming predicament of major powers.⁶ The power contestation is shaping new dimensions where these powers are no more ready to accept any supremacy formula and begrudge each other's expansionist policies. The emergence of new economic and military powers at the regional level is another factor that increases the demand for a remodeled world.

dominant states, those same states either ignore them or rewrite them.”

6. Lai, David. “The Power Transition Theory.” *The United States and China in Power Transition*. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, (2011) p.6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12113.7>; Also see the regional cases Kim, Woosang. “Power Parity, Alliance, Dissatisfaction, and Wars in East Asia, 1860-1993.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 5 (2002): 654–71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176196>; Also see, Chan, Steve. “Can’t Get No Satisfaction? The Recognition of Revisionist States.” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 4, no. 2 (2004): 207–38, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26156514>; Chan, Steve. “Is There a Power Transition between the U.S. and China? The Different Faces of National Power.” *Asian Survey* 45, no. 5 (2005): 687–701, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2005.45.5.687>.

Unfolding China's World Order

China's rise is currently the most debated issue in international relations discourse. Though scholars of international relations disagree about an imminent threat to the existing US-led order, most accept China as an emerging power.⁷ China's strategy to influence the existing system however is unpredictable due to its cooperative and non-confrontational behavior in foreign policy.⁸ Compared to the US, China has shown closer liaison with international organizations such as the UN⁹ and the World Trade Organization (WTO).¹⁰ China joined WTO and other economic institutions with unfavorable conditions that "included foregoing special accommodations that had been offered to developing countries and post-socialist transitional economies and granted trading partners exceptional powers to impose barriers in response to rising Chinese exports."¹¹

On the other hand, the US has shown less support for its own liberal order by adopting an aggressive foreign policy in the last

7. See Yang, Shih-yueh. "Power Transition, Balance of Power, and the Rise of China: A Theoretical Reflection about Rising Great Powers." *China Review* 13, no. 2 (2013): 35–66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23611064>; Also see Hang, Nguyen Thi Thuy. "The Rise of China: Challenges, Implications, and Options for the United States." *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 30, no. 1/2 (2017): 47–64, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26465816>; Beeson, Mark, and Fujian Li. "China's place in regional and global governance: A new world comes into view." *Global Policy* 7, no. 4 (2016): 491–499; also see, Cao, Cong, Richard P. Suttmeier, and Denis Fred Simon. "China's 15-year science and technology plan." *Physics today* 59, no. 12 (2006): 38.

8. A large portion of literature on "Peaceful rise of China" quoted by Xiang, Jun, Primiano, Christopher B. and Huang, Wei-hao gives an empirical evidence of scholar's dominant assessment of China's cooperative foreign policy approach. See Xiang, Jun, Primiano, Christopher B. and Huang, Wei-hao. "Aggressive or Peaceful Rise? An Empirical Assessment of China's Militarized Conflict, 1979–2010" *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2015, pp. 301–325, <https://doi.org/10.1515/peps-2015-0004>.

9. During Covid-19 pandemic for example, the US criticized influence and cooperation of WHO with PRC.

10. The State Council, People's Republic of China, White Paper 2018, online available on http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/06/28/content_281476201898696.htm

11. deLisle, Jacques. "China's Rise, the US, and the WTO: Perspectives from International Relations Theory." *U. Ill. L. Rev. Online* (2018): 57.

few years. This is reactionary behavior rooted in the failure of these institutions to protect the global economic, political, and strategic interests of the US. The components of a grand strategy include careful calculations of a state's core national interest, threat perception, and leadership vision.¹² The external sources of a grand strategy are as important as the domestic ones. The US grand strategy as a part of its foreign policy is based upon inward and outward clusters to protect the aim of "primacy."¹³ Meanwhile, China's grand strategy seems to advance in two parallel directions – one, to keep supporting existing order with restricted US influence and two, to promote economic and strategic connectivity to establish regional control. Whatever the execution strategies, policy orientations, or responses, China's "calculations are closely tied to the US presence in the Indo-Pacific Region (IOR), and globally."¹⁴ China's self-image is not as it was during the Cold War when the supremacy of the two superpowers was accepted; China now compares its power with that of the US. This parity scale reflects China's national power strength, making its grand strategy more comprehensive.

Policy responses to Western maneuverings for preserving the status quo, in Chinese calculations, play a secondary role in the changing international power structure. There are two broader views debated by scholars concerning China's grand strategy.¹⁵ The first group of commentators believes there is no

12. Jisi, Wang. "China's Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds Its Way." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 2, 2011, p. 68.

13. Patrick Porter, Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed, *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Spring 2018) 9, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00311.

14. Stanzel, Angela, Jabin Jacob, Melanie Hart, and Nadège Rolland. "Grand Designs: Does China Have A Grand Strategy'?" European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21595>.

15. The State Council, People's Republic of China published a White Paper on "China's military strategy" in May 2015 that provides an insight into the dimensions of China's grand strategy. It says that "China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion. China's armed forces will remain a staunch force in maintaining world peace," http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/

composite grand strategy of China to tackle the US or change the contemporary Western liberal order. They argue that China is promoting its interests through different projects, including Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),¹⁶ the 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR-21), and the so-called institutional balancing.¹⁷ Instead of one grand strategy, Beijing is therefore following different strategies to pursue its interests.¹⁸ Other analysts, however, are of the view that China's grand dream and role indicate the global intention and a holistic approach into grand strategy. From 2012 to the current scenario, an evaluation of Beijing's foreign policy denotes a strong connection between all these concepts. In short, China's foreign policy objective remains to be the protection and promotion of its regional and global roles. It may be noted that these concepts have a built-in characteristic of expansion within the existing order. However, China's rise and expanding role in the prevailing international system would unavoidably be challenging for the rest of the contributing players in the current chessboard of global power contestation including Japan, India, and the EU. Moving ahead as a back-seat driver seems to be China's grand strategy.¹⁹

The second aspect of China's grand strategy is ensuring uninterrupted regional primacy and a less belligerent US role in the UN and worldwide, particularly in Asia. China accepts and endorses a strong UN and international law. Simultaneously, it also opposes any other state's dominant role, or the imposition of any rule defined unilaterally by any major power. Thus, any role of the US beyond defined equality regulation is unacceptable to China. China's Foreign Minister

content_281475115610833.htm.

16. Christian Ploberger, One Belt, One Road – China's new grand strategy, *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, (2017)15:3, p.289, DOI: 10.1080/14765284.2017.1346922.

17. Feng, Huiyun, and Kai He. "China's Institutional Challenges to the International Order." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (2017): 23.

18. Stanzel, *Grand Designs*, p.4.

19. Op cit.

Wang Yi advocated multilateralism as a key element of his country's foreign policy during his address at G-20 Foreign Ministers' meeting in July 2022. He said:

We should be partners of mutual respect and equal consultation. International affairs should be handled by all countries through consultation, and international rules jointly formulated and observed by all countries. In the world, there is only one international system, *i.e.*, the international system with the UN at its core. There is only one international order, *i.e.*, the international order underpinned by international law. Imposing the rules made by a certain country or group on others is the antithesis of multilateralism.²⁰

Yi's remarks reveal China's understanding of US regional and global intentions. Without using names, he was critical of unilateralism as the pivot of US security and expansionist policies.²¹ His statement is an elucidation of China's grand strategy. Its focus is on demanding space in proportion to its enhanced economic and military power in the international system. The consideration of China's grand strategy as a major threat to their security by the Western powers, and their perception of Chinese real intention is visible in their foreign policy changes. Their foreign policy has been reactive in the last few years. Resultantly, the challenge from the states which were designated as rogue states is now downgraded to a secondary level in US grand strategy. The revisionist powers are now considered an imminent challenge to deal with.²² Contrarily, the ontology of China's grand strategy is

20. Wang Li, Working as Cooperation Partners for True Multilateralism, The G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting, Bali, 8 July 2022.

21. See full text of Wang Li opening remarks during the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting at Bali on July 08, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202207/t20220710_10718093.html.

22. Dubik, James M., and Nic Vincent. "Challenge #1: The Revisionist Powers." *America's Global Competitions: The Gray Zone in Context*. Institute for the Study of War, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17467.4>.

defensive rather than offensive in nature²³ and Beijing does not claim any power transition. In fact, China's primary interest is to forestall any external power from interfering in what is sometimes referred to as its "sensitive zone" which includes Taiwan,²⁴ Hong Kong, the South China Sea,²⁵ Xinjiang,²⁶ and Tibet.²⁷ At the systemic level, there is no "sensitive zone" for China in the contemporary order. Its policies clearly indicate that it stands as a "defender of international order."²⁸ The only concern for China currently is an unrestrained US proclivity to exercise power in different world regions. China's leadership envisions a peaceful and multilateral world. Speaking at the golden jubilee of China's membership in the UN, President Xi Jinping quoted lines from a Tang dynasty's poet, "Green hills immerse in the same cloud and rain. The same moon lights up towns however far away."²⁹ This reflects a mixture of optimism and a will to ensure a mutually beneficial global structure.³⁰ The first step to operationalizing this strategy is to stabilize the Asian region.³¹ According to Blackwill's

23. Jalil, Ghazala Yasmin. "China's Rise: Offensive or Defensive Realism." *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 1 (2019): 41.

24. Geography, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peoples Republic of China, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/china_abc/2014/09/02/content_281474985266381.htm.

25. Brands, Hal, and Zack Cooper. "Getting Serious About Strategy in The South China Sea." *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 1 (2018): 12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26398089>.

26. See, Li Yee, Stefanie Kam. "China (Xinjiang)." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9, no. 1 (2017): 57.

27. Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of Peoples Republic of China, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on July 7, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202207/t20220707_10716862.html.

28. Xi-Jinping, 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Lawful Seat of the PR China in the UN on Oct 25, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202110/t20211025_9982254.html.

29. Xi, 50th Anniversary.

30. Stenslie, Stig, and Chen Gang. "XI Jinping's Grand Strategy: From Vision to Implementation." In *China in the Era of Xi Jinping: Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges*, edited by Robert S. Ross and Jo Inge Bekkevold, 117–36. Georgetown University Press, 2016.

31. Samson, Anna. "A 'Friendly Elephant' in the Room? The Strategic Foundations of China's Multilateral Engagement in Asia." *Security Challenges* 8, no. 3 (2012): 57.

report, China is following a strategy to ensure a robust domestic structure, zero conflict policy with the US, and a reduced role of the US in Asia by increasing dependence and connectivity with Beijing. Lowering the US-Asia confidence and weakening the US alliance system in the region is another preferred policy, along with a reasonable military presence in the region.³²

Russian Objectives

Russia is back in world politics.³³ Moscow's territorial expansion and military postures in the last decade have proved its capability and manifested its will to redefine its role in the international power structure. Though its approach is different from that of China for ensuring changes in the world order, their converging interests may lead to similar ends. Moscow's grand strategy revolves around "Putin's vision" to establish absolute regional control. The Russian strategy demands an aggressive foreign policy. More interestingly, this strategy is similar to that of the US. Russian foreign policy behavior is formulated to pursue two aims. Firstly, to restrict the US role within its "sphere of influence," particularly in eastern Europe, besides the Middle Eastern region is also on Moscow's radar³⁴ to counter the US increasing role in the near abroad region.³⁵ Secondly, Russia benefits from its geography and abundant natural resources. Thus, it focuses on European energy dependence, landlocked central Asian states, and the Caucasus. The absence of a military threat at the regional level gives Russia space to assert itself internationally. Russia is also advocating a "rule-based world" at international forums

32. Blackwill, Robert D. "China's Grand Strategy." *Implementing Grand Strategy toward China: Twenty-Two U.S. Policy Prescriptions*. Council on Foreign Relations, (2020) p.11.

33. Syed Taimoor Shah, Ayesha Afgun, *Resurgence Of Russia as a Great Power and Its foreign Policy Orientation Towards South Asia*, Margalla Papers-2020 (Issue-II), p.93.

34. Wehrey, Frederic, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Jessica Watkins, Jeffrey Martini, and Robert A. Guffey. "New Challenges to American Influence: Chinese and Russian Roles in the Middle East." In *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War*, RAND Corporation, (2010) p.49; Also see Russian interests in Lebanon, Rakov, Daniel, and Orna Mizrahi. "Enhanced Russian Involvement in Lebanon?" Institute for National Security Studies, 2021.

35. See how Russia responded in Syria, Jones, Seth G., ed. "Russian Goals and Strategy." *Moscow's War in Syria*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020.

including the UN.³⁶ This emphasis on following international law is part of Russia's containment policy towards the US increasing dominance in international organizations.

Some commentators believe that Russia lacks a grand strategy. They think that its plans and implementation processes³⁷ are flawed, speculating that Russia will become a failed state in the future.³⁸ This line of argument is rooted in their perception of Russian ambiguity in regional and global policies. However, the other side has a different connotation. If Russia succeeded in its resurgence, it may become one of the top ten economies of the world.³⁹ Russia's prime objective is to restore its global status through offensive foreign policy and military means where needed.⁴⁰ Although Russia failed to expand and strengthen the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), it maintains its existence. The UNs' endorsement of the CSTO peacekeeping mission in Nagorno Karabakh in 2021 has been used as an argument in support of presenting the CSTO as a legitimate force for humanitarian assistance. An enhanced CSTO role may harm Western interests.⁴¹ Furthermore, Russia's military interventions in recent years, particularly in Ukraine, have been perceived as a challenge⁴² and a message to NATO and the West

36. Remler, Philip., Russia's Concept of International Law, *Russia at the United Nations: Law, Sovereignty, and Legitimacy*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2020) p.3.

37. Monaghan, Andrew, Marcin Kaczmarek, Wojciech Michnik, and Vasile Rotaru. "Russian Grand Strategy: Avoiding the Barracuda Effect." *Russia's Emerging Global Ambitions*. NATO Defense College, (2020)3.

38. Theodore C. Hailes, Ronald Buckley, David Blanks, Mark Butler, Phillip Preen, and Michael Tarlton. "Alternate Future – Russia in 2030." *Resurgent Russia in 2030: Challenge for the USAF*. Air University Press, 2009, p.57.

39. Hailes, Alternate Future, 62.

40. Shirreff, Richard and Maciej Oleks-Szczytowski. "The Threat from Russia." *Arming for Deterrence: How Poland and NATO Should Counter a Resurgent Russia*. Atlantic Council, 2016.

41. Barros, George, "Putin's 'Peacekeepers' Will Support Russian Wars." Institute for the Study of War, (2020) p.2.

42. A. Michta, Andrew, "Nato and a Resurgent Russia: Can the Alliance Adapt?" Edited by Stephen J. Blank. *The Russian Military in Contemporary Perspective*. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, (2019)1009.

that Moscow will not tolerate any move to influence the balance of power in what it regards as its “near abroad.”

Keeping the European Union away from US influence is another objective and part of President Putin’s vision.⁴³ To decode the Russian grand strategy, we need to understand two broad constraints for Russia. First, Russia does not have military and economic power parity with the US and understands that it is not in a position to directly confront the US militarily.⁴⁴ Secondly, the US alliances and agreements with other states are deeply rooted in traditional threat perceptions that pose a big challenge to the implementation of Russian strategy. While realizing these hurdles, Russia maneuvers geo-economic and geo-strategic vulnerabilities of near abroad regions. During his term from 2008-2012 as the Russian President, Medvedev extended Putin’s vision to (re)establish the historical legacy of the Russian Federation. Simultaneously, from his first term to the next tenure, Putin continuously directed his efforts to build a grand strategy through political and strategic processes.⁴⁵ Before the annexation of Crimea, the proactive orientation in the foreign policy behavior of Russia towards the West will be considered a part of Putin’s strategy to frame Russia’s greater role in world politics.⁴⁶

The promotion and support of engagement with European states and the so-called hybrid use of force⁴⁷ to restrict American superiority have been major components of the policy during this period. A non-contact war with the US could be of greater help in securing the Russian grand strategy objective. However, the overarching goal to rationalize the contemporary world order

43. Remler, *From Multipolarity to Sovereignty*, p.3.

44. Clark, Joseph Roger, Russia’s Indirect Grand Strategy, *ORBIS*, (Spring 2019), p.14.

45. Monaghan, Andrew, Putin’s Russia: Shaping a Grand Strategy? *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 89, no. 5 (2013)1221.

46. Roberts, Kari. “Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse.” *International Journal* 72, no. 1 (2017): 28.

47. Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *Back to the Future? Russia’s Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs, and Cold War Comparisons*, NATO Defense College, (2015)1.

to create space for Russia's role in it has remained. Another approach taken by Russia is to strengthen its relations with traditional US allies by providing them with military and energy packages.⁴⁸

Russia views its relations with China mainly through the strategic prism.⁴⁹ The contours of their strategic cooperation can be traced in Putin's writings and official statements on different occasions. In his article published in Xinhua, Putin exclusively discussed the attributes of contemporary Russia-China cooperation by endorsing China's importance for Russia in controlling the Asian region, building collective mechanisms for UN reforms, and safeguarding a non-discriminatory multilateral trading system. Putin disclosed a part of his grand strategy of controlling those regions which are geographically near China as a common objective. For example, he named Serbia and the Far East as a point of reference and highlighted China's role to keep them aligned.⁵⁰

The most important part of Putin's article is his argument about the common Russia-China desire to make reforms in the UN. He argues, "The coordination of the foreign policy of Russia and China is based on close and coinciding approaches to solving global and regional issues. [Their] countries play an important stabilizing role in today's challenging international environment, promoting the democratization of the system of interstate relations to make it more equitable and inclusive. [They] are

48. Anthony H. Cordesman and Grace Hwang, *Civil Competition: Competing in Other Areas That Do Not Involve the Use of Military Force. U.S. Competition with China and Russia: The Crisis-Driven Need to Change U.S. Strategy*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020. p.115.

49. In 2018 Dmitry Medvedev met President of China Xi Jinping, Russia officially endorsed its strategic partnership with China. Russian strategic orientation is based on different sectors including energy, trade, and geopolitics. Official document available on <http://government.ru/en/news/34581/>.

50. Vladimir Putin, "Russia and China: A Future-Oriented Strategic Partnership", Xinhua, Feb 03, 2022. Online available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/articles/67694>.

working together to strengthen the central coordinating role of the UN in global affairs and to prevent the international legal system, with the UN Charter at its center, from being eroded.”

Russia seemingly believes that the objective of having equality with the US is not achievable without China’s cooperation. Putin is willing to employ a joint strategy with China to dilute established Western influence on the global financial system and trade markets, which would work as an effective shield against unilateral sanctions.⁵¹ Accordingly, an incremental strategic partnership with China is aimed at fixing Russia’s economic and military weakness. Besides that, Russia is also making political investments in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, RIC, and the G-20, which will enable it to play a central role in defining the dimensions of a future crisis. This investment may also benefit Russia in securing its interest in the Middle East and Korean Peninsula, which have been largely under the US influence for seven decades or more. Russia also considers both these regions, particularly the Korean Peninsula, where Russian and Chinese interests align.⁵² Russian and Chinese convergence of interests in these regions highlights their role in global strategic stability.

Why is Russia a Bigger Challenge for the US?

The 2022 National Security Strategy of the US regards Russia as a dangerous state.⁵³ Assessing Russian power and desire to restrict American political and military influence worldwide is multi-dimensional. Compared to China, the Russian grand strategy has inbuilt characteristics of self-image and a strong “will.” Like the US, Russian exceptionalism persists despite the experience of disintegration. Generally, it is perceived that Russian foreign policy behavior towards the West is rooted in

51. Putin, Russia, and China.

52. Vladimir Putin, “Russia and China: New Horizons for Cooperation”, (Renmin Ribao, June 05, 2012), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/articles/15547>.

53. US National Security Strategy 2022, p.23, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

President Putin's personality. If this is true, as some Western scholars argue, post-Putin Russia will no more be a challenge to US primacy and the existing international power structure. However, the case is otherwise. The assessment of Russian strategic culture based on one individual leader's personality is misleading and a reductionist approach to analyzing Russian exceptionalism. The Russian challenge transcends its recent and current history. This belief distinguishes it from China's approach to its revival as a great power. It puts it in a category that is close to the American exceptionalism approach in international relations. This distinction is based upon Russian self-image as special people with a universal agenda and a firm belief that they can build a better world than the West.⁵⁴

Since 2014, its coercive foreign policy behavior is a fair demonstration of Russia's grand strategy. The military advancements beyond the borders of "new Russia," challenging the West and NATO that impinges on European security, are successfully being managed by Kremlin. In 2016, Russia demonstrated its will and military power by challenging the US at home through an alleged disruption⁵⁵ that included Russian perceived ability to influence American presidential elections and build narratives⁵⁶ in US domestic politics.⁵⁷ Without a physical presence, the so-called Russian interference in the domestic political and social structure of the US portrays the potency and effectiveness of the Russian strategy to achieve its goal of "US restricted role." Contrary to China, this aspect of Russian foreign policy has a conflictual element. On one hand, Russia's use of war as a foreign policy tool reflects its ability to

54. Zevelev, Igor. "Russian National Identity and Foreign Policy." Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2016, p.5.

55. Clark, Mason. "The Russian View of Future War: Unconventional, Diverse, and Rapid." *Russian Hybrid Warfare*. Institute for the Study of War, (2020) p.20.

56. Even, Shmuel. "Clear and Present Danger: The US Intelligence Community and Foreign Intervention in the Elections." Institute for National Security Studies, (2020)1.

57. Rosner, Yotam, and David Siman-Tov. "Russian Intervention in the US Presidential Elections: The New Threat of Cognitive Subversion." Institute for National Security Studies, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17054>.

counter any external physical military intervention, while on the other, it presents itself as the problem solver in different world regions.

What makes Russia different and how Russian political character is unique was made unambiguously clear by Putin in his address to the Russian armed forces on the 77th victory anniversary of the Great Patriotic War. In his speech, he justified the use of force as a tool of Russian foreign policy. Putin's address reflects the crux of the Russian grand strategy. It shows how it is different from China's non-military and defensive approach to seeking an adjustment in world order:

We saw the military infrastructure being built up, hundreds of foreign advisors starting work, and regular supplies of cutting-edge weaponry being delivered from NATO countries. The threat grew every day. Russia launched a pre-emptive strike at the aggression. It was a forced, timely, and only correct decision. A decision by a sovereign, strong, and independent country.⁵⁸

It is evident from Putin's statement that Russia endorses the use of pre-emptive military action under perceived threat conditions to secure its interests. This is the same strategy that the US has been using as a justification for war to silence critics. Putin's statement was also a clear message to NATO and the US that Russia was no longer a weak state and could instead deal with any aggressive strategy through the physical use of power. Furthermore, this preference for pre-emptive strike validates an inbuilt Russian offensive character. Putin's military intervention in Ukraine and NATO's support and provision of military equipment to the latter has created a situation that may escalate to a crisis similar to the

58. Victory Parade on Red Squar, President of Russia – Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces Vladimir Putin attended a military parade marking the 77th anniversary of Victory in the 1941–1945 Great Patriotic War, May 9, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/statements/68366>.

Cuban missile episode of 1962. Russia and China are aware of the dangers of an abrupt change in the existing world order and thus follow their respective lines to reach a common destination. Russia strongly condemns US military interventions in Libya, Iraq, and Syria, and views US primacy as “modern absolutism.”⁵⁹

Russia also considers NATO as a tool of US foreign policy. Russia regards any move by the Western powers that may potentially disturb the status quo in the territories adjacent to it as a major security threat. Consequently, a harsh military response may be expected from Russia to prevent NATO from crossing the red line.⁶⁰

A “Red Line” defined by President Putin is based on five parameters:

1. Installation of modern weapon systems in the Russian “strategic area”⁶¹ will be considered a direct military threat. Russia strongly opposes the installation of missile systems by the US in the European region, particularly in Eastern Europe.
2. The membership of NATO by any near abroad state is unacceptable.
3. The military and economic sanctions imposed by the US against Russia are a “notorious policy” which should be revised.
4. The acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) by any opponent in the region could be a possible danger and may invite preemption.

59. Address by the President of Russian Federation, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/statements/67843>.

60. Ibid.

61. President Putin used this term to describe Russian concerns in Eastern Europe particularly in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Crimea and other adjacent parts to the Russian Federation. Putin talked about restoration of old jurisdictions of Russian Federation in his speech. See <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/statements/67828>.

5. Any attempt to change pro-Russia regimes by the US, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Middle East is unacceptable.

Russia avoids any direct military confrontation with the US and NATO, however, the parameters mentioned above indicate the threshold level. These “red lines” also denote Russian feeling of (in)security and the looming perils in the international system.⁶² Nationalism and patriotism in Russia’s foreign policy and decision making is associated with the level of opposition to the West.⁶³ The future of Moscow’s foreign policy towards the West can thus be seen as pessimistic and conflictual.

Conclusion

China and Russia have consistently pursued an agenda of change in the existing international system. The US has curtailed its military presence worldwide in recent years. It has, however, taken a policy decision to protect its global hegemonic position and primacy through offshore balancing and integrated deterrence policies. This policy is still in the early stages of implementation; it is too early to assess its effectiveness. Russia and China are pursuing a two-fold policy of conflict and cooperation with the US. Their strategic interests are served well if adjustments are made in the international system to accommodate their resurgent power without fundamentally disturbing the existing format. Russia has defined and exercised its “red line” formula based on offensive strategy and consistently applies it to counter any regional political or military move against it. On the other hand, China has been working on developing regional connectivity, diverting financial routes, and building a China-centric global narrative to achieve the objective of restricting

62. M. Leichtova, *Misunderstanding Russia: Russian Foreign Policy and the West* (1st ed.). Routledge (2014)93, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315595634>,

63. *Ibid*, 67.

the US role in international politics. The Sino-Russian policies to build a balanced world order, focused on challenging the existing American power, may generate new forms of conflicts and linkages in Asia and beyond.