

NIDS China Security Report 2024

China, Russia, and the United States Striving for a New International Order

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Cover photo (from left): *Liaoning* aircraft carrier (Photoshot/Aflo), MV-22 Osprey (Stocktrek Images/Getty Images), Russia's celebration of the 76th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe (AP/Aflo)

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Summary

Chapter 1

China, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, viewed the United States as a threat to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It sought to avoid confrontation and promote cooperation with the United States to stabilize the bilateral relationship. Beijing generally accepted the post-Cold War U.S.-led international order and pursued an international order strategy based on cooperation. From around the end of the 2000s, however, the CCP leadership began to shift its approach, perceiving the power of Western countries as declining and the power of developing countries as increasing. Namely, it strove to reform the existing international order, so as to allow China to secure its “core interests” by its power and not threaten the CCP rule.

The Xi Jinping government urged the United States to respect China’s “core interests” and accept a “new type of major-country relations” that considers China as an equal. At the same time, China has explicitly rejected the existing international order based on universal values and rules. Rather, it began to advocate for a new model of international order, specifically, a “new type of international relations” and a “community with a shared future for mankind,” which would give a greater voice to China and other developing countries. Russia is a key partner for China sharing a common vision for a desirable international order. In strengthening their position in the rivalry with the United States and other Western countries over the international order, the two countries have bolstered their mutual support and cooperation.

Pitting against the United States, China is reinforcing its military capabilities, primarily anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, aimed at transforming the U.S. forces-led security order in East Asia. It is physically obstructing U.S. military operations and conducting more joint exercises and coordinated activities with Russian forces in China’s periphery. Furthermore, China is rapidly strengthening its nuclear capabilities, which will likely not only increase China’s voice on nuclear weapons in the future security order, but also raise the threshold for U.S. military involvement in conflicts related to China’s “core interests.” China is expected to reshape the existing international order by deepening strategic cooperation with Russia, with which it has a shared vision of a desirable international order, alongside reinforcing nuclear and other military capabilities.

Chapter 2

The Putin regime embarked on a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Consequently, Russia incurred harsh economic sanctions from Western countries and lost significant international credibility. As a challenger to the existing international order, the Putin regime harbors a strong sense of rivalry against the international order favored by the G7 countries. This is underscored in the “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” that was revised in March 2023. At the

root of this rivalry is built-up dissatisfaction with the restructuring of the post-Cold War international order. Moreover, the Putin regime emphasizes Russia's traditional spirit and moral values as well as its unique view of history. It also exhibits an aversion to Western liberal values, including diversity and inclusivity, and to civil society activities. Especially in recent years, these sentiments, coupled with increasing regime personalization, tended to be amplified as a domestic strategy for the survival of the Putin regime.

Such views of the international order have emerged in the broad context of modern Russia's political and diplomatic history. The views are linked to Russia's internal developments as well, exemplified by constraints on civil liberties, the absence of constitutionalism, and the rise of personalization. The regime has a growing affinity with China's Xi Jinping regime, which too has shown increasing personalization. Due in part to Russia's growing dependence on China for the second Russia-Ukraine war, cooperating with the Chinese regime has become a foreign strategy for regime survival. Russia-China relations are steadily deepening in such policy areas as military, nuclear, and Arctic development.

Aiming to strengthen cooperation with emerging and developing states in the Global South, including India and Turkey, the Putin regime in wartime is actively approaching countries that are highly aligned with them politically, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS member nations as well as Middle Eastern and African countries, both through diplomatic and military activities.

Chapter 3

China is perceived by the Biden administration as its greatest challenge. The 2022 National Security Strategy states that China presents the United States' "most consequential geopolitical challenge" and underscores the administration's intent to prevail over China in this competition. From a military perspective, the Biden administration has also recognized China as a "pacing challenge" and set forth a strategy that considers the prevention of China's dominance of key regions as a top priority. Competition with China in the military/diplomatic domain has also spilled over into the economic domain.

The Biden administration has recognized Russia as an "acute threat" that poses significant and persistent risks to key regions in addition to Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine since 2014. In order to achieve its policy goal of making Russia's invasion of Ukraine a "strategic failure," the Biden administration has provided an overwhelming amount of security assistance to Ukraine in collaboration with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other allies and partners while imposing economic sanctions on Russia.

The military challenges confronting the United States in its attempt to gain an edge in its strategic competition with China and Russia are, namely, (i) activities below the threshold of armed conflict; (ii) threats to the U.S. military's power projection, operational actions, and kill chain; and

(iii) future changes in the balance of nuclear forces. In response to the first military challenge, the U.S. military has not only conducted freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) and maneuvers in the domains of cyber and information operations but also established a new conceptual framework known as the “Competition Continuum Model” under which U.S. forces are engaged in a range of activities at all phases. At the same time, the U.S. military has continued to develop new concepts in response to the second military challenge, that is, the threat associated with A2/AD and its kill chain. In response to the third military challenge of the emerging issue of having “two nuclear-capable near-peers,” where the United States is simultaneously confronted with China and Russia whose nuclear forces are comparable to its own, the Biden administration has shown a commitment to reducing the risk of nuclear use through arms control and strengthening U.S. deterrence.

The Biden administration recognizes that U.S. efforts over the next decade will determine the future state of the international order, and it has adopted an increasingly proactive stance with the goal of gaining an edge in its strategic competition with China and curbing the threat posed by Russia. Competition with China and Russia over how the international order will take shape looks set to continue and intensify moving forward.

Conclusions

Unless rapid political changes occur in Russia, the contest between the United States and China/Russia over the international order will accelerate in the next foreseeable decade. Involving the Global South, it is expected to expand into a contest between the forces seeking to maintain the current order, centered around the United States, and the forces seeking to change it, centered around China and Russia. As both sides are anticipated to enhance their competitiveness, the outcome will not be determined quickly, and the confrontation will likely persist over the long term with tensions rising. It will be incumbent on both sides to manage the competition effectively to prevent the manifestation of destabilizing factors, such as accidental clashes and unexpected escalations.

In the longer term, however, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is very likely to fall short of changing the international order. China, on the other hand, has used *faits accomplis* to alter the status quo in waters such as the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Looking ahead, whether China’s unilateral changes to the status quo by force can be prevented or not will be the most crucial determinant of the course of the competition for the international order.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

A2/AD	anti-access/area-denial
AI	artificial intelligence
ALBM	air-launched ballistic missile
ASB	Air Sea Battle
BCC	Bilateral Consultative Commission
CC	Competition Continuum
CCG	China Coast Guard
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COVID-19	novel coronavirus disease
FOB	fractional orbital bombardment
FONOPs	freedom of navigation operations
FSB	Federal Security Service
FSO	Federal Guard Service
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff
HGV	hypersonic glide vehicles
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
JADC2	Joint All-Domain Command and Control
JADO	Joint All-Domain Operations
JAM-GC	Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons
JCC	Joint Concept for Competing
JCIC	Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning
JWC	Joint Warfighting Concept
MDPW	Multi-Domain Precision Warfare
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NC3	nuclear command, control, and communications
NDS	National Defense Strategy
New START	Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms
NPR	Nuclear Posture Review
NSS	National Security Strategy
PLA	People's Liberation Army
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SSBN	nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine
STRATCOM	Strategic Command
SVR	Foreign Intelligence Service
UN	United Nations
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Introduction

The Theme of This Report

IIDA Masafumi

The Theme of This Report

The Cold War was a period of intense U.S.-Soviet rivalry, with each of the two superpowers bringing countries into their alliances and aiming vast nuclear arsenals at each other. After the war came to an end in the early 1990s, the victorious United States led the efforts to create a new international order supported and embraced by many nations, including Western countries. This rules-based international order was built upon universal values, such as freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights, and was shared by many states. In this context, increasing cooperation among the great powers and economic globalization brought stability and prosperity to the post-Cold War world. However, this international order is now facing serious challenges.

China rapidly achieved economic growth by adapting to the post-Cold War international order. Coupled with its military buildup, China rose to become a global power second only to the United States. From around the late 2000s, by intensifying its unilateral moves to change the status quo by force, such as in the Taiwan Strait and the East and South China Seas, Beijing began to challenge the existing rules-based international order. In recent years, China has explicitly rejected rules that have been accepted by the international community and has pursued policies aimed at building a new international order, resulting in a severe great-power competition with the United States.

Russia initially engaged in diplomacy that emphasized cooperation with the West, as exemplified by its joining of the G8 in 1998. Under the Putin regime, however, Russia gradually stepped up its anti-Western posture, and its relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, including the United States, deteriorated with the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. In 2022, Russia launched an aggressive war against Ukraine that blatantly violated the rules-based international order, including the United Nations (UN) Charter. This aggression has rendered the UN Security Council dysfunctional and significantly undermined the post-Cold War international order.

We are now witnessing a serious competition between the United States, which aspires to maintain the existing rules that have brought stability and prosperity to the post-Cold War international community, and its challengers, China and Russia, which seek to change these rules. The world's eyes are on the fate of the international order, which is also the focus of this report. The future international order will be influenced by numerous factors. Particularly significant among them will be the behavior of the United States, China, and Russia, all of which possess powerful military capabilities including nuclear weapons. It is not an exaggeration to say that the U.S., Chinese, and Russian strategies for the international order and their interplay will determine the direction of the future international order.

This report analyzes how the United States, China, and Russia envision the future international order and how they are working toward its realization. In addition, it attempts to shed light on each country's approach toward the other two, with a focus on military and security aspects. Based on this analysis, it concludes by examining how the interplay among the three great powers will shape the future international order.

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Chapter 1

China's Strategy to Transform the Existing International Order

IIDA Masafumi

CHINA UNDER the leadership of Xi Jinping has gradually stepped up its confrontational posture toward the United States. U.S.-China relations deteriorated noticeably during the Barack Obama administration, became increasingly confrontational during the Donald Trump administration, and grew more strained during the Joseph Biden administration. Despite the widening rift, the Xi government in its third term continues to take a confrontational stance against the United States. During a press conference held on the margins of the National People's Congress in March 2023, Foreign Minister Qin Gang criticized the United States' claim to "out-compete" China, describing it as an effort to "contain and suppress China in all respects and get the two countries locked in a zero-sum game." Furthermore, he emphasized that containment and suppression "will not stop the rejuvenation of China."¹

By contrast, the Xi Jinping administration has steadily enhanced its cooperative relationship with Russia. Despite Russia's launch of a military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which drew strong condemnation from an overwhelming majority of United Nations (UN) member states, the Xi government has continued to strengthen ties with Russia. The China-Russia relationship sets "a good example for a new type of international relations," said Foreign Minister Qin Gang, noting that if the two countries work together, "the world will have a driving force toward multipolarity and greater democracy in international relations, and global strategic balance and stability will be better ensured." With regard to the Ukraine war, Qin mentioned that there seems to be "an invisible hand" "using the Ukraine crisis to serve a certain geopolitical agenda," indirectly criticized the United States.²

If the post-Cold War international order is led by the United States, which became the sole superpower by securing victory over the Soviet Union, then China could become the primary driving force for transforming the existing international order as an emerging country that rapidly gained power after the Cold War and has the second most power after the United States. With China intensifying its confrontational posture toward the United States, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was on point in saying, "China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it."³ Therefore, to gain insights into the future direction of the international order, it is necessary first and foremost to examine China's strategy for international order, that is, what kind of international order China aims to establish and by what means it seeks to achieve this goal.

In this chapter, the first section analyzes the international order strategy of China by reviewing its evolving policy toward the United States, beginning from the end of the Cold War to the Xi Jinping administration. China views that the United States holds hegemony in the existing international order. China's perception of the United States is reflective of China's perception of the international order. Furthermore, China's international order policy is encompassed within its U.S. policy. The second section examines the Xi leadership's policy toward Russia, a nuclear power on par with the United States that is increasingly challenging the existing international order. By observing the relationship between China and Russia—two countries which have been deepening their strategic cooperation—it is hoped that a clearer understanding will emerge of the Chinese strategy for the future international

order. The third section attempts to provide prospects for China's international order strategy by analyzing its strengthening military cooperation with Russia and changing nuclear weapons posture.

1. China's Policy Shift from Cooperation to Confrontation with the United States

(1) Adapting to the Post-Cold War International Order with a Cooperative Posture

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government faced a serious situation both domestically and internationally. Domestically, on June 4, 1989, the government mobilized the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to violently suppress students and citizens who were campaigning for political democratization on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, known as the Tiananmen Square incident. It exposed the intense power struggles within the Party, and also severely eroded the Chinese people's trust in the Party. Moreover, Western countries, including the United States, strongly criticized the CCP government for suppressing a peaceful democratization movement with the use of force, citing serious human rights violations, and imposed harsh economic and diplomatic sanctions on China. Internationally, as the socialist bloc collapsed, beginning with the disintegration of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and culminating with the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, China became the sole remaining socialist power in the international community.

The Tiananmen Square incident and the disintegration of the socialist bloc greatly undermined the legitimacy of the CCP's rule and severely shook the foundations of the government. Beijing attributed this crisis to the United States. China viewed that the United States sought a "peaceful evolution" [和平演变], meaning overthrowing the CCP regime using peaceful means, such as penetrating freedom, democracy, and other Western values into Chinese society.⁴ In addition, the post-Soviet collapse international order was led by the United States, which became the sole superpower. The CCP government thus found itself in a challenging international environment, seeing the United States as the largest threat that could endanger its very survival.

Following the Tiananmen Square incident, China, under the leadership of the CCP's newly appointed General Secretary Jiang Zemin, aspired to avoid confrontation and



The "Goddess of Democracy" erected in Tiananmen Square, May 1989 (Photo: Kyodo News)

improve relations with the United States through cooperation. During a meeting with members of the U.S. House of Representatives who visited China in November 1992, General Secretary Jiang set out China's policy of "increase trust, reduce trouble, develop cooperation, and avoid confrontation" [增加信任, 减少麻烦, 发展合作, 不搞对抗] with the United States. In other words, the aim was to build a relationship of trust with the United States through cooperation, not increasing friction through confrontation. In November 1993, President Jiang Zemin attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Meeting in Seattle, United States and held a meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton. At the meeting, Jiang stated that China "will not constitute a threat to U.S. security" and emphasized that their relationship should be founded on mutual interests.⁵ While tensions heightened due to the Taiwan Strait Crisis from 1995 to 1996, President Jiang and President Clinton met in October 1997 and released a joint statement committing to work toward building a "constructive strategic partnership."⁶ By refraining from confrontation, China steadily improved its relations with the United States. Despite incidents such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces' mistaken bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in May 1999 and a collision accident between a U.S. Navy EP-3 signals intelligence aircraft and a Chinese PLA J-8 fighter in April 2001, China maintained a cooperative posture toward the United States and sought to strengthen the bilateral relationship. Furthermore, the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 steered the wind in China's favor. As an outcome of the attacks, the security agenda for the George W. Bush administration underwent a major shift from competition with China, which was considered a "strategic competitor," to the war on terror. Additionally, cooperating with the United States' war on terror provided China with opportunities to make further strides in the bilateral relationship. In February 2002, President Bush visited China, and the two countries agreed to build a "constructive and cooperative relationship."⁷

The Hu Jintao administration, which succeeded the Jiang Zemin administration at the 16th CCP National Congress (Party Congress) in November 2002, continued the foreign policy of collaborating in various fields to strengthen relations with the United States and promote cooperation with the international community. In August 2003, aiming to resolve the issue of North Korea's nuclear development, the Hu administration established the Six-Party Talks comprised of the United States, China, the Republic of Korea, North Korea, Japan, and Russia. At its meeting in September 2005, the Hu leadership contributed to the release of a joint statement in which North Korea committed to abandoning its nuclear development program. It was under this foreign policy vision which emphasizes cooperation with the international community, including the United States, that Hu began to advocate building a "harmonious world" [和谐世界]. In an address at a summit commemorating the UN's 60th anniversary in September 2005, President Hu underscored the need to build a "harmonious world with lasting peace and common prosperity." In this address, President Hu stressed that the international community must strive to create a "harmonious world" by opposing dispute resolutions through interference in internal affairs and the use of force, as well as by boosting the economic development of

developing countries and their voice in the international community.⁸ Additionally, the Hu administration introduced the concept of “peaceful development” [和平发展] as a policy guideline for building a “harmonious world.” In December 2005, the Chinese government released a white paper titled *China’s Peaceful Development Road*. In this white paper, China vowed to develop cooperative relations with the United States and other major powers and deepen friendly relations with neighboring countries, and declared to “follow the road of peaceful development” involving efforts to “strive for a peaceful international environment for its own development, and promote world peace and development with its own growth.”⁹

As examined above, China’s U.S. policy from the Jiang Zemin administration to the early years of the Hu Jintao administration sought stable Sino-U.S. relations by promoting various cooperation while avoiding confrontation with the United States as much as possible. Accordingly, China had basically accepted the U.S.-led international order and signaled an intention to build a “harmonious world” within the existing international order paradigm. Some officials in the United States commended China for its stance on the international order. In September 2005, for instance, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick emphasized his expectation that China will become a “responsible stakeholder” in the existing international order.¹⁰

(2) A Shift toward Confrontation with the United States and Transformation of the Existing International Order

By the late 2000s, the Hu Jintao government began to aggressively assert China’s stance and interests and adopt an antagonistic posture toward neighboring countries and the United States. Beijing boosted deployment of maritime law enforcement patrol vessels and PLA vessels and aircraft to the South and East China Seas, ramping up pressure on other countries with which it had disputes over the sovereignty of islands and reefs and over jurisdiction in periphery waters. Chinese patrol vessels obstructed the passage of Vietnamese and Philippine survey ships in the South China Sea, while increasing their presence around the Japanese territory of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. The PLA, too, stepped up its activities in the South and East China Seas. China’s resolute posture was directed at the United States as well. In March 2009, China’s naval intelligence collection ship, patrol vessels, and fishing trawlers obstructed the U.S. Navy’s acoustic surveillance ship, USNS *Impeccable*, which was sailing in waters south of Hainan Island. The United States lodged a protest with the Chinese government over its dangerous action that breached the freedom of navigation recognized under international law. However, China dismissed it, arguing that the *Impeccable*’s activities were in violation of both international law and Chinese domestic law. With this incident, the South China Sea became one of the focal points of contention between the United States and China.

The Chinese posture on maritime territory and sovereignty hardened against the backdrop of a major foreign policy revision made by the Hu Jintao leadership. During the 11th Diplomatic Envoys’ Meeting held in July 2009, General Secretary Hu Jintao identified one of his foreign policy priorities as

“appropriately safeguarding our territory, sovereignty, and maritime rights and interests.” He further stated, “We must resolutely struggle against actions by any related parties that infringe upon our rights and interests and firmly protect our core interests.” Additionally, Hu highlighted the need to “more actively participate in international rulemaking” and “more actively promote the development of the international political and economic order in a more just and reasonable direction.”¹¹ In short, the Hu Jintao government shifted its policy from prioritizing cooperation with the international community based on the existing U.S.-led international order, to not hesitating from confrontation with the United States and other countries on core interests for China, alongside advocating for transforming the existing international order in a direction favorable to China.

The greatest factor that precipitated this policy shift was the global financial crisis which intensified following the bankruptcy of a U.S. investment bank, Lehman Brothers, in September 2008. The crisis induced severe damage to the economies of Western countries, including the United States, while China achieved sustainable economic growth by implementing a 4 trillion-yuan stimulus package. Thus, amid growing anticipation of a long-term decline in U.S. power and a relative increase in Chinese power, a perception prevailed that the China-U.S. capability gap was narrowing.¹² Expecting China's power to rise relative to that of the United States, the Hu Jintao administration became more confident in China's ability to compete with the United States. In turn, he was no longer hesitant to confront the United States over core interests and started challenging the existing U.S.-led international order.

China's new foreign policy also applied to the United States. Vice President Xi Jinping, who was certain to succeed Hu Jintao, visited the United States in February 2012. Xi emphasized, during his meeting with President Obama, “The Taiwan issue concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and has consistently been the most important and sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations.”¹³ In his meeting with Vice President Biden, Xi stated that “the issues concerning Taiwan and Tibet involve China's core interests,” and proposed that China and the United States “respect each other's core interests and major concerns, refrain from making trouble for each other, and not cross each other's line.”¹⁴ In addition, at a welcome reception hosted by U.S.-China friendship organizations, Xi stated, “The vast Pacific Ocean has ample space for the two major countries of China and the United States,” and stressed that by “respecting each other's core interests and major concerns,” the two countries should develop their relationship into a “new type of relationship between major countries in the 21st century.”¹⁵ By urging the United States to respect China's core interests such as Taiwan, Beijing aimed to build a “new type of major-country relations,” meaning an equal relationship with the United States at least in the Asia-Pacific region.

Inaugurated at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the Xi Jinping government presented the slogan of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” or the “Chinese Dream,” as the goal to aspire to. When General Secretary Xi visited a naval base on Hainan Island in December 2012, he described the dream as follows: “The dream is to build a strong country; and for the military, it is a

dream to build a strong military; to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must ensure there is unison between a prosperous country and a strong military and strive to build a strong national defense and a powerful military.” Xi stressed that bolstering military capabilities was essential for the realization of the “Chinese Dream.”¹⁶

In addition, during the CCP Central Committee Politburo’s group study session on foreign policy held in January 2013, General Secretary Xi stated that a peaceful international environment was necessary to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. At the same time, he underscored, “We will stick to the road of peaceful development, but will never give up our legitimate rights and will never sacrifice our national core interests. No country should presume that we will engage in trade involving our core interests or that we will swallow the ‘bitter fruit’ of harming our sovereignty, security or development interests.”¹⁷ Xi Jinping aimed to realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by establishing protection of core interests as a foreign policy pillar, supported by a powerful military.

This policy was also reflected in China’s diplomacy with the United States. In June 2013, President Xi visited the United States and held a meeting with President Obama. At a press conference, Xi announced, “Both sides agreed to make joint efforts to build...[a] new type of China-U.S. major-country relations” proposed by China.¹⁸ State Councilor Yang Jiechi explained that a “new type of major-country relations” means: (i) not engaging in conflict or confrontation; (ii) respecting each other as well as each other’s core interests and major concerns; and (iii) pursuing cooperation and win-win results and abandoning zero-sum thinking.¹⁹ Subsequently, the Xi Jinping administration began taking a hardline posture, urging the United States to respect China’s core interests. In August 2013, State Councilor and Defense Minister Chang Wanquan visited the United States. During his meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, Chang demanded the cessation of U.S. arms exports to Taiwan, intelligence gathering activities by U.S. forces in the periphery of China, and the U.S. ban on high-tech exports to China, citing them as impediments to the development of a “new type of China-U.S. military relationship.”²⁰ In December 2013, a PLA Navy landing ship came dangerously close to and obstructed the passage of the U.S. Navy cruiser USS *Cowpens*, which was monitoring a Chinese naval exercise off the southern coast of Hainan Island.²¹

Besides not shying away from confrontation with the United States on issues concerning core interests, the Xi leadership also bolstered its efforts to revise the existing U.S.-led international order. At the Central Conference on Work relating to Foreign Affairs held in November 2014, General Secretary Xi expressed the view that the existing international order led by the United States was in the midst of change. He stressed that “Today’s world is a transforming world,” namely, “a world in which the international system and order are going through a deep adjustment” as well as “a world in which the international balance of power is profoundly shifting in favor of peace and development.” Xi then explained that, going forward, China’s foreign policy will be to “work for greater democracy in international relations” and “promote the building of a new type of international relations with

cooperation and win-win results at the core.” He called this new foreign policy “major-power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.”²²

At the General Debate of the UN General Assembly in September 2015, President Xi Jinping delivered an address on China’s aspirations for the new international order. In his address, President Xi criticized major powers’ pressure on and interference in the internal affairs of smaller states, emphasizing that all countries must be treated equally. Regarding inter-state security relations, he called for a departure from zero-sum thinking that assumes confrontation and for partnerships based on dialogue and cooperation rather than alliances. Furthermore, Xi stated, “China will always be the builder of world peace” and vowed to “never seek hegemony, expansion, or an extension of its sphere of influence.” He also expressed China’s commitment to “continue to safeguard the international order and system with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter at the core.” Additionally, Xi stated that “China will continue to support the effort of increasing the representation and voice of developing countries, particularly African countries, in the international governance system,” and indicated China’s intention to enhance cooperation with developing countries in the new international order. Based on China’s stance, Xi emphasized, “We must build a new type of international relations with cooperation and win-win results at the core and create a community with a shared future for mankind.”²³

The motivating force behind China’s increased effort to transform the post-Cold War international order was the Xi government’s perception of global power shift. The government viewed that the United States and Western advanced countries, which had been leading the existing international order, were weakening in power, while developing countries, including China, were gaining in power, and that this trend was irreversible. During the Central Committee Politburo’s group study session on the global governance system held in October 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping noted, “The transformation of the global governance system is at a historic turning point.” “The international balance of power is undergoing profound changes, and the rapid development and continuously rising international influence of emerging market countries and many developing countries represent the most revolutionary change in the international balance of power since modern times.” Xi went on to state, “The centuries-old struggle for interests and hegemony through wars, colonization, and division of spheres of influence by the great powers is gradually shifting toward countries’ coordination of relations and interests through institutions and rules.” He expressed the view that “the transformation of the global governance system is the trend of the times” and “is linked with each country’s position and role in the long-term institutional arrangement of the international order and system.”²⁴

The Xi Jinping government, as it strikes a more confrontational posture toward the United States over core interests and presses ahead with transforming the existing U.S.-led international order, saw its relations with the United States deteriorate rapidly. The Trump administration, which was inaugurated in January 2017, conflicted sharply with the Xi administration over trade, leading to a trade war with both sides imposing additional tariffs on each other. The Phase One agreement reached

in January 2020 did not improve their relations. Furthermore, the democracy movement in Hong Kong that intensified in 2019 heightened the vigilance of China, which deemed that U.S. political forces were attempting a color revolution in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, China's tightening control in Hong Kong, including imposition of the National Security Law, provoked strong opposition from the United States for suppressing democracy. Additionally, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Wuhan in December 2019 developed into a global pandemic and fueled serious disagreements between the United States and China over political systems and values.²⁵



Protestors marching in Hong Kong to demand the withdrawal of a bill to amend the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, June 2019 (Photo: Kyodo News)

Regarding core interests, the Xi government adopted an even more hardline stance toward the Biden administration that took office in January 2021. Concurrently, Xi rejected the U.S. position on the international order and accelerated efforts to build China's proposed new international order. In March 2021, the first U.S.-China high-level strategic dialogue after the Biden administration assumed office was held in Alaska. From the Chinese side, Yang Jiechi, director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, and Wang Yi, state councilor and foreign minister, strongly criticized U.S. interference in China's internal affairs. China criticized the United States for pressuring the CCP government under the pretext of democracy and human rights, emphasizing that "the status and institutions of the CCP as the ruling party must not be undermined, and it is a red line that should not be touched." Furthermore, they stated that the Taiwan issue "bears on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and concerns China's core interests, and there is no room for compromise and concession," and demanded that the United States not "attempt to cross China's bottom line."²⁶ Regarding the international order, Director Yang Jiechi flatly rejected the existing international order led by the United States, saying, "The majority of countries do not recognize U.S. values as international values, do not recognize U.S. views as international public opinion, and do not recognize rules made by a few countries as international rules." Yang continued, "China will advocate for the common values of humanity—peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom—and safeguard the international system with the UN at the core and the international order based on international law."²⁷

President Xi Jinping also made similar remarks to President Biden. At their first in-person meeting in November 2022, President Xi stated unequivocally that "the Taiwan issue is at the core of China's core interests and is a red line that must not be crossed in China-U.S. relations." He warned that "the Chinese people will surely resist" those who seek to split Taiwan from China. Regarding the increasingly intense U.S.-China rivalry, Xi argued, "All pressure and containment only serve to arouse the will and passion of the Chinese people." On the international order, Xi stated that China

will “safeguard the international system with the UN at the core as well as the international order based on international law” and “promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.” With regard to the Sino-U.S. relationship, President Xi stated, “The vast expanse of the Earth can fully accommodate the development and shared prosperity of both China and the United States.”²⁸ While President Xi had stated during his 2012 visit to the United States that “the vast Pacific Ocean has ample space for the two major countries of China and the United States,” his latest remarks suggest that he was calling on the United States to accept an equal relationship with China on a global level.

2. China's Increasing Cooperation with Russia to Build a New International Order

(1) From Rival to Partner

During the Cold War, China had disputes with the Soviet Union over ideology and a land border, which ignited armed clashes on Damansky Island (Zhenbao Island) in the Ussuri River in 1969. However, their relations normalized when General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev visited China in May 1989, and an agreement on the eastern border was signed in May 1991. Subsequently, China continued to work toward stabilizing its relationship with Russia, the successor state to the Soviet Union. In July 2001, China and Russia signed the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. Clauses to foster mutual trust stand out, such as supporting each other's policies that defend national unity and territorial integrity, continuing to hold talks on unresolved border disputes without making territorial claims against each other, reducing military forces in the border areas, and agreeing not to be the first to use nuclear weapons against each other and not targeting strategic nuclear missiles at each other. At the same time, the treaty indicates that the two countries had a common stance on the international order more broadly, such as opposing any action of interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state under pretexts or through resorting to the use of force to apply pressure, working together for the maintenance of global strategic balance, and reinforcing the authority of the UN to guarantee the major responsibility of the UN Security Council in the area of maintaining international peace and security.²⁹

President Hu Jintao visited Russia in June 2011, ten years after the signing of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. The bilateral relationship made significant strides over the decade, including finalization of the demarcation of their border in 2004. President Hu Jintao and President Dmitry Medvedev issued a joint statement on the tenth anniversary of the treaty's signing. They highlighted that the border had become an area of cooperation through the resolution of territorial disputes, that the two sides “support each other on issues related to core interests such as sovereignty, security, and development,” and that China and Russia had set a model to the world of

building a successful major-power relationship based on a treaty. Furthermore, they emphasized that their strategic cooperation was “favorable for building a just and reasonable new international order and for multipolarization of the world and democratization of international relations.” In addition, they declared to elevate their relationship from the traditional “strategic partnership of cooperation” to a “comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation.”³⁰

On the same occasion, the two leaders also issued the “Joint Statement on the International Situation and Major International Issues.” In this statement, they expressed the view that the international situation had “entered a key period for major development, major transformation, and major adjustment.” They note that the global financial crisis of 2008 “revealed how existing global governance mechanisms lack efficiency and do not reflect the current political, economic, and financial realities” and underscored that “these mechanisms are actively moving in the direction of multipolarity.”³¹ China and Russia criticized the dysfunctional existing system of global economic order that had been led by the United States and other Western countries, and expressed support for shifting to a more multipolar economic order.

In March 2013, Xi Jinping visited Russia as the destination of his first overseas trip as president. During this visit, President Xi delivered a comprehensive address on China’s stance regarding the international situation, China-Russia relations, and other topics at Moscow State Institute of International Relations. With regard to the current international situation, Xi noted that Cold War-era bloc confrontations were already nonexistent and that “no state or group of states can dominate world affairs singlehandedly.” He opined that “many emerging market and developing countries” are achieving rapid growth, giving rise to numerous growth centers around the world, and “the international balance of power is evolving in a direction favorable for peace and development.” Furthermore, Xi asserted that as countries become increasingly interdependent, they are further evolving into a “community with a shared future.” At the same time, he contended that there remain many challenges to realizing peace and development due to “the rise of hegemony, power politics, and neo-interventionism” in the world. For adapting to these changes in the international situation, Xi argued that countries “should jointly promote building a new type of international relations with cooperation and win-win results at the core.” In other words, for the first time in Russia, he introduced the concepts of a “community with a shared future for mankind” and a “new type of international relations,” which later became the pillars of “major-power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.” Xi Jinping highlighted that a strong China-Russia relationship “serves as an important guarantee for maintaining the international strategic balance and safeguarding peace and stability in the world,” and emphasized that the joint development of China and Russia “will bring positive energy to evolving the international order and system in a just and reasonable direction.” Additionally, Xi described that “a prosperous and powerful Russia aligns with China’s interests and is favorable for the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific and the world.”³²

Before this speech, President Xi Jinping held a meeting with President Vladimir Putin. During their meeting, Xi stated that “China and Russia are each other’s principal and most important strategic

cooperation partners,” and underlined the need for both countries to “closely cooperate and work together in international and regional affairs” as well as “firmly uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the rules of international relations.”³³ In the joint statement issued after the meeting, the leaders stated that “the China-Russia relationship had reached an unprecedented high level and had set a model for harmonious coexistence of major powers,” and called on the United States and other major powers to “build a new type of major-country relations for long-term stability and sound development.”³⁴

(2) Deepening Cooperation for Transforming the Existing International Order

China and Russia further deepened their strategic cooperative relationship under the leadership of President Xi and President Putin. The leaders continued to make reciprocal visits and promoted cooperation in a wide range of fields, including politics, economy, and security. Moreover, they have frequently issued joint statements that express a common stance on the desirable international order. The “Joint Statement on Strengthening Global Strategic Stability” issued in June 2016 underlined that “individual countries and military-political alliances seek decisive advantages in the fields of military and relevant technology, so as to serve their own interests without difficulty through the use or threat of use of force in international affairs,” harshly criticizing the United States and its allies without identifying them by name.³⁵ In the “Declaration on the Promotion of International Law” issued concurrently, the leaders criticized interference in the internal affairs of other countries aimed at regime change, imposing sanctions without UN Security Council decisions, and other acts for violating international law. The leaders advocated that international law was the cornerstone for “just and equitable international relations featuring win-win cooperation,” “creating a community with a shared future for mankind,” and “establishing common space of equal and indivisible security and economic cooperation,” and that both countries would cooperate in “establishing a just and equitable international order based on international law.”³⁶ In the “Joint Statement on the Current World Situation and Major International Issues” released in July 2017, they advocated for “jointly building a peaceful, secure, open, and orderly cyberspace” and underscored their opposition to the use of information and communication technologies to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, hostile actions, and acts of aggression. They also appreciated multilateral cooperation schemes, such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), for “making important contributions to promoting the democratization of international relations.”³⁷ In the “Joint Statement on Contemporary Global Strategic Stability” released in June 2019, the leaders urged that “relevant countries should abandon the nuclear sharing policy (implemented by NATO) and return all nuclear weapons deployed abroad by nuclear-weapon states to their home countries,” and that “nuclear-weapon states should abandon Cold War thinking and zero-sum competition and stop unrestricted development of the global missile defense system.”³⁸

As described above, China and Russia have shared a common emphasis on building an

international order based on international law and the UN Charter, focusing on transforming the existing international order led by the United States and its allies, as well as opposing “interference in internal affairs” and sanctions by the United States and other countries that may undermine Chinese and Russian political systems. Additionally, China has gained Russian support for the central concepts of the new international order that China is aspiring to realize, including a “new type of international relations” and “community with a shared future for mankind.” For China, Russia is an indispensable partner for building a desirable international order.

China-Russia cooperation to build a new international order was further reinforced during President Putin’s visit to China in February 2022. In the joint statement that was issued following the meeting between President Xi and President Putin, both sides “reaffirm their strong mutual support for the protection of their core interests, state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and oppose interference by external forces in their internal affairs.” On this basis, Russia “notes the significance of the concept of constructing a ‘community with a shared future for mankind,’” while China “notes the significance of the efforts taken by the Russian side to establish a just multipolar system of international relations.” The statement revealed both countries “oppose further enlargement of NATO and call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon its ideologized Cold War approaches” and “remain highly vigilant about the negative impact of the United States’ Indo-Pacific strategy on peace and stability in the region.” Additionally, China and Russia advocated for “the establishment of a new kind of relationships between world powers on the basis of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation,” asserting that “Friendship between the two states has no limits, there are no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation.”³⁹

China’s approach of promoting strategic cooperation with Russia to transform the existing U.S.-led international order remained unchanged even after Russia waged its aggression against Ukraine. China has consistently avoided criticizing Russia, opposed sanctions and strengthened its economic relationship with Russia, and sharply criticized Western countries’ military support to Ukraine as an “act that adds fuel to the fire.” In March 2023, President Xi Jinping visited Russia and held a meeting with President Putin. At the meeting, President Xi stated that the two countries “should support each other on issues concerning each other’s core interests, and jointly resist the interference in internal affairs by external forces.” Xi emphasized that both countries should “make joint efforts to steer and promote global governance in a direction that meets the expectations of the international community” and “advance the trend toward a multi-polar world, and promote the reform and improvement of the global governance



President Xi and President Putin exchanging a joint statement, March 2023 (Photo: Xinhua News Agency/Kyodo News Images)

system.”⁴⁰ In the joint statement issued after their meeting, the two countries expressed that “to settle the Ukraine crisis, the legitimate security concerns of all countries must be respected, bloc confrontation should be prevented and fanning the flames avoided.” In addition, they expressed “serious concern about NATO’s continuous strengthening of military-security ties with Asian-Pacific countries and undermining of regional peace and stability,” and condemned that “The United States maintains Cold War thinking, advances the ‘Indo-Pacific strategy,’ and has a negative impact on the peace and stability of the region.”⁴¹ When Western countries imposed countermeasures toward Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, China perceived it necessary to further cooperate with Russia, which seeks a transformed international order.

China meanwhile appears to be refraining from offering explicit military support to Russia, such as supplying lethal weapons. A likely reason is that, by providing weapons to Russia, China would become subject to severe sanctions from Western countries, including the United States, and this would further impact China’s already stagnant economy. Additionally, military support to Russia is compatible with neither China’s criticism of Western military support to Ukraine, nor China’s claim that the Sino-Russian relationship is not a military alliance. Furthermore, the fact that over 140 countries, including the Global South, have criticized Russia’s invasion of Ukraine may be causing China to hesitate in offering explicit support to Russia. In February 2023, China released a position paper titled “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis,”⁴² which seeks substantive concessions from Ukraine in line with the Russian stance. The paper suggests that China’s intention is to end the Ukraine war as early as possible in a manner favorable to Russia, and thereby, prevent any further decline in Russian power and maintain China’s strategic cooperation with Russia for transforming the international order.

3. China’s Increasingly Contesting Military Posture against the United States

(1) Military Confrontation against the United States and Strengthening Cooperation with Russia

China has adopted a foreign policy of strengthening relationships with developing countries and promoting strategic cooperation with Russia, aiming to transform the existing U.S.-led international order. Simultaneously, China has rapidly built up military capabilities to transform the East Asian security order, which has been maintained with the strong presence of U.S. forces. The PLA began modernizing its military capabilities coinciding with the end of the Cold War. It has commissioned a series of advanced vessels, including aircraft carriers, deployed numerous fourth and fifth-generation fighters with capabilities equivalent to those of the West, and developed ballistic missile capabilities

capable of striking U.S. military bases in East Asia, including Guam. Furthermore, since late 2015, China has conducted large-scale PLA reforms for enhancing its joint operations capabilities.⁴³ By pressing forward with modernization, the PLA substantially strengthened anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities that can restrict U.S. forces' access to the Asia-Pacific region and deter U.S. presence in China's surrounding areas.⁴⁴

Equipped with improved capabilities, the PLA has repeatedly interfered with U.S. force activities in the periphery of China that are in accordance with international law. As discussed earlier, in March 2009, multiple Chinese vessels, including a PLA Navy intelligence collection ship, obstructed the passage of the U.S. Navy's acoustic surveillance ship, USNS *Impeccable*. In December 2013, a PLA Navy landing ship engaged in a dangerous maneuver by crossing in front of the U.S. Navy cruiser USS *Cowpens*. In September 2018, in the South China Sea, a PLA Navy destroyer crossed in front of the U.S. Navy destroyer USS *Decatur* and came within 41 meters of each other. In June 2023, a PLA Navy destroyer engaged in a dangerous maneuver in the Taiwan Strait by twice crossing in front of the U.S. Navy destroyer USS *Chung-Hoon*, coming within approximately 140 meters.⁴⁵ The PLA has also repeatedly engaged in provocative acts against U.S. forces in airspace. In August 2014, a PLA J-11 fighter conducted a dangerous flight over the South China Sea, coming within 6 meters of a U.S. Navy P-8 patrol aircraft. In February 2020, a PLA Navy destroyer struck a military-grade laser and obstructed the flight of a U.S. Navy P-8 patrol aircraft over the Pacific Ocean.⁴⁶ In May 2023, a PLA J-16 fighter dangerously crossed in front of a U.S. Air Force RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft over the South China Sea, forcing the RC-135 into turbulent airspace.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in July 2019 and August 2020, the PLA launched anti-ship ballistic missiles from mainland China toward the South China Sea. All of these actions were attempts to deter or interfere with U.S. military activities in the periphery of China. The PLA's provocative acts against U.S. forces without regard for danger have increased the risk of unintended accidents and collisions.

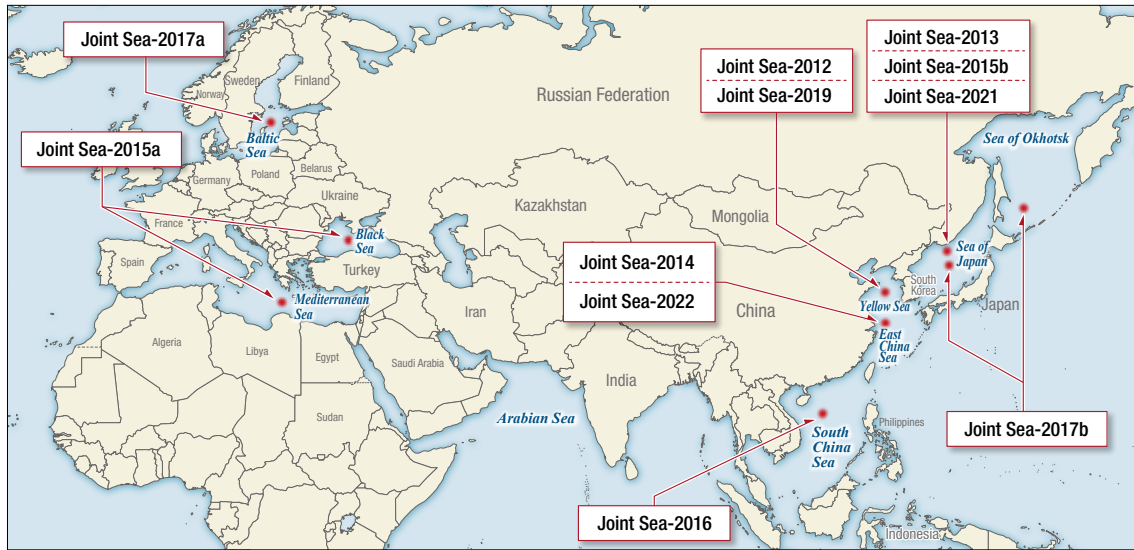
As the PLA bolsters its confrontational posture toward U.S. forces, it has also sought to deepen its cooperative relationship with Russian forces. The PLA conducted its first joint exercise with Russian forces in August 2003 as part of a multilateral counter-terrorism exercise under the SCO. Subsequently, SCO counter-terrorism joint exercises were regularized under the name of "Peace Mission." They began to be conducted bilaterally between China and Russia or multilaterally with other countries. The Peace Mission joint exercises have been carried out ten times between 2005 and 2021.

The PLA and Russian navies conducted their first-ever joint exercise, Joint Sea, covering joint



A Chinese destroyer crossing in front of U.S. destroyer USS *Chung-Hoon*, June 2023 (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Andre T. Richard)

Figure 1.1 China-Russia Joint Sea Bilateral Exercises



Source: Compiled by the author based on *PLA Daily*, USNI News, and other news reports.

defense at sea and joint protection of maritime routes in April 2012 in the Yellow Sea.⁴⁸ Since then, Joint Sea exercises have been conducted nearly every year, not limited to areas around China such as the Sea of Japan and the East and South China Seas but also on the European front, including the Mediterranean and Baltic Seas. For the PLA Navy, these exercises provide an opportunity for training in distant waters away from mainland China, alongside demonstrating solidarity with the Russian Navy that is face-to-face with NATO member navies.

While the Chinese and Russian militaries had gradually deepened their cooperative relationship through the Peace Mission and Joint Sea exercises, it was in 2018 that their relationship strengthened considerably. In September of that year, the PLA participated in Russian forces' Vostok-2018 strategic exercise for the first time. Every year Russian forces conduct this strategic exercise involving large-scale and high-intensity warfare scenarios, and the participants were traditionally Russian allies that are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. In 2018, however, China, which is not a Russian ally, was a participant. Considering that Russian strategic exercises had included China as a hypothetical adversary, the PLA's participation represents a major turning point in the relationship between the two militaries. Subsequently, the PLA participated in Russian forces' Tsent-2019 and Kavkaz-2020 strategic exercises. In 2021, Russian forces participated in the PLA's Western/Interaction-2021 strategic exercise. The PLA also took part in Vostok-2022 in September 2022, even after Russian forces launched an aggression against Ukraine, showcasing the strong cooperative relationship between the two militaries.

Furthermore, the Chinese and Russian militaries began "joint patrols" in airspace and waters in the periphery of Japan. In July 2019, the PLA's H-6 bombers and Russian forces' Tu-95 bombers conducted a joint flight over the East China Sea, the Tsushima Strait, and back over the East China

Sea. In its announcement, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense referred to it as “joint strategic air patrol.”⁴⁹ Since then, the Chinese and Russian air forces have repeatedly conducted “joint strategic air patrols” and gradually enhanced their operational coordination, including expanding the flight range, providing fighter escorts, and launching bombers from each other’s bases. The Chinese and Russian navies have similarly conducted “joint patrols.” In October 2021, five PLA Navy vessels and five Russian Navy vessels participated in Joint Sea-2021 in the Sea of Japan.



PLA Navy vessels (right) and Russian Navy vessels (left) conducting joint maritime patrol, October 2021 (Photo: Joint Staff Office)

Afterwards, they jointly transited the Tsugaru Strait to the Pacific Ocean, sailed southward off the eastern coast of Honshu, Japan and passed through the Osumi Strait before reaching the East China Sea. The *PLA Daily* reported it as the first “joint maritime patrol” by the Chinese and Russian navies.⁵⁰ Subsequently, the two navies have repeatedly conducted “joint maritime patrols” and coordinated navigation in the periphery of Japan. In July 2022, Chinese and Russian naval vessels successively entered or sailed in the contiguous zone of the Senkaku Islands.⁵¹ China and Russia’s objective in conducting “joint patrols” is plausibly to rein in the strengthening of Japan-U.S. cooperation aimed at maintaining the existing rules-based international order. When China and Russia conducted a “joint strategic air patrol” on May 24, 2022, Japan, the United States, India, and Australia were holding a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) Summit in Tokyo. The joint statement issued in March 2023 following the China-Russia summit meeting explicitly mentioned, “Both sides will regularly conduct joint sea and air patrols as well as exercises and training.” In practice, Chinese and Russian air force aircraft conducted “joint strategic air patrol” in June 2023, while their naval vessels conducted “joint maritime patrols” in August 2023. Chinese and Russian forces are anticipated to continue strengthening their joint activities in the periphery of Japan.

(2) Nuclear Capability Buildup for Strengthening Deterrence against the United States

The PLA has steadily reinforced its nuclear capabilities besides rapidly modernizing its conventional forces to enhance A2/AD capabilities against the United States. In the 1980s, China’s nuclear deterrence against the United States was mainly limited to the DF-5A liquid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). However, in the mid-2000s, China developed and deployed its first solid-fueled ICBM, the DF-31, and in recent years, began deploying the longer-range DF-41, which is capable of carrying multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles. Along with increasing its ICBM stockpiles, China

has built more silos for deploying ICBM underground. It is estimated that China's operational silo count has risen from around 20 to around 300.⁵² Furthermore, since the late 2000s, the PLA has begun deploying the new Type 094 nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), and as of 2023, operates six Type 094 SSBNs. Recently, the JL-2 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) on the Type 094 SSBN appears to have been replaced with the new longer-range JL-3, suggesting China is acquiring the ability to launch SLBMs from nearby seas, such as the South China Sea and Bohai Sea, to the continental United States.⁵³ Additionally, the PLA has newly deployed the H-6N, a new bomber with aerial refueling capabilities, and is developing air-launched ballistic missiles (ALBMs) that can be mounted on the H-6N. These moves suggest China's goal is to acquire "nuclear triad" capabilities comparable to that of the United States and Russia.

The PLA has not only increased its nuclear delivery vehicles but also its stockpile of mountable nuclear warheads. According to estimates of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China possesses 410 nuclear warheads as of January 2023, which is 60 more than the previous year.⁵⁴ In addition, in a report published in 2022, the U.S. Department of Defense projected China's nuclear warhead count to rise from around 400 in 2022 to around 1,000 by 2030 and to around 1,500 by 2035.⁵⁵ The United States and Russia are limited to a maximum of 1,550 deployable nuclear warheads under the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START Treaty). If China possesses 1,500 nuclear warheads while this treaty is in effect, it would solidify China's position as a nuclear power on par with the United States and Russia.

While China has never provided a comprehensive explanation of its nuclear weapons policy, it has outlined several tenets in the 2019 Defense White Paper, including: (i) no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances; (ii) no use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or zones unconditionally; (iii) no engagement in a nuclear arms race with any other country; (iv) keeping nuclear capabilities at the minimum level required for national security; and (v) maintaining a nuclear strategy of self-defense with the goal of deterring other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China.⁵⁶ Fan Jishe, director of the Department of Strategic Studies at the Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, explains as follows. As China's sole purpose in pursuing nuclear development is to deter foreign nuclear attacks against China, its policy is to possess the minimum nuclear deterrence necessary to deter such attacks, and therefore, limits itself to maintaining "asymmetric nuclear deterrence" against the United States and Russia.⁵⁷ However, China's recent surge in nuclear capabilities appears to be aimed at building symmetric nuclear capabilities against the United States and Russia, marking a stark departure from the traditional policy.

A significant expansion of Chinese nuclear capabilities would contribute substantially to achieving the Xi Jinping government's goals to transform the existing U.S.-led international order and safeguard core interests. The nuclear deterrence-based international order has traditionally been shaped by two major nuclear-weapon states, the United States and Russia. If China were to become

a third nuclear power, it could play a key role in shaping a new nuclear order. Furthermore, if China can create a situation of mutual assured destruction with the United States, it would give rise to the so-called “stability-instability paradox.” Supposing there is little possibility of escalation into nuclear war with the United States, China might become more inclined to employ conventional forces in theaters where its core interests are concentrated, such as the Taiwan Strait, East China Sea, or South China Sea. The effectiveness of the nuclear threat in discouraging U.S. direct intervention in conflicts is a subject of growing attention, including Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Wu Dahui, deputy dean of Russia Institute at Tsinghua University, argues that Russia’s nuclear threat has clearly deterred U.S. and NATO direct involvement in the Ukraine war.⁵⁸

Russia appears to tolerate China’s rapid enhancement of nuclear capabilities. The China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation states that both countries will not be the first to use nuclear weapons against each other and not target strategic nuclear missiles at each other. Under the treaty, China’s nuclear weapons are not considered a threat to Russia. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Russia has deepened military cooperation and established a strategic cooperative relationship with China. Additionally, Moscow is believed to be providing highly enriched uranium to use as fuel for the fast breeder reactors that China is building.⁵⁹ Fast breeder reactors produce plutonium required for manufacturing nuclear warheads. In this light, Russia is indirectly supporting China’s buildup of nuclear warheads. Moreover, Russia has offered to support China’s development of a missile early warning system,⁶⁰ demonstrating a willingness to cooperate with China’s building of a “launch-on-warning” posture through its nuclear capabilities.

Conclusion

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, China viewed the United States as a threat that could undermine the CCP’s rule. China sought to avoid confrontation with the United States as much as possible and promote cooperation to stabilize the bilateral relationship. Beijing generally accepted the post-Cold War U.S.-led international order and pursued an international order strategy based on cooperation—building a “harmonious world” through “peaceful development.” From around the end of the 2000s, however, the CCP leadership perceived the power of Western countries, with the United States at the forefront, as declining and the power of developing countries, with China at the forefront, as increasing and began to shift its approach. Instead of hesitating from confrontation with the United States on issues related to “core interests,” China strove to reform the existing U.S.-led international order, so as to allow China to use its power to secure its “core interests” and not threaten the CCP’s authoritarian political regime.

The Xi Jinping government, which places an emphasis on the “great rejuvenation of the

Chinese nation” and the protection of “core interests,” urged the United States to respect China’s “core interests,” including the Taiwan issue, and to accept a “new type of major-country relations” that considers China as an equal. At the same time, China has explicitly rejected the existing international order based on rules and universal values, such as freedom and democracy. Rather, it began to advocate for a new model of international order, specifically, a “new type of international relations” and a “community with a shared future for mankind,” which would give a greater voice to China and other developing countries. Russia is a key partner for China sharing a common vision for a desirable international order. In strengthening their position in the rivalry with the United States and other Western countries over the international order, the two countries have bolstered their mutual support and cooperation.

Coupled with pitting against the United States and safeguarding “core interests,” China is reinforcing its military capabilities, primarily A2/AD capabilities, aimed at transforming the U.S. force-led security order in East Asia. By physically obstructing U.S. military operations and conducting more joint exercises and coordinated activities with Russian forces in China’s periphery, Beijing seeks to ratchet up pressure on the United States and Japan and weaken the presence of U.S. forces. Furthermore, China is rapidly strengthening its nuclear capabilities to secure robust nuclear deterrence against the United States. Enhanced nuclear capabilities will likely not only increase China’s voice on nuclear weapons in the future security order, but also raise the threshold for U.S. military involvement in conflicts related to China’s “core interests.” It is expected that China will work to reshape the existing international order by deepening strategic cooperation with Russia, with which it has a shared vision of a desirable international order, alongside reinforcing nuclear and other military capabilities.

NIDS China Security Report 2024

China, Russia, and the United States Striving for a New International Order



Sputnik/Kyodo News Images

Chapter 2

The Russia-Ukraine War and the Putin Regime's Survival Strategy

HASEGAWA Takeyuki

THE CURRENT second term of Vladimir Putin's second administration commenced in May 2018 with the issuance of the so-called "new May decree" that outlines the priorities of the administration, formally known as the presidential decree "On National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Russian Federation through to 2024."¹ The decree begins with the words: "In order to achieve breakthroughs in the stagnant fields of science and technology and socioeconomic development." It sets concrete objectives and numerical targets for social and economic policies, and calls on the Russian bureaucracy to ensure their implementation. This brings to light Russia's stagnant modernization policy since the Dmitry Medvedev administration (2008–2012). Furthermore, it reflects the urgency that the incumbent administration attaches to the longstanding policy challenges facing Russian society.

While being cognizant of Russia's stagnation, the Putin administration embarked on a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022,² approximately four years after issuing the "new May decree." Consequently, Russia incurred harsh economic sanctions from Western countries and lost significant international credibility. Assuming there is some logic behind the policy decisions of the administration, what survival strategy could be guiding its actions?

This chapter examines the above question by focusing on the domestic and foreign survival strategies of the Putin regime. To understand the domestic strategy, the first section takes a historical approach, identifying the features of the current political system from the perspective of contemporary Russian political history and comparative politics. The second section discusses the transformation of the political system and the foreign strategy for regime survival during the Ukraine war, including the wartime situation. It relies on normative documents such as the "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation." Using Russia as a case study, this chapter offers a comparative perspective to consider the new strategic environment, a common theme that runs through this report.

1. The Putin Regime's Survival Strategy



(1) The 2020 Constitutional Reform and the Survival Strategy of the "Inner Circle"

The current Putin administration has encountered difficult maneuvering since taking office in May 2018, as its announced pension reforms that would raise the retirement age triggered severe protests and a decline in approval rating. After nationalism surged with the "annexation of Crimea" in March 2014, President Putin's approval rating had generally remained high in the 80% range. However, discussions over pension reforms intensified in the State Duma (lower house), and his approval rating dropped to 67% in July 2018 and subsequently hovered around the 60% range.³ At that time, the Constitution of the Russian Federation stipulated, "One and the same person may not be elected President of the Russian Federation for more than two terms running."⁴ President Putin's term, which

began in 2012 when he returned to the presidency, was set to expire in May 2024 when he will be age 72. This sparked discourse on who will follow Putin.

The annual presidential address to the Federal Assembly on January 15, 2020 initiated Russia's full-fledged constitutional reform process.⁵ It added a clause that resets the terms of current and former presidents, allowing President Putin to remain in office until 2036 (age 84).⁶ As shown in Figure 2.1, the 2020 constitutional reform not only concentrated power in the president and changed the presidential term, but also enhanced protection of former presidents, such as granting immunity during and after their term.⁷ Moreover, it made presidents eligible to become lifelong senators⁸ in the Federation Council (upper chamber) after leaving office and allowed them to appoint up to seven lifelong senators.⁹ Like former presidents, up to seven lifelong senators would enjoy constitutional protection due to Federal Assembly members possessing immunity during the term of their mandate.¹⁰ These changes can be considered as the institutionalization of the survival strategy of the “inner circle” of the Putin regime.

Figure 2.1 The 2020 Constitutional Reform and the Putin Regime's Survival Strategy

Strategy for the political system's survival and presidential powers	The Putin regime's historical and moral perspectives
 <p>Maintaining the political system and guaranteeing protections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A clause that “resets” the number of terms that can be held by former presidents ● <i>Immunity</i> to presidents who have left office and <i>lifelong senator status</i> ● Presidential authority to appoint (no more than seven) senators <i>for life</i> <p>Enhancement of presidential powers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The president was granted the power to dismiss the chairman of the government (prime minister) and conduct overall direction over the federal government (cabinet) ● The president appoints the heads of foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence agencies upon consultations with the Federation Council (upper chamber) ● The Security Council, the highest decision-making body, was transformed into a deliberative body that <i>cooperates</i> with the president ● Further centralization through the introduction of a “unified system of public authority” and the strengthening of the National Council's functions 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “<i>protection of marriage</i> as a union of a <i>male</i> and a <i>female</i>” ● “The Russian Federation, united by the <i>millennium history</i>, preserving the <i>memory of the ancestors</i> who conveyed to us ideals and <i>belief in God</i>, as well as continuity of development of the Russian state, recognises the unanimity of the State that was established historically.” ● “The Russian Federation honours the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland, ensures <i>protection of historical truth</i>. Diminution of the heroic deed of the people defending the Fatherland is precluded.” ● “The Russian Federation ensures protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Any actions (except delimitation, demarcation, re-demarcation of the state border of the Russian Federation with bordering states) aimed at alienation of the part of the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as calls upon such actions are precluded.”

Source: Compiled by the author based on Hasegawa Takeyuki, “Russia's Constitutional Reform in the Second Putin Administration: Presidential Power in the Russian Political System,” *Security & Strategy*, Vol. 3, January 2023, pp. 61-80. Italics are the author's own emphasis.

Photo: Russian President official website (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69470/photos/69106>; <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69470/photos/69108>).

Details of the clauses endorsing the Putin regime's view of history and traditional family values were later presented in Putin's July 2021 article, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," as well as in his wartime speeches delivered on September 30, 2022 that referred to sexual minorities, including the LGBT people. The intention was evidently to further solidify the support base of his regime. In summary, the 2020 constitutional reform was used to advance the survival strategy of the Putin regime,¹¹ and once again highlighted the absence or weakening of constitutionalism in modern Russia following the Soviet dissolution.

Additionally, the reorganization of departments of the Presidential Administration during the second Putin administration¹² provides insights into how it regards Ukraine and how the state views the post-Soviet space. For example, the Presidential Directorate for Social and Economic Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Member Countries, "the Republic of Abkhazia," and "the Republic of South Ossetia," established in June 2012, was renamed the Presidential Directorate for Cross-Border Cooperation¹³ in October 2018. As shown in Table 2.1, its tasks were modified substantially. It is particularly noteworthy that the "Republic of Abkhazia" and the "Republic of South Ossetia"—unrecognized states that are part of Georgia—were treated on par with Ukraine in laws and regulations.

Table 2.1 Matters under the Jurisdiction of the Presidential Directorate for Cross-Border Cooperation

Presidential Decree No. 893 (June 25, 2012)	Guarantees the president's activities related to social and economic issues with the CIS member countries, "the Republic of Abkhazia," and "the Republic of South Ossetia"
Presidential Decree No. 559 (October 2, 2018)	Guarantees the president's activities related to cross-border cooperation issues with "the Republic of Abkhazia," "the Republic of South Ossetia," Ukraine, and other neighboring countries based on presidential decrees
Presidential Decree No. 459 (August 9, 2021)	Guarantees the president's activities related to cross-border cooperation issues on the European front

Source: Compiled by the author based on relevant presidential decrees.

Personnel changes in the Presidential Directorate for Cross-Border Cooperation provide further insights. Alexei Filatov was promoted from deputy head to head in April 2019. He was reportedly in charge of the overall coordination of humanitarian and political cooperation with the "Donetsk



Expanded meeting of the Security Council held on February 21, 2022 (Photo: Russian President official website, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67825/photos/67644>)

People's Republic" and the "Luhansk People's Republic," which were essentially "influence operations."¹⁴ In August 2021, the task of the directorate changed to "cross-border cooperation on the European track," putting fewer countries under its responsibility.¹⁵ Under the leadership of top officials in the Presidential Administration, such as Presidential Aide Vladislav Surkov and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration Dmitry Kozak,¹⁶ the Presidential

Directorate for Cross-Border Cooperation appears to have played a core role in Moscow's policy toward Ukraine, with a focus on military intervention in Donbas.

These institutional changes fostered a level of shared understanding between the president and the small "inner circle" regarding foreign countries, history, and values, and it became a core component of the regime's survival strategy.

(2) The Putin Regime and Personalization of Power

In studies of authoritarian regimes, a theoretical paradigm that deconstructs personalization of power is used to explain the features of the Putin regime. According to political scientist Erica Frantz, signs of personalization include narrowing of the inner circle, appointment of loyalists to key positions, creation of new security services, placement of family members in powerful posts, and use of referendums as a means of making major decisions.¹⁷ It is said that many of these characteristics align with the political dynamics in modern Russia under the second Putin administration.¹⁸

In the case of appointment of loyalists to key positions, examples include the establishment of the Federal National Guard Service by the 2016 security apparatus reform, the appointment of Viktor Zolotov, former chief of the Presidential Security Service, as its director,¹⁹ the creation of the post of deputy chairman of the Security Council as part of the 2020 Security Council reform, and the appointment of Medvedev, a longtime loyalist.²⁰ Placement of family members in powerful posts is demonstrated by the appointment of "second-generation siloviki" to key positions. For example, Foreign Intelligence Service Director Mikhail Fradkov's second son, Pavel, was appointed first deputy head of the Administrative Directorate of the President, while Dmitry, the eldest son of Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev was appointed minister of agriculture, and Andrey, his second son, a top executive in the energy sector.²¹

During the second Putin administration, Russian politics saw a surge in nationalism driven by territorial expansion, particularly following the "annexation of Crimea." Against this backdrop, Russia's expulsion from the G8 and economic sanctions further cemented the confrontational relationship with Western countries. In addition, Putin continued to take a hardline posture through military interventions in Eastern Ukraine and Syria. The personalization of power by Putin tightened controls not only on organized opposition forces but also on civil society and the general media, and tended to further constrain civil liberties. As a result, connectivity with Western countries diminished steadily. To enhance tolerance toward economic sanctions, Russia conducted summit diplomacy to strengthen its relationships with emerging and developing countries, such as China, India, and Turkey, and rapidly developed closer ties with international mechanisms, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS.

Combined with the above, the temporal limits on President Putin's term as supreme leader had to be taken into account for safeguarding the regime. Ikeda Yoshiro, a scholar of modern Russian history, notes, "Russia sensed that if it does not act now, everything would be lost and the consequences would

be catastrophic.”²² This description acutely captures the situation that has faced the Putin regime in recent years.

The regime’s survival strategy has several features. They include the 2020 constitutional reform aimed at extending the terms of the president and his inner circle and establishing common values and a shared view of history; the appointment of “second-generation siloviki” to maintain the basic nature of the regime; and a foreign policy shaped by Russia’s confrontational relationship with Western countries, especially enhancement of relationships with countries that have a strong authoritarian tilt by leveraging President Putin’s network.

Some insights may thus be offered on the policymaking process for the second Russia-Ukraine war that began on February 24, 2022, focusing on institutional characteristics such as personalization of power and the narrowing of the inner circle in the Putin regime. However, details of the decision-making, including the timing chosen to commence the war, await further empirical research. Considering the survival strategy examined in this section, the war in Ukraine appears to be an attempt to realize foreign and military policies for defending and establishing the regime’s values and view of history and to permeate them without bounds. Even by extending its term, the Putin regime sought to resolve the key challenges facing the strategic fronts of “great power Russia” as its “special responsibility” and establish it as the legacy of the regime.

2. Regime Transformation and Foreign Strategy for Regime Survival during the Ukraine War

(1) The Dynamics of Regime Transformation

The war in Ukraine brought further changes to the Putin regime.²³ Russian politics during wartime have seen amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Offenses that restrict (if not deprive) civil liberties through strict speech and information control.²⁴ Other features include increased personalization of power. The growth of informal actors, such as private military companies, and autonomous actors have also resulted in policy process disruptions. In foreign policy, sweeping sanctions, exemplified by Russia’s exclusion from SWIFT, have given rise to a survival strategy—strengthening relations (or dependence) with countries like China, India, and Turkey. In line with the purpose of this report, the following section analyzes the transformation of Russia’s political system and its pursuit of a foreign survival strategy during the Ukraine war, relying on normative documents such as the “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” that was revised in March 2023.

As outlined in Figure 2.2, structural features of the Putin regime in wartime include increased personalization through the installation of loyalists in key positions, the growing influence of informal actors, and the rise of autonomous actors, such as regional governors.

Figure 2.2 Structural Features of the Putin Regime in the Ukraine War



Source: Compiled by the author based on Tatiana Stanovaya, “The Putin Regime Cracks,” Carnegie Moscow Center, May 2020; 長谷川雄之[Hasegawa Takeyuki]「第2次ロシア・ウクライナ戦争とプーチン体制の諸相——権力構造と政治エリート」『国際安全保障』第51巻第2号、2023年9月、14-25頁；*Ведомости*, от 18 июля 2023г., «Спецназ МВД передают Росгвардии: Такое решение принял президент Владимир Путин»; *Украинская правда*, от 25 июня 2023г., «Путина не было нигде»: СМИ узнали, как шли переговоры с Пригожиным»; *The Wall Street Journal*, December 2 and 23, 2022, among other sources.

Photo: Russian President official website (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/trips/71718/photos/71909>; <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/307/biography>; <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71530/photos/71668>; <http://www.kremlin.ru/catalog/keywords/86/events/70667/photos/70512>; <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51259/photos/43194>; <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71723/photos/71957>; <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/74/events>); (Prigozhin only) ©Pool/Wagner Group/Planet Pix via ZUMA Press Wire/Kyodo News Images.

An example of the installation of loyalists in key positions is the appointment of Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Medvedev to an important policy post. Amid reports that the Ukraine war and economic sanctions were causing the defense industry to stagnate and weaponry to be depleted, Medvedev was appointed as first deputy chairman of the Presidential Military-Industrial Commission on December 26, 2022.²⁵ The commission, chaired by the president, is a permanent body for implementing national policies on the military-industrial complex and military technology assurance in defense, security, and law enforcement activities.²⁶ In September 2014, it was elevated from a federal government commission to a presidential commission.²⁷ While its major task for now is monitoring the production system of the military-industrial complex,²⁸ a structure was established in which First Deputy Chairman Medvedev leads the practical aspects of the commission,²⁹ while



A person getting a commemorative photo taken with Wagner troops during the “Wagner Rebellion,” June 2023 (Photo: Sputnik/Kyodo News Images)

Denis Manturov, deputy chairman of the commission and chairman of its Board (also deputy prime minister and minister of industry and trade), brings together the relevant parties to execute policy.

At the same time, some have pointed out conflicts among the formal actors, including conflicts between the Ministry of Defense/Russian Armed Forces and the security apparatus, such as the Federal Security Service (FSB). They have openly criticized each other on military operation planning, the quality of intelligence,

and the performance of the Russian forces.³⁰ Such disruptions in policy processes have been further exacerbated by the increasing presence of informal or autonomous actors, such as private military companies like the Wagner Group, RSB-Group (Russian Security Systems), and Moran Security Group,³¹ together with Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the Chechen Republic, and his affiliated units.³²

Since its establishment in spring 2014, the Wagner Group led by Yevgeny Prigozhin leveraged its connections with the Russian military intelligence service (GRU), airborne forces, special forces (Spetsnaz), and others to expand the capability, size, and areas of activities. With the support and direction of the GRU, the Wagner Group’s military operations have spanned not only Ukraine but also Syria, Sudan, Libya, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Madagascar.³³ The group’s original role was to complement official state institutions, such as the Russian forces and security services.³⁴ During the Ukraine war, however, Prigozhin’s critiques of the formal system and his remarks, which could be read as political interference, gained prominence. Informal actors grew noticeably, with one scholar describing it as the “semi-privatization” of Russia’s state security functions.³⁵

In response, the Kremlin attempted to compel private soldiers, including Wagner fighters, into contracts with the Defense Ministry and force informal actors to join the formal system. The “Wagner Rebellion” initiated on June 23, 2023 was its consequence.³⁶ While the rebellion subsided with the mediation of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and others, Yevgeny Prigozhin maintained a certain presence, traveling between Russia, Belarus, and African countries. But, on August 23, 2023, exactly two months after the rebellion, a private jet crashed in Tver Oblast. The Federal Agency for Air Transport announced that the passenger list included Prigozhin and other senior officials from the Wagner Group, including Dmitry Utkin.³⁷ President Putin expressed his condolences to the victims and praised Prigozhin as a “man with a complex destiny” and a “talented man.”³⁸

While the crash put an end to Prigozhin’s mutiny, continued attention will be paid to the fate of the remaining Wagner members and the forces close to Prigozhin, the redistribution of Wagner’s massive interests, and the changes that private military companies are bringing to Russia’s influence

in the Middle East and Africa.

During the war in Ukraine, those loyal to the Putin regime as well as formal and informal actors made various independent moves that have pulled them into intense power struggles and interdepartmental conflicts. The Russian presidential election is also looming in 2024. Instability within the regime, including the question of who will eventually replace Putin, is likely to become a significant element that will heighten uncertainty in the international order.

(2) A New “Foreign Policy Concept” and Challenging a “Small Group of States”

Against this backdrop, what is the Putin regime’s vision for the international order? In the second Russia-Ukraine war, the bulk of the Russian government’s major tasks are military operations and preparations for mobilization across a vast area, combined with implementation of financial policies and emergency economic measures to deal with the situation. There have also been policy developments, such as the revision of the “Foreign Policy Concept” that outlines Russia’s basic foreign policy in March 2023, a first in around six years.³⁹

In the hierarchy of modern Russia’s strategic documents, the “National Security Strategy” (revised in July 2021) is at the top, followed by lower-level documents, such as “Military Doctrine,” “Foreign Policy Concept,” and “Information Security Doctrine” that are formulated for each policy area. The documents are drafted by the relevant ministries and agencies and undergo adjustments by the Kremlin (Presidential Administration and Security Council) before they are ultimately approved by presidential decree.

At the meeting with permanent members of the Security Council on March 31, 2023, President Putin stated that Russia’s bureaucracy did extensive and meticulous work to the “Foreign Policy Concept” to align it with the “modern geopolitical phenomena.”⁴⁰ In reality, however, the concept is an entirely different document from the previous version (2016). On February 21, 2023, prior to the concept’s approval, the government revoked the presidential decree “On Measures to Implement Foreign Policy,” which had mainly listed its expectations for the Foreign Ministry following Putin’s re-election in 2012.⁴¹ This decree had established the “basic principles of pragmatism, openness, and multi-vector nature” for ensuring Russian national interests.⁴² The abolition of the decree is considered to mark a major turning point in Russian diplomacy.

As shown in Table 2.2, the basic structure of the new “Foreign Policy Concept” follows the 2016 version’s. It presents the worldview in I and II and then provides details about issue and region-specific foreign policies in IV and V. The new concept underscores the uniqueness of the Russian state, describing itself as having “more than a thousand years of independent statehood,” “a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power,” and “one of the two largest nuclear powers.” Additionally, “awareness of its special responsibility for maintaining peace and security at the global and regional levels” can be read as a declaration of its mission by the current regime. The document also expresses aversion toward the “rules-based world order”⁴³ and describes plainly and openly about the regime’s view of the

Table 2.2 Composition and Key Points of the “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation”

2016 Foreign Policy Concept	2023 Foreign Policy Concept
Approved by Presidential Decree No. 640 of November 30, 2016	Approved by Presidential Decree No. 229 of March 31, 2023
I. General Provisions (Paras. 1–3) “allow Russia’s economy to grow steadily and become more competitive” “the principles of independence and sovereignty, pragmatism, transparency, predictability, a multidirectional approach and the commitment to pursue national priorities on a non-confrontational basis”	I. General Provisions (Paras. 1–6) “More than a thousand years of independent statehood” “a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power” “one of the two largest nuclear powers” “awareness of its special responsibility”
II. Modern World and Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Paras. 4–22) Worldview “The world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system.”	II. Today’s World: Major Trends and Prospects for Development (Paras. 7–14) Worldview “Humanity is currently going through revolutionary changes” “a small group of states is trying to replace [the international legal system] with the concept of a rules-based world order (imposition of rules, standards and norms that have been developed without equitable participation of all interested states)”
III. Priorities of the Russian Federation in Overcoming Global Challenges (Paras. 23–48) Stipulates foreign policy specific to various issues, such as strengthening international security and international economic and environmental cooperation	III. National Interests of the Russian Federation in the Foreign Policy Domain, Strategic Goals and Key Tasks Set by the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Paras. 15–17) Stipulates national interests and strategic goals
	IV. Foreign Policy Priorities of the Russian Federation (Paras. 18–48) Stipulates foreign policy specific to various issues
IV. Regional Foreign Policy Priorities of the Russian Federation (Paras. 49–99) China Russia will continue developing comprehensive, equal, and trust-based partnership and strategic cooperation, and proactively step up cooperation in all areas. Russia views common principled approaches adopted by the two countries to addressing the key issues on the global agenda as one of the core elements of regional and global stability. Building on this foundation, Russia intends to promote foreign policy cooperation with China in various areas, including countering new challenges and threats, resolving urgent regional and global problems, cooperation in international organizations and multilateral associations. India Russia is committed to further strengthening its particularly privileged strategic partnership with India based on shared foreign policy priorities, historical friendship and deep mutual trust, as well as strengthening cooperation on urgent international issues and enhancing mutually beneficial bilateral ties in all areas, primarily in trade and economy, with a focus on implementing long-term cooperation programmes approved by the two countries.	V. Regional Tracks of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Paras. 49–65) New geographical divisions Listed in the order of near abroad; the Arctic; Eurasian continent, China, and India; Asia-Pacific; the Islamic world; Africa; Latin America and the Caribbean; European region; the U.S. and other Anglo-Saxon states; and Antarctica. China Russia aims at further strengthening the comprehensive partnership and the strategic cooperation with China and focuses on the development of a mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas, provision of mutual assistance, and enhancement of coordination in the international arena to ensure security, stability and sustainable development at the global and regional levels, both in Eurasia and in other parts of the world. India Russia will continue to build up a particularly privileged strategic partnership with India with a view to enhance and expand cooperation in all areas on a mutually beneficial basis and place special emphasis on increasing the volume of bilateral trade, strengthening investment and technological ties, and ensuring their resistance to destructive actions of unfriendly states and their alliances.
V. Formation and Implementation of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Paras. 100–108)	VI. Formation and Implementation of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (Paras. 66–76)

Source: Compiled by the author based on relevant presidential decrees.

Table 2.3 Key Points of Modern Russia's Normative Documents on Nuclear Policy

Normative documents	“Military Doctrine”	“Fundamentals of Nuclear Deterrence State Policy”
Legal basis	Article 83, (z) of the Constitution Presidential Decree No. 815 and Presidential Directive No. 2976 of December 25, 2014	Presidential Decree No. 355 of June 2, 2020
Notable parts	<p>Para. 27: The Russian Federation shall reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy. The decision to use nuclear weapons shall be taken by the President of the Russian Federation.</p>  <p>Strategic deterrence drill (October 26, 2022)</p>  <p>Strategic deterrence exercise (February 19, 2022)</p>	<p>The document consists of (I) General Provisions, (II) Essence of Nuclear Deterrence, (III) Conditions for the Transition of the Russian Federation to the Use of Nuclear Weapons, and (IV) Tasks and Functions of Federal Government Authorities, Other Government Bodies and Organizations for Implementing State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence.</p> <p>(III) Para. 17: The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy. (Same as Military Doctrine, para. 27)</p> <p>(III) Para. 19: The conditions specifying the possibility of nuclear weapons use by the Russian Federation are as follows: a) arrival of reliable data on a launch of ballistic missiles attacking the territory of the Russian Federation and/or its allies; b) use of nuclear weapons or other types of weapons of mass destruction by an adversary against the Russian Federation and/or its allies; c) attack by an adversary against critical governmental or military sites of the Russian Federation, disruption of which would undermine nuclear forces response actions; d) aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy.</p> <p>(I) Para. 4: State policy on nuclear deterrence is defensive by nature, and is aimed at maintaining the nuclear forces potential at the level sufficient for nuclear deterrence. It guarantees protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, and deterrence of a potential adversary from aggression against the Russian Federation and/or its allies. In the event of a military conflict, this Policy provides for the prevention of an escalation of military actions and their termination on conditions that are acceptable for the Russian Federation and/or its allies.</p>

Source: Compiled by the author based on relevant laws and regulations.

Photo: Russian President official website (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69680/photos/69289>; <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67814/photos/67633>).

international order. Such features align with the direction of the survival strategy of the Putin regime discussed in the first section.

According to the self-description of “one of the two largest nuclear powers,” paragraph 27 on strategic stability refers to “strategic deterrence, preventing the aggravation of interstate relations to a level capable of provoking military conflicts, including with the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction.”⁴⁴ The so-called “nuclear dependence” of the Putin regime is epitomized in narratives about using its nuclear trump cards during the war against Ukraine,⁴⁵ and the wording in



China-Russia summit meeting held in Moscow, March 2023 (Photo: Sputnik/Kyodo News Images)

the “Foreign Policy Concept” can be understood in this context.

Normative documents on modern Russia’s nuclear strategy consist of the “Military Doctrine” (approved in December 2014) and the “Fundamentals of Nuclear Deterrence State Policy” (approved in June 2020).⁴⁶ Their key points are outlined in Table 2.3. Russia’s nuclear strategy can be summarized into the following three parts.⁴⁷ The first is to intimidate an adversary with unacceptable damage in order to deter

threats relating to Russia’s existence, especially large-scale nuclear threats. The second is to launch limited first use of nuclear weapons to compel termination of an ongoing conventional war on terms acceptable to Russia (albeit it is unclear whether acceptable is the same as victory). The third is to execute large-scale nuclear operations in the event that the Russian state’s very existence is threatened by an adversary’s aggression with conventional weapons. While the first and third parts are clearly articulated in the normative documents, there remains some ambiguity regarding the second one. If we go back to the principles, even more important than the scenarios of nuclear weapons use presented in the Fundamentals is the following: the actual use of nuclear weapons rests on the standing and authority of “a single supreme authority”—the president’s standing as the supreme commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, as stipulated in Article 87 of the Constitution, and the president’s authority to take decisions on nuclear weapons use, as stipulated in paragraph 27 of the Military Doctrine.

Russia has continued to build up its deterrence posture against the United States during the war in Ukraine. In mid-April 2023, the Russian Navy’s Pacific Fleet conducted a surprise inspection of its large-scale combat readiness and announced that 167 vessels, including 12 submarines, 28 aircraft, and 25,000 personnel participated.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Borey-class nuclear-powered submarine (Project 955A) started her transfer from the Northern Fleet to the Pacific Fleet by sailing along the Arctic sea route in August 2023, and is expected to serve her mission with the submarine base in Vilyuchinsk, Kamchatka Peninsula as her new homeport.⁴⁹ Russia seeks to maintain and reinforce its nuclear capabilities in the Okhotsk Sea as part of its deterrence against the United States.

(3) Military, Nuclear, and Arctic Cooperation between the Russian and Chinese Regimes

The new “Foreign Policy Concept” sets out Russia’s policy of “further strengthening the comprehensive partnership and the strategic cooperation” with China. While this is essentially in line with the 2021 National Security Strategy, the concept adds that the cooperation will span not only the Eurasian region but also other parts of the world.⁵⁰

In March 2023, President Xi Jinping visited Moscow for his first overseas trip since assuming his third term and met with the Russian leader. The outcomes of their meeting were compiled into 14 documents, including the “Joint Statement on Deepening the Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Cooperation for a New Era.” The documents attracted attention, particularly Russia’s stance on Taiwan and economic cooperation focusing on Russian LNG exports. Receiving less attention but nonetheless noteworthy is the documents’ mention of the “Comprehensive Long-Term Cooperation Program in the Area of Fast Reactors and Nuclear Fuel Cycle Closure” between Rosatom, a global nuclear firm, and the China Atomic Energy Authority.⁵¹ In December 2022, Rosatom reportedly exported to China 6,477 kilograms of uranium that can be used for fueling the CFR-600 fast-neutron reactor.⁵² As such reports suggest, the two countries have steadily deepened their nuclear cooperation, which is directing attention on the fate of their nuclear relationship.⁵³

In the Russia-China joint statement, “rules-based order” is described using the term “hegemonism.” Some have interpreted this as an indication that Russia and China regard the United States or Western countries as their “primary adversary.”⁵⁴ The view of the West, as expressed in the joint statement, aligns with the wording in Russia’s “Foreign Policy Concept.” Although the two countries may not have reached a common vision of the international order, they are rapidly converging in their threat perception.

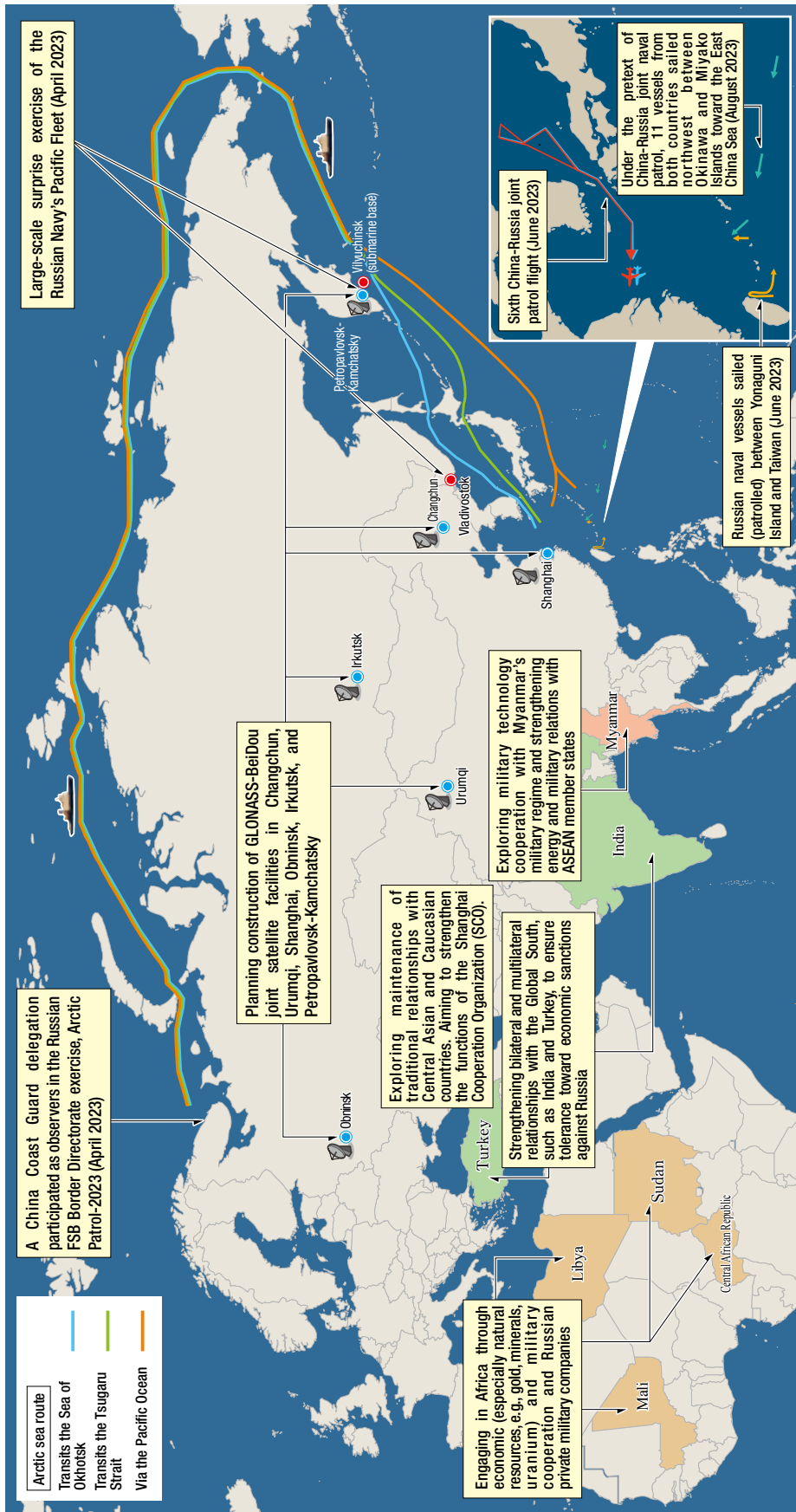
The sixth Russia-China Joint Patrol was conducted on June 6, 2023, in which two Russian Tu-95 bombers and two Chinese H-6 bombers jointly flew over the Sea of Japan to the East China Sea.⁵⁵ In July, Russian forces participated in the Northern/Interaction-2023 military exercise hosted by China’s Northern Theater Command, and joint naval exercises were conducted in the Sea of Japan.⁵⁶ As these examples demonstrate, Russian and Chinese forces have continued to carry out some level of joint activities in the periphery of Japan, even during the war on Ukraine (see Figure 2.3).

Likewise, their quasi-military organizations and law enforcement agencies have enhanced their cooperation, especially in the Arctic Sea. In April 2023, the “Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation and the China Coast Guard” was signed in Murmansk in the Arctic between Vladimir Kulishov, first deputy director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and director of the Border Guard Service, and a delegation from the China Coast Guard (CCG). This memorandum put forward the direction for expanding cooperation in search and rescue operations at sea, counterterrorism, and combating illegal fishing, illegal immigration, and the smuggling of weapons and drugs.⁵⁷

On April 25, 2023, the Arctic Patrol-2023 practical maritime exercise was conducted under the command of Stanislav Maslov, chief of the FSB Border Directorate for the Western Arctic Region, and a delegation from the CCG participated as an observer.⁵⁸

As Russia faces Western economic sanctions due to the war in Ukraine, support from China, India, and other emerging countries has become essential for national security interests, namely, energy development in the Arctic and the installation of ports and other infrastructure along the Arctic

Figure 2.3 The Putin Regime's Foreign Survival Strategy



Source: Compiled by the author based on *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, от 08 августа 2022 г., «Мишустин утвердил программу развития Северного морского пути с финансированием в 1790, 5 млрд рублей»; *Коммерсантъ*, от 27 сентября 2021 г., «РФ и Китай договорились о взаимном размещении спутниковых станций»; *Морские вести России*, от 19 мая 2023 г., «Руководство Погранслужбы ФСБ РФ поблагодарило морских спасателей за активное содействие в проведении учений 'Арктический патруль - 2023'»; 小林周[Kobayashi Amane] 露ワグネルのアフリカにおける動向——「アフリカ」はどのような変化をもたらすか 国際情報ネットワーク分析INA (2023年7月27日), among other sources.

sea route. How Russia will deepen its collaboration with China, its biggest partner, and how the FSB and the CCG will work together in areas like the Arctic sea route as well as areas connected to the Arctic Sea, such as the Bering Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Sea of Japan, will be noteworthy.

(4) Russia and the “Global South”

It should be noted that the new “Foreign Policy Concept” vows to strengthen relations with emerging and developing countries, the so-called “Global South,” with India being a prime example. The paragraph on India mentions “ensuring [India’s] resistance to destructive actions of unfriendly states and their alliances.”⁵⁹ As such, Russia’s policy toward India is framed around its response to the economic sanctions over the war in Ukraine.

Furthermore, the section on the “Islamic world” gives emphasis to strengthening relations with Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt in particular.⁶⁰ Iran has supplied large quantities of the Shahed-136 low-cost suicide drone to Russia⁶¹ and has deepened the bilateral relationship during the Ukraine war. At the SCO Summit in July 2023, Iran became the ninth official member of the SCO,⁶² which has reinforced its nature as a counterbalance to Western countries.

Turkey has pursued balancing diplomacy even during the war against Ukraine, maintaining relations with both Russia and Ukraine. Turkey has stepped up energy cooperation with Russia, including LNG and nuclear cooperation, and it has boosted economic ties mainly in the tourism, finance, and real estate sectors.⁶³ At the same time, Turkey supplies unmanned aerial vehicles such as the Bayraktar TB2 to Ukraine as part of its military support. Russia’s nuclear industry has a significant presence in Turkey. In April 2023, Rosatom delivered the first batch of fuel to Turkey’s first nuclear power plant (Akkuyu), which will be launched with the company’s support.⁶⁴

Turkey, a regional power in the Black Sea, led the negotiations on the Black Sea Grain Initiative, an agreement among Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, and the UN to address the grain export issues arising from the Ukraine war. While the initiative ended with Russia’s withdrawal on July 17, 2023, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Sochi in southern Russia and held a meeting with President Putin on September 4. A tête-à-tête was held over breakfast, in addition to an expanded meeting attended by ministers and senior government officials responsible for financial, energy, and military technology cooperation,⁶⁵ highlighting the closeness of the Russia-Turkey relationship. Especially after the “annexation of Crimea,” the Putin regime has put agricultural policy and food security in the same framework as the National Security Strategy. Agricultural policy, together with energy policy, continues to constitute the Russian foreign strategy for regime survival during the Ukraine war.

The emerging and developing states known as the “Global South” include many countries that Russia has not designated “unfriendly states.” Nonetheless, Russia’s independent approach toward these countries, its cooperation with China, and its approach through the SCO framework demands ever more attention.

Conclusion

At the G7 Summit in May 2023, the G7 leaders issued the G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué, which put support for Ukraine at the fore and committed to upholding and reinforcing the “free and open international order based on the rule of law.”⁶⁶ As discussed in this chapter, the Putin regime, a challenger to the existing international order, harbors a strong sense of rivalry against the international order favored by the G7 countries. At the root of this rivalry is built-up dissatisfaction with the restructuring of the post-Cold War international order. Moreover, as this chapter examined, the Putin regime emphasizes Russia's traditional spirit and moral values as well as its unique view of history. It also exhibits an aversion to Western liberal values, including diversity and inclusivity, and to civil society activities. Especially in recent years, these sentiments, coupled with Putin's increasing personalization of power, tended to be amplified as a domestic strategy for regime survival.

Such views of the international order have emerged in the broad context of modern Russia's political and diplomatic history. The views are linked to Russia's internal developments as well, exemplified by constraints on civil liberties, the absence of constitutionalism, and the rise of personalization. The regime has a growing affinity with Xi Jinping's political regime, which too has shown increasing personalization. Due in part to Russia's dependence on China for the Ukraine war, cooperating with the Chinese regime has become a foreign strategy for regime survival. As this chapter examined in detail, Russia-China relations are steadily deepening in policy areas, such as military, nuclear, and Arctic development.

Aiming to strengthen cooperation with emerging and developing states in the “Global South” in wartime, the Putin regime is actively approaching countries that are highly aligned with them politically, such as SCO and BRICS member nations, both through diplomatic and military activities.

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China, Russia, and the United States Striving for a New International Order



Chapter 3

U.S. Military Strategy for Maintaining the International Order

ARAKAKI Hiromu

FROM THE perspective of U.S. national security, the perceived threat of China and Russia only started growing from the 2010s onward. The United States had sought to foster cooperative relations with China and Russia during the post-Cold War era, especially following the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 that prompted the United States to pursue the war on terror which it had deemed its greatest national security challenge.

With regard to China, the United States maintained a policy of engagement based on the expectation that China's approval as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001 would lead to greater economic growth through its integration into the global economy, that a more economically powerful China would eventually play a role in tackling common global problems such as climate change and nuclear non-proliferation, and that democratic values would take root in China. With regard to Russia, too, the United States pursued political and economic cooperation as well as cooperative relations in the area of security by inviting Russia to join the G8 in 1998 with the expectation that Russia would play a certain role in maintaining a stable security environment in Western Europe and in advancing arms control as one of the two major nuclear powers.

However, the eventual reality diverged significantly from U.S. expectations of China and Russia described above. China, which became the world's second-largest economy by GDP in 2010, continued modernizing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by drawing on its economic power while repeatedly asserting its coercive territorial claims in the East and South China Seas and intensifying its attempts to change the status quo through the use of *faits accomplis*. Russia, on the other hand, intervened militarily in Georgia's civil war in 2008 and again in Ukraine in February 2014 before illegally annexing the Crimean Peninsula as it continued to provide military support for Russian-backed separatist groups operating in eastern Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, the Donald Trump administration inaugurated in 2017 declared that the United States was engaged in political, economic, and military great power competition with both China and Russia, which it decried as revisionist states that were "contesting [U.S.] geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor."¹ The Joseph Biden administration has also branded China as the United States' "most consequential geopolitical challenge," and Russia, which launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, as an "immediate and persistent threat to international peace and stability."² U.S. national security strategy is now formulated based on the premise of strategic competition with China and Russia.

This chapter aims to answer the question of what kind of international order the United States hopes to shape and how the United States approaches and intends to respond to strategic competition with China and Russia under such an order. The United States is currently engaged in strategic competition with China and Russia across a wide range of different arenas, including in the political, military/diplomatic, and economic domains. This chapter will thus focus on the military domain while examining the questions of (i) what military threats are posed by strategic competition with China and Russia, and (ii) how the United States, and the U.S. military in particular, intends to respond to these threats.

Section 1 discusses the Biden administration’s vision of the international order, its basic policies toward China and Russia, the history of how China and Russia came to be perceived as major threats to U.S. national security, and the three new military challenges posed by strategic competition with China and Russia. Section 2 examines these new military challenges, namely, competition below the threshold of armed conflict, the U.S. military’s response to anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) threats against its power projection capabilities and operational actions, as well as its response to threats against its kill chain. Section 3 outlines the issue of having “two nuclear-capable near-peers” in terms of future changes in the balance of nuclear forces, and discusses the Biden administration’s response in this regard.

1. Growing Perception of China and Russia as Threats

(1) Re-emergence of Great Power Competition

In the National Security Strategy issued in October 2022 (NSS 2022), the Biden administration identified China and Russia as the greatest challenge to the international order that the United States seeks to achieve. It goes on to describe China as “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective.”³ Russia, on the other hand, is said to pose an “immediate and persistent threat to international peace and stability” against the backdrop of its invasion of Ukraine.⁴

However, it is only in recent years that the United States has come to recognize China and Russia as rivals in geopolitical competition. From the end of the Cold War until the early 2010s, the United States had adopted a cooperative stance toward China and Russia despite the existence of certain challenges. The George W. Bush administration made it clear that the United States “must seize the opportunity—unusual in historical terms—of an absence of fundamental conflict between the great powers”⁵ by aiming to build “a new strategic relationship [with Russia] based on a central reality of the twenty-first century: the United States and Russia are no longer strategic adversaries” and by welcoming “the emergence of a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China.”⁶

The Barack Obama administration had also initially expressed a commitment to the establishment of cooperative relations with China and Russia in order to maintain the U.S.-led international order. It set out to “pursue a positive, constructive, and comprehensive relationship with China” in the hope of cooperating with China to tackle various issues such as the war on terror, climate change, and North Korea’s nuclear development.⁷ At the same time, it sought to “build a stable, substantive, multidimensional relationship with Russia, based on mutual interests.”⁸

This course of cooperation with China and Russia underwent a major shift under the Trump administration when the National Security Strategy issued in December 2017 (NSS 2017) declared that “China

and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity,” branding the two countries as revisionist states that were aiming to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.⁹ It also warned that China was attempting to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, while Russia was seeking to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders.¹⁰ Confronted with these emerging political, economic, and military competitions around the world, the United States emphasized the need to “rethink the policies of the past two decades—policies based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners.”¹¹

Along with its view of the world as being in an era of great power competition, the Trump administration’s hardline stance toward China and Russia was also sparked by Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine as well as China’s assertion of coercive territorial claims and use of *faits accomplis* in the East and South China Seas, which led to a growing perception of China and Russia as threats from the 2010s onward.

Shortly after the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine in late February 2014, Russia launched a military intervention in the Crimean Peninsula and illegally annexed it as part of the Russian Federation in March of the same year. Russia was later strongly suspected of its involvement in an anti-government armed conflict led by Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. In response to these events, the Obama administration issued executive orders imposing economic sanctions on government officials and Russian companies.¹² Furthermore, there were growing concerns about Russia’s use of cyberspace to influence and interfere in U.S. elections during this period, and the Obama administration imposed sanctions on government agencies and individuals alleged to have been involved in cyberattacks against critical infrastructure and financial systems.¹³

The United States had pursued a policy of engagement with China during the post-Cold War era based on the strengthening of political, social, and economic ties, backed by economic benefits and hopes for future democratization. Since then, China has achieved remarkable economic growth, surpassing Japan in 2010 to become the world’s second-largest economy by GDP. Fueled by its economic power, China continued to modernize the PLA through the 2000s, greatly improving its A2/AD capabilities for impacting the U.S. military’s power projection capabilities and operational actions. Moreover, even as U.S. trade deficit with China continued to expand, there was an emergence of the issue of non-tariff barriers, including restrictions on access of foreign companies to the Chinese market. Under these circumstances, both the Bush and Obama administrations became increasingly dissatisfied with and wary of China in the military and economic domains.¹⁴

Further exacerbating the United States’ dim view of China were China’s assertion of coercive territorial claims in the East and South China Seas as well as the manner in which China stepped up its use of *faits accomplis*. On November 13, 2013, China’s Ministry of National Defense unilaterally declared that it had established an East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea and that it would adopt “defensive emergency measures” in the event that aircraft flying in this airspace did not abide

by the procedures established by the Ministry. Around December of the same year, China began reclamation work on low-tide elevations in several areas within the South China Sea to which other countries in the region had asserted territorial claims. It then constructed a number of large artificial islands and even deployed the PLA to these islands, converting them into military bases.¹⁵

The Biden administration inaugurated in 2021 has also recognized that “the post-Cold War era is definitively over and a competition is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next,”¹⁶ signaling its intent to continue adopting the Trump administration’s view of the world as being in an era of great power competition with China and Russia. The Biden administration’s goal is to maintain an international order in “a world that is free, open, [and] prosperous.”¹⁷ NSS 2022 states that with regard to the essential elements of such an international order, “the foundational principles of self-determination, territorial integrity, and political independence must be respected, international institutions must be strengthened, countries must be free to determine their own foreign policy choices, information must be allowed to flow freely, universal human rights must be upheld, and the global economy must operate on a level playing field.”¹⁸ It goes on to highlight the fact that these values are also enshrined in the United Nations Charter.¹⁹

China is perceived by the Biden administration as the greatest challenge to maintaining this international order moving forward. NSS 2022 states that China presents the United States’ “most consequential geopolitical challenge” and underscores the administration’s intent to prevail over China in this competition. From a military perspective, the Biden administration has also made China a point of focus, with the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS 2022) issued in October 2022 positioning China as a “pacing challenge” in U.S. national defense planning and setting forth a strategy that considers the prevention of China’s dominance of key regions as a top priority.²⁰

The main arena of strategic competition with China is in the military/diplomatic domain. The United States seeks to “prevent [China’s] dominance of key regions,” including by maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, in light of various military challenges such as the improved capabilities and expanded range of activities of the PLA following its modernization, as well as China’s hardline territorial claims and use of *faits accomplis* in the East and South China Seas.²¹ As discussed below, the U.S. military is improving its capabilities and strengthening its posture, enhancing the resilience of its kill chain systems that may be subject to attack by China, and developing a Joint Warfighting Concept, as means to achieve this goal.

Competition with China in the military/diplomatic domain has also spilled over into the economic domain. Trade volume between the United States and China has increased under the Biden administration as well, resulting in deeper economic interdependence between the two countries. In recent years, however, China’s illicit acquisition and theft of cutting-edge technologies from U.S. companies as well as its use of economic statecraft as a means of imposing its political claims on other countries have emerged as risks to U.S. national security. In response, the United States has sought to prevent the outflow of emerging technologies to China and build supply chains for semiconductors and other strategic goods that

are independent of China.²²

The Biden administration has also indicated that it will “compete responsibly” with China,²³ with a focus on managing the competition and ensuring that American interests are not harmed by excessively intense competition in the form of unintended military conflict or an economic decoupling between the United States and China. However, achieving this will not be easy, as the competition for military superiority and technological supremacy in the economic domain looks set to intensify moving forward.

Besides having identified China as the greatest challenge for U.S. national security, the Biden administration has also recognized Russia as an “acute threat” that poses significant and persistent risks to key regions in view of not only Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine since 2014 but also its military intervention in Syria, its efforts to destabilize its neighbors, its attempts to undermine internal political processes in countries across Europe and Central Asia, and its interference in U.S. politics.²⁴ In order to achieve the policy goal of making Russia’s invasion of Ukraine a “strategic failure,”²⁵ the current U.S. approach toward Russia is to provide an overwhelming amount of security assistance to Ukraine in collaboration with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other allies and partners while imposing economic sanctions on Russia.²⁶

While future U.S. policy toward Russia will depend in part on the trajectory of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, its main tenets include (i) continued support for Ukraine; (ii) strengthening defense of NATO territory; (iii) preventing Russia from achieving its objectives through using, or threatening to use, nuclear weapons; and (iv) maintaining pragmatic modes of interaction with Russia on issues of mutual interest.²⁷

There have also been growing concerns within the Biden administration over the expansion of political and military cooperation between China and Russia. One such concern pertains to the possibility of China providing military support, including highly lethal weapons, to Russia as Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine. In February 2023, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken admitted in a media interview that there is “deep concern” that China could provide military support to Russia.²⁸ Another concern is the risk that China and Russia could impact future U.S. military action, with NDS 2022 noting that the



U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley attending the 11th meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group held at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, April 2023 (Photo by Chad J. McNeeley, DOD)

two countries could “create dilemmas globally” for the U.S. military in the event that the United States engages in a crisis or conflict involving either China or Russia.²⁹ At a House Armed Services Committee hearing held on March 28, 2023, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley noted that although he does not consider the relationship between Russia and China to be a true full alliance, their increasingly close partnership could become a future problem for U.S. national security.³⁰

In its strategic competition with China and Russia, the Biden administration’s emphasis is on

strengthening cooperation with allies and partners. The United States is not working alone in providing security assistance to Ukraine; indeed, an international partnership framework known as the Ukraine Defense Contact Group was established in April 2022, comprising all then NATO member states and 24 other partner states, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, Finland, Sweden, Kenya, and Tunisia. In addition to strengthening U.S. bilateral relations with allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines in the Indo-Pacific region, a four-nation cooperative framework known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, as well as AUKUS, a security cooperative framework composed of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have been formed.

In fact, NATO member states and the EU have been actively supporting Ukraine while imposing economic sanctions on Russia on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, Finland's accession to NATO in April 2023, Sweden's increasingly realistic bid to follow suit thanks to a previously reluctant Turkey having finally signaled its approval, and the increased defense spending of NATO member states will strengthen deterrence on the European front against any future Russia military aggression.³¹ Following the adoption of its Strategic Concept in June 2022, NATO has taken a proactive stance on maintaining security in the Indo-Pacific region, describing the Chinese threat in terms of how China's "ambitions and coercive policies challenge [NATO] interests, security and values" in the Communiqué issued at the Vilnius Summit held in July 2023.³² These moves by European countries can be said to be a favorable development for the United States as it seeks to prevail in its strategic competition with China as its top rival, since they allow resources to be concentrated in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, given the negative reactions of countries other than U.S. allies and partners toward the support provided to Ukraine and economic sanctions imposed on Russia, the question of whether the United States will be able to gain support for its foreign policy from emerging and developing countries in the so-called Global South will also be a major challenge for the United States in its attempt to seek an edge in its strategic competition with China and Russia. In this regard, the United States has indicated that it looks to the United Nations Charter as the standard by which to judge whether the actions of Russia and China are problematic,³³ which can be seen as an attempt to gain the support of the broader international community, including ASEAN nations that wish to avoid having to choose between the United States and China or Russia.³⁴

The Biden administration recognizes that U.S. efforts over the next decade will constitute an "inflection point" that determines whether it is possible to maintain a "free, open, and prosperous" international order moving forward, and it has demonstrated its intent to establish conditions that are favorable to the United States in its competition with China while doing its best to address the "acute threat" posed by Russia.³⁵

(2) Three Military Challenges Emerging from Strategic Competition

Strategic competition with China and Russia that first emerged in the late 2010s has become increasingly

intense in the military domain. For the United States, the most important condition for maintaining a “free, open, and prosperous” international order moving forward is to ensure its superiority in this domain. However, competition with China, which has rapidly modernized its military capabilities, and with Russia, which has become increasingly reliant on its nuclear forces in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine, poses a variety of challenges to the U.S. military that will not be easy to overcome. The military challenges confronting the United States in its attempt to gain an edge in its strategic competition with China and Russia are, namely, (i) activities below the threshold of armed conflict; (ii) threats to the U.S. military’s power projection, operational actions, and kill chain; and (iii) future changes in the balance of nuclear forces.

The first military challenge is what is known as gray-zone situations and operations. It was not until the Trump administration that the U.S. Government officially alluded to this threat. NSS 2017 pointed out how “adversaries and competitors became adept at operating below the threshold of open military conflict and at the edges of international law,” and that “such actions are calculated to achieve maximum effect without provoking a direct military response from the United States. And as these incremental gains are realized, over time, a new status quo emerges.”³⁶ The Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy issued in January 2018 also warns against activities occurring in the gray zone, noting that “in competition short of armed conflict, revisionist powers and rogue regimes are using corruption, predatory economic practices, propaganda, political subversion, proxies, and the threat or use of military force to change facts on the ground.”³⁷

In the military context, the Biden administration has been more explicitly focused on Chinese and Russian actions in the gray zone. NDS 2022 cautions that rivals such as China and Russia are now “[seeking] adverse changes in the status quo using gray zone methods—coercive approaches that may fall below perceived thresholds for U.S. military action and across areas of responsibility of different parts of the U.S. Government.” In particular, it highlights the problem by specifying China as a state that “employs state-controlled forces, cyber and space operations, and economic coercion against the United States and its Allies and partners.”³⁸

A report published by the RAND Corporation in the United States notes that specific gray-zone operations launched by China and Russia in the late 2010s were characterized by the use of a diverse range of methods, including military means, such as military threats and wars involving proxy forces; intelligence operations, such as the dissemination of discourse in support of official Chinese and Russian views and policies as well as attacks on dissenting views; and economic coercion, such as export restrictions imposed on specific goods.³⁹

China is believed to have started engaging in such activities in the East and South China Seas, including issuing military threats that seek to disrupt U.S. vessels on the high seas and U.S. aircraft in the airspace above international waters, as well as the use of paramilitary organizations such as civilian and maritime militias.⁴⁰ Russia, on the other hand, is believed to be engaged in activities such as exploiting the weaknesses of countries that are targets of its gray-zone operations, including the economic dependence of

these countries in areas such as energy; attempting to justify its military aggression by granting passports to Russian people residing in other countries; and conducting cyberattacks against the critical infrastructure of target countries.⁴¹

A clear indication of the U.S. approach to China's and Russia's gray-zone activities in the context of military threats can be found in the unclassified version of the Joint Concept for Competing (JCC) issued by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in February 2023.⁴² The JCC defines strategic competition as a "persistent and long-term struggle that occurs between two or more adversaries seeking to pursue incompatible interests without necessarily engaging in armed conflict with each other,"⁴³ and it highlights the importance of the role played by the U.S. military even in activities below the threshold of armed conflict.

The JCC acknowledges that China's goal is not to defeat the United States directly through military power but rather to "deter U.S. intervention militarily and present the United States with a fait accompli that compels the United States to accept a strategic outcome that results in a PRC regional sphere of influence and an international system more favorable to PRC national interests and authoritarian preferences."⁴⁴ The report also presents an analysis of Russia's actions as being "built on the concepts of whole-of-government warfare, the fusion of elements of hard and soft power across various domains, and permanent conflict blurring the boundary between peace and war."⁴⁵

Furthermore, the JCC points out that while China and Russia intend to "win without fighting" against the United States by "[employing] cohesive and comprehensive civil and military approaches designed to advance their national interests incrementally without triggering an armed conflict with the United States," they are also "building military forces that strengthen their ability to 'fight and win' an armed conflict against the United States." It emphasizes that China and Russia are not confined by a binary spectrum of conflict marked by peace and war and that the two countries are taking advantage of the risk of escalation to the level of armed conflict based on their military superiority over target countries. The JCC also reiterates the need for the U.S. military to adapt to strategic competition with China and Russia, noting that if it "does not change its approach to strategic competition, there is a significant risk that the United States will 'lose without fighting.'"⁴⁶

The second military challenge posed by strategic competition with China and Russia is the expected threat to the U.S. military's power projection capabilities, operational actions, and kill chain in future warfare. With regard to this military challenge, the United States is particularly focused on the capabilities of the PLA. NDS 2022 is clearly positioned as a strategy focused on China rather than Russia, with U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stating at a House Armed Services Committee hearing that China is the "pacing challenge" in U.S. national defense planning.⁴⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley also testified at the same hearing that China "remains [the U.S. military's] #1 long-term geostrategic security challenge," suggesting that China's military capabilities serve as the benchmark for building U.S. military capabilities.⁴⁸

The main challenge for the U.S. military in this regard is the PLA's A2/AD capabilities. The "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2022" (hereinafter the

“China Military Power Report 2022”) issued by the U.S. Department of Defense in November 2022 identified four sets of A2/AD capabilities: (i) precision strike capabilities and the Strategic Support Force’s intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to detect, identify, target, and conduct damage assessments for precision strikes; (ii) early warning radar networks, various surface-to-air missiles, as well as ballistic and cruise missile systems; (iii) hypersonic weapons; and (iv) air power with the capability to operate at long ranges beyond the First Island Chain. These capabilities could significantly disrupt the U.S. military’s strategic power projection and operational actions in the Western Pacific.⁴⁹

In recent years, in addition to the PLA’s A2/AD capabilities, there is a growing recognition of the risk of attacks on the U.S. military’s situational awareness capabilities acquired through various sensor systems and even its command and control systems in view of the PLA’s improved capabilities in space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum. The China Military Power Report 2022 alluded to this threat for the first time as the PLA’s “systems destruction warfare.” The report also recognizes that the PLA’s goal is to achieve “Multi-Domain Precision Warfare (MDPW),” which leverages a “network information system-of-systems” that utilizes big data and artificial intelligence (AI) to rapidly identify vulnerabilities in the U.S. military’s operational systems and launch precision strikes against those vulnerabilities across multiple domains.⁵⁰

The third military challenge arising from strategic competition is the future changes in the balance of nuclear forces. In addition to its A2/AD capabilities, China has continuously modernized and expanded its nuclear forces and is believed to intend to possess at least 1,000 nuclear warheads by the end of the decade.⁵¹ Russia has also positioned nuclear capabilities at the core of its national defense policy and has continued to improve its capabilities. The 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR 2022) issued in October 2022 notes that “by the 2030s the United States will, for the first time in its history, face two major nuclear powers as strategic competitors and potential adversaries,” which it recognizes as a new challenge for the United States’ existing deterrence posture, assurance to allies, arms control, and approach to escalation management in a crisis.⁵²

2. The U.S. Military’s Response to the New Military Challenges

(1) The Competition Continuum Model

The first military challenge that has emerged from strategic competition with China and Russia is responding to intensifying activities in the gray zone. The U.S. military has responded to this challenge by conducting freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) and maneuvers in the domains of cyber and information operations. What is remarkable in addition to these responses is the establishment of a new conceptual framework that seeks to break through the military’s previous peace-war

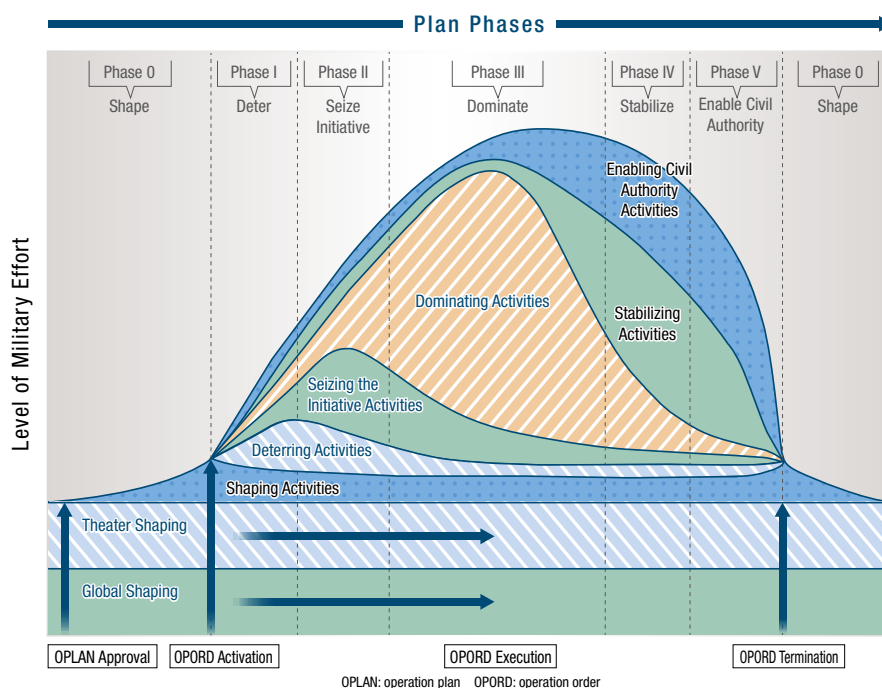
binary conception of the operating environment, indicating that U.S. forces are engaged in a range of activities at all phases from peacetime through competition to armed conflict.

The U.S. military has traditionally held a binary conception of peace and war, with intermediate states between the two, as the basis on which its operation planning is carried out.⁵³ The joint doctrine in the Joint Operation Planning published in August 2011 divided situations into six phases and presented a “Six-Phase Model” showing the corresponding level of U.S. military action for each phase (Figure 3.1).⁵⁴ This model was formulated based on the assumption that “Phase III (Dominate)” would be the focus of U.S. military activities and that the U.S. military would not play a central role in the other phases.

The Joint Publication 1 Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States published in March 2013 also presented a spectrum of conflict that reflected a binary conception of peace and war.⁵⁵ Both these models exemplify the widely held perception that the basic target of U.S. military action is situations involving full-scale war, and that the peaceful, prewar phase as well as the postwar phase are areas that fall within the ambit of other government agencies.

The limitations of such a binary understanding of the spectrum of conflict were highlighted in the Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC) issued in March 2018.⁵⁶ The JCIC alluded to China’s construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea as well as Russia’s illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and military intervention in eastern Ukraine, noting that “strategic challenges such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are employing coercive methods to accomplish objectives in the competitive space between peace and war.”⁵⁷ In particular, it points out that China and Russia will

Figure 3.1 The Six-Phase Model in the Joint Doctrine



Source: JCS, *JP5-0 Joint Operation Planning*, p. III-39, Figure III-16.

Figure 3.2 The U.S. Army's Competition Continuum Model



Source: Adapted from TRADOC, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-8, U.S. Army Concept: Multi-Domain Combined Arms Operations at Echelons Above Brigade 2025-2045*, p.15.

“continue to creatively combine conventional and non-conventional methods to achieve objectives by operating below a threshold that would invoke a direct military response from the United States while retaining the capability to engage in more conventional armed conflict,” with the escalation advantage provided by the superiority of their conventional forces over those of target countries playing a complementary and important role and the backing of their military power enhancing the effectiveness of their activities in the gray zone.⁵⁸

The JCIC argues that in response to these circumstances, the U.S. military “must eliminate institutional remnants of the obsolete peace/war binary conception of the operating environment,” recognize that competition below the threshold of armed conflict is the primary arena of adversary activity, and engage in this competition to deter armed conflict.⁵⁹ It further highlights the importance of understanding that the phase following the end of armed conflict is not “peace” but a return to and a continuation of the competition phase.⁶⁰

The JCIC presents the “Competition Continuum Model” as a new conceptual framework developed based on the understanding described above. This model classifies relations between the United States and other countries into three states: “cooperation,” “competition below armed conflict,” and “armed conflict,” all of which may exist simultaneously. The U.S. military is expected to perform certain roles (operational actions) in each of these states.

The Joint Doctrine Note on the Competition Continuum (CC) published in 2019 also presents subordinate operational objectives for the states of cooperation, competition, and armed conflict. For instance, the three subordinate objectives for the state of competition are, in order of decreasing degree of coercion, (i) “enhance,” which seeks to achieve strategic objectives, prevent the competitor from achieving objectives incompatible with those of the United States, and improve relative strategic or military advantage

without causing an escalation to armed conflict; (ii) “manage,” which seeks to maintain relative strategic or military advantage to ensure the competitor achieves no further gains, and only seek to improve the U.S. advantage when possible with existing resources and in a manner that does not jeopardize interests elsewhere; and (iii) “delay,” which seeks to achieve the best possible strategic objective within the given resources or policy constraints, while recognizing that this entails risk that the competitor will achieve further gains.⁶¹

The CC also identifies several important considerations for U.S. military action in the state of competition below armed conflict. Specifically, (i) the U.S. military should achieve the best possible understanding of how relevant actors will perceive its action; (ii) the U.S. military should conduct a broad array of activities, e.g., establish access to critical areas, forward position units, establish appropriate and timely presence, organize exercises, share intelligence, prepare the environment for crisis response, and engage in efforts to counter and undermine the competitor’s narrative; (iii) the U.S. military and its partners should ensure the creative and flexible conduct of their activities within a fluid and pervasive information environment; (iv) the U.S. military and its partners should have a deep understanding of competitor perceptions and decision making, ensure the close integration of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic efforts, and conduct continual reassessment of the competitor’s intentions and capabilities; and (v) competition below armed conflict should make use of latent, rather than direct, military power.⁶²

(2) New Concepts for Future Warfare

The U.S. military has continued to develop new concepts in response to the second military challenge, i.e., the threat associated with A2/AD and its kill chain. In 2009, under the direction of U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, the U.S. Air Force and Navy began studying the Air Sea Battle (ASB) Concept as a concept for guiding capabilities designed to counter this threat. Subsequently, in November 2011, the ASB Office was established in the Department of Defense alongside the U.S. Marine Corps to further develop the ASB Concept.⁶³

The ASB Concept issued in May 2013 is based on the idea of rendering the adversary’s A2/AD capabilities wholly ineffective by conducting an attack on any stage of the adversary’s kill chain to disrupt and destroy its capabilities. Rather than focusing on attacking specific capabilities such as long-range precision strike capabilities, the ASB Concept aims to develop “networked, integrated forces capable of attack-in-depth” to (i) disrupt the adversary’s command and control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; (ii) destroy the adversary’s A2/AD platforms and weapons systems; and (iii) defeat the adversary’s weapons and formations.⁶⁴

In November 2015, oversight of the development work for the ASB Concept was transferred to the Joint Staff J7 Directorate (Joint Force Development), and the name of the concept was changed to the “Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons” (JAM-GC). JAM-GC was approved in October 2016 and expanded operational domains from sea and air to a total of five battle domains, including land, space, and cyberspace, with a focus on operational actions within the adversary’s A2/AD

threat range.⁶⁵

Given the PLA's improved capabilities in space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum in the late 2010s, there was a growing recognition within the U.S. military of the risk that the situational awareness capabilities and command control systems that had previously given the U.S. military the edge could be attacked and rendered ineffective. The focus in both the ASB Concept and JAM-GC was on the "offensive" aspect of how to penetrate into the adversary's A2/AD threat range to carry out operational actions, but the need to address the "defensive" aspect of how to respond to attacks by China, which has now become a "peer adversary," has emerged.

In response to these changing perceptions of China's military threat, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop the Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC) for the entire U.S. military in July 2019. The JWC was approved in June 2021, and while it remains a classified document, the JWC has since been revised with its third iteration published in 2023.⁶⁶ At the core of the JWC is the so-called Joint All-Domain Operations (JADO), which is described as "actions by the joint force in all domains that are integrated in planning and synchronized in execution, at speed and scale needed to gain advantage and accomplish the mission."⁶⁷

One of the hallmarks of both the JWC and JADO is the goal of building a system capable of faster decision making than the adversary as a means of countering adversaries of comparable capability. To safeguard its advantage in decision making, the U.S. military has been developing a next-generation command and control system in recent years. Known as the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2), this system utilizes AI technology and combines the sensors and strike capabilities of all U.S. military services into a single network with the aim of creating an immediate and efficient kill chain.⁶⁸

3. Changing Nuclear Balance

(1) The "Two-Nuclear-Peer" Problem

A major factor contributing to future changes in the balance of nuclear forces is China's rapid buildup of its nuclear forces. The China Military Power Report 2022 estimates that China's operational nuclear warheads stockpile has surpassed 400, and that if China continues the pace of its nuclear expansion, it will "likely field a stockpile of about 1,500 warheads by its 2035 timeline."⁶⁹ As a demonstration of its nuclear expansion policy, China has been building over 300 silos for fielding intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). These silos would be equipped with the DF-41, which has improved range and accuracy over DF-31 class ICBMs and can carry three or more warheads per missile. The report also points out that China intends to increase its capacity to produce plutonium, a raw material for nuclear warheads, by constructing new fast breeder reactors.⁷⁰

Senior U.S. government officials have expressed concerns over China's pursuit of nuclear

expansion in recent years. At a House Armed Services Committee hearing on March 1, 2022, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Sasha Baker testified that although it had been assessed in 2020 that China could double its number of nuclear warheads from the then estimated figure of less than 200 to around 400 by 2030, China's efforts since then meant that it "may be able to amass up to 700 warheads by 2027 and at least 1,000 by 2030."⁷¹ At a House Armed Services Committee hearing on March 28, 2023, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy John Plumb shared the outlook presented in the China Military Power Report 2022, according to which projections for China's nuclear warheads grew by as much as 1.5 times in the span of one year.⁷²

The United States has been alarmed by the strengthening of China's nuclear forces not only quantitatively in terms of its growing number of nuclear warheads but also qualitatively in terms of their improved capabilities, including the modernization of the types of nuclear warheads and their means of delivery. Among these is China's development of new nuclear delivery systems such as hypersonic glide vehicles (HGV) and fractional orbital bombardment (FOB) systems that are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. At the House Armed Services Committee hearing on March 8, 2023, Commander of the U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) Anthony Cotton expressed concerns over China's November 2021 test of a HGV with FOB capability,⁷³ which has "implications for strategic stability" as the non-ballistic trajectories of FOB systems complicate missile detection and tracking.⁷⁴

In addition, China is modernizing the three key pillars of its nuclear policy. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs Deborah Rosenblum noted that "China is working to develop, test, and field new generations of land-based ballistic missiles and increase the range of their submarine-launched ballistic missiles."⁷⁵ Former STRATCOM Commander Charles Richard has described this rapid expansion of China's nuclear forces in both qualitative and quantitative terms as a "strategic breakout."⁷⁶

Another concern pertaining to China's breakout is its deepening cooperative relations with Russia. It was announced at the end of February 2023 that Rosatom, a Russian state-owned nuclear-energy corporation, will supply 25 tons of highly-enriched uranium to China as fuel for the CFR-600 fast breeder reactors that China is constructing.⁷⁷ The United States considers the CFR-600 to be a reactor designed for breeding plutonium for nuclear weapons and is alarmed at the prospect of Russia providing support for China's nuclear expansion.⁷⁸ At the hearing on March 28, 2023, Assistant Secretary of Defense Plumb testified that "the PRC's development of new nuclear material production and reprocessing facilities—including with Russian assistance in supplying nuclear fuel for a plutonium-generating breeder reactor—is particularly troubling because these facilities could support nuclear warhead production."⁷⁹ Congress has also become increasingly concerned by the deepening of Sino-Russian cooperation in the field of nuclear energy. In their March 16 letter to Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Jake Sullivan, the chairmen of the House Armed Services Committee, House Foreign Affairs Committee, and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence urged the Biden administration to "use all tools at its disposal to stop Rosatom and the PRC's dangerous cooperation" and to take firm action such as the application of

economic sanctions against Rosatom.⁸⁰

While China has pursued the rapid expansion of its nuclear forces, Russia's nuclear forces are also perceived as a serious threat to the United States. Assistant Secretary of Defense Plumb testified that "Russia is steadily expanding and diversifying nuclear systems that pose a direct threat to NATO and neighboring countries."⁸¹ Russia is also expected to pursue defense strategies that are even more reliant on nuclear weapons moving forward as a result of its invasion of Ukraine, with STRATCOM Commander Cotton noting that "the continued degradation of Russian conventional capability in Ukraine will likely increase Russia's reliance on its nuclear arsenal."⁸²

Russia has been modernizing its nuclear forces and phasing out ICBMs deployed during the Soviet era over the last few decades, with its current oldest silo-based ICBM SS-18 (first deployed in 1988) to be replaced by the SS-29 from 2023 onward.⁸³ One feature of Russia's nuclear forces is its large stockpile of short-range non-strategic nuclear weapons and weapons systems that can also carry conventional warheads, with the U.S. Government estimating that Russia currently has an active stockpile of 1,000 to 2,000 non-strategic nuclear weapons.⁸⁴ The United States believes that Russia will use non-strategic nuclear weapons as a means of nuclear intimidation, as it did during its invasion of Ukraine. Assistant Secretary of Defense Rosenblum has pointed out that Russia's non-strategic nuclear weapons "underwrite a clear willingness in Moscow to use threats of nuclear use for coercive benefit and revisionist ends."⁸⁵

Even as it was modernizing its nuclear forces, Russia entered into the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START Treaty) with the United States in 2011 and agreed to reduce not only the number of nuclear warheads in its arsenal but also the number of deployed and non-deployed ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM), and heavy bombers. This treaty stipulated a verification regime as part of its implementation that requires (i) mutual on-site inspections; (ii) mutual notification of ballistic missile launch tests; and (iii) biannual data exchanges on new missiles entering the force, basing location of treaty-accountable missiles, status change for missiles, advance notice of major strategic exercises, and the elimination and conversion of strategic offensive arms. The treaty also mandated the establishment of a Bilateral Consultative Commission (BCC) as a consultative body for treaty compliance and implementation that meets at least twice each year.⁸⁶ According to the Department of State, the two parties have conducted a total of 328 on-site inspections, 25,449 exchanges of notifications, 19 meetings of the BCC, and 42 biannual data exchanges under the New START Treaty as of February 1, 2023, following the treaty's entry into force.⁸⁷

Maintaining transparency over nuclear forces through such means was a major contributor to the strategic stability of U.S.-Russia relations. However, President Vladimir Putin announced on February 21, 2023, that Russia would "suspend" implementation of the New START Treaty. Since there is no provision in the treaty for the suspension of its implementation, it is unclear whether Russia will increase its stockpile of strategic nuclear weapons beyond the treaty limits or what its intentions are, but according to an announcement by the Department of State, Russia has not provided the required data update to the United States scheduled for March 2023 or conducted any on-site inspections in the United States.⁸⁸

While the United States has pledged to continue implementing the treaty, it has currently stopped sharing information on U.S. nuclear forces as a countermeasure in response to Russia's violation of the treaty.⁸⁹

Given these circumstances, future changes in the balance of nuclear forces are expected to occur in this new phase characterized by China's nuclear expansion and Russia's growing reliance on its nuclear forces. Currently, the United States has 1,419 deployed nuclear warheads according to official figures released,⁹⁰ while Russia had 1,549 warheads as of September 1, 2022, before it suspended its implementation of the New START Treaty.⁹¹ Accordingly, if the United States and Russia were to maintain their nuclear forces at current levels and if China meets its forecast of 1,500 warheads by 2035, the three countries will have roughly equal numbers of deployed nuclear warheads in around 10 years. This prompted former STRATCOM Commander Richard to warn at the House Armed Services Committee hearing on March 1, 2022, that "never before has [the United States] simultaneously faced two nuclear-capable near-peers."⁹²

(2) The Biden Administration's Response

In response to the emerging issue of having "two nuclear-capable near-peers," where the United States is simultaneously confronted with China and Russia, two countries whose nuclear forces are expected to be comparable to those of the United States, the Biden administration has committed to reducing the risk of nuclear use through arms control and strengthening U.S. deterrence. In remarks delivered at the Arms Control Association Annual Forum on June 2, 2023, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that the United States seeks to achieve strategic stability with other nuclear powers based on the core approaches of "[preventing] an arms race" and "[reducing] the risk of misperception and escalation" through efforts to "update [U.S.] deterrence capabilities and plans" as well as to "advance new arms control and risk reduction measures."⁹³

U.S. policies aimed at strengthening deterrence include (i) modernizing each leg of its nuclear triad of ICBMs, SLBMs, and strategic bombers, and (ii) modernizing its nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) systems.⁹⁴ As U.S. nuclear forces and NC3 systems were first deployed in the 1970s and 1980s and have had their service lives extended multiple times through refurbishment programs, their modernization has become an important policy issue.

For ICBMs, development and testing of the next-generation ICBM Sentinel, which will replace the current Minuteman III, is underway.⁹⁵ For sea-based nuclear forces, deployment of a minimum of 12 COLUMBIA-Class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), which will replace the current OHIO-Class SSBNs, is planned to take place from 2030.⁹⁶ For air-based nuclear forces,



ICBM Minuteman III test launch conducted at Vandenberg Space Force Base, California, February 2023 (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Landon Gunsauls)

development of the B-21 Raider bomber, which will replace the B-2 bomber, is underway, in addition to the modernization of the B-52H Stratofortress bomber, which is scheduled to be in operation until 2050. In addition, development of a long-range stand-off cruise missile is underway to replace the current air-launched cruise missile, which was first deployed in 1982 and has already exceeded its design service life.⁹⁷ Finally, a decision has been taken to replace the B61-3/4/7 bombs with the B61-12 nuclear gravity bomb and retire the B83-1 nuclear gravity bomb.⁹⁸

The Biden administration has explicitly shut down the possibility that the United States will expand its nuclear forces in response to China's and Russia's nuclear expansion even as it pursues the modernization of its aging nuclear forces. In the aforementioned speech, National Security Advisor Sullivan pointed out that "the United States does not need to increase [its] nuclear forces to outnumber the combined total of [the nuclear forces of its] competitors in order to successfully deter them [...] nor does the United States need to deploy ever-more dangerous nuclear weapons to maintain deterrence."⁹⁹

To begin with, the Biden administration has specified that the roles of nuclear weapons in U.S. national defense policy are to (i) deter strategic attacks against the United States; (ii) provide security assurances to U.S. allies and partners; and (iii) achieve U.S. objectives if deterrence fails.¹⁰⁰ With regard to deterrence, it has declared that "as long as nuclear weapons exist, the fundamental role of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States, [its] Allies, and partners."¹⁰¹ While the Declaratory Policy identifies the target of deterrence as nuclear attack, it also recognizes that "nuclear weapons are required to deter not only nuclear attack, but also a narrow range of other high consequence, strategic-level attacks" without precluding attacks by conventional forces or chemical and biological weapons as potential targets of deterrence.¹⁰²

Regarding the use of nuclear weapons, the Biden administration has maintained a stance of negative security assurances, stating that "the United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its Allies and partners," and that "the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations."¹⁰³



A B-52H bomber landing at Kualanamu International Airport in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, to participate in a bilateral exercise with the Indonesian Air Force, June 2023 (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Zade Vadnais)

Deterrence of limited nuclear use in armed conflict has also come to be recognized as an important task in light of the structure of China's and Russia's nuclear forces and the nuclear threats issued by Russia during its invasion of Ukraine. Assistant Secretary of Defense Plumb testified that "the capability to deter limited nuclear attacks is critical given that some competitors have developed strategies for warfare that may rely on the threat or actual employment of nuclear weapons to terminate

a conflict on advantageous terms.”¹⁰⁴ NPR 2022 also reiterates that the United States must “be able to deter both large-scale and limited nuclear attacks from a range of adversaries.”¹⁰⁵

The Biden administration has sought to formulate an integrated deterrence strategy that incorporates non-nuclear forces in a manner that is optimized for specific countries as its approach to achieving deterrence as outlined above. This strategy is intended to achieve deterrence by complicating the potential adversary’s policy-making calculus and by influencing its perception of gains and losses associated with options such as whether to instigate a crisis, initiate armed conflict, or use nuclear weapons.¹⁰⁶

In this regard, NPR 2022 indicates that “[the United States’] goal is to strengthen deterrence and raise the nuclear threshold of [its] potential adversaries in regional conflict by undermining adversary confidence in strategies for limited war that rely on the threat of nuclear escalation.”¹⁰⁷ It goes on to suggest that “when engaged in conventional operations against a nuclear-armed adversary[,] the Joint Force must be able to survive, maintain cohesion, and continue to operate in the face of limited nuclear attacks,” pointing to a posture of strengthening U.S. deterrence by demonstrating to adversaries that even limited nuclear escalation would not allow them to achieve their objectives.¹⁰⁸

In relation to China, the Biden administration seeks to maintain a flexible deterrence strategy and force posture with the intent to “prevent the PRC from mistakenly concluding that it could gain advantage through any employment of nuclear weapons.”¹⁰⁹ At the same time, it has called on China to engage in strategic dialogue to reduce mutual misperceptions and the risk of unintended nuclear escalation, as it expresses concerns over the stark differences in how “the United States has substantial experience in strategic dialogue [...] with Russia, but has made little progress with the PRC despite consistent U.S. efforts.”¹¹⁰ Despite China’s reluctance to engage in such dialogue, the United States has called for dialogue between the military and diplomatic authorities of both parties, stating that it “remains ready to engage the PRC on a full range of strategic issues, with a focus on military de-confliction, crisis communications, information sharing, mutual restraint, risk reduction, emerging technologies, and approaches to nuclear arms control.”¹¹¹

The Biden administration has also emphasized efforts to maintain the credibility and reliability of extended deterrence, the first of which is the modernization of U.S. nuclear forces, as discussed above. Another policy on this front is the integration of U.S. military activities, operations, and strategies with those of its allies and partners, which “adds uncertainty and complexity to adversary planning.”¹¹² The United States has also signaled its intent to strengthen its consultative posture with South Korea, Japan, and Australia on nuclear deterrence policy, strategic communication, and policy formation aimed at enhancing collective regional security. Another key measure it will pursue to enhance credibility is to “increase the visibility of U.S. strategic assets” through activities such as port calls and flights undertaken by its strategic SSBNs and bombers, respectively.

Conclusion

China and Russia have come to be perceived as major threats to U.S. national security from the late 2010s. The view of the world as being in an era of great power competition that first emerged under the Trump administration has been inherited by the Biden administration, with U.S. national security policy currently being formulated based on the premise of strategic competition with China and Russia. The Biden administration seeks to achieve a “free, open, and prosperous” world and an international order that is underpinned by the principles and values of self-determination, territorial integrity, political independence, and universal human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

China is seen as the greatest challenge to maintaining this international order. Specifically, the United States considers China its “most consequential geopolitical challenge” and “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective.” Russia, on the other hand, has violated international rules with its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and is said to pose an “immediate and persistent threat to international peace and stability.”

Strategic competition with China and Russia in the military domain has intensified. The United States is currently confronted with three new military challenges, namely, (i) responding to activities below the threshold of armed conflict; (ii) threats to the U.S. military’s power projection, operational actions, and kill chain; and (iii) future changes in the balance of nuclear forces.

The United States has sought to respond to these challenges by (i) pursuing operational action planning under the conceptual framework of a spectrum of conflict known as the Competition Continuum Model, (ii) developing the Joint Warfighting Concept for conducting operational actions across multiple operational domains within the adversary’s A2/AD threat range; (iii) strengthening security assurances to allies through measures such as maintaining a safe, robust, and effective nuclear deterrence posture, encouraging strategic dialogue with China, strengthening extended deterrence talks, and increasing the visibility of U.S. strategic assets.

The Biden administration recognizes that U.S. efforts over the next decade will determine the future state of the international order, and it has adopted an increasingly proactive stance with the goal of gaining an edge in its strategic competition with China and curbing the threat posed by Russia. Competition with China and Russia over how the international order will take shape looks set to continue and intensify moving forward.

NIDS China Security Report 2024

China, Russia, and the United States Striving for a New International Order



Conclusions

Future Direction of the International Order

IIDA Masafumi, ARAKAKI Hiromu, and HASEGAWA Takeyuki

Future Direction of the International Order

This report has analyzed the international order ambitions of China, Russia, and the United States—great powers that could significantly influence the future international order—and the measures taken to achieve them. It has also discussed each country’s approach to the other two nations for creating their desirable order. Here we review and take stock of the analysis in each chapter and share our views on the direction of the international order expected in the foreseeable future.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government perceived the new post-Cold War international order as a threat to its political regime. Not only did the socialist bloc collapse following its defeat in the Cold War against the West. The government also believed that Western attempts to permeate universal values in China and promote a “peaceful evolution” triggered the Tiananmen Square incident. Beijing initially sought to avoid confrontation with the powerful United States as much as possible and to cooperate with the U.S.-led international order. However, as its economy grew and its military capabilities increased, China began to gradually challenge the existing international order under which it prospered.

In particular, the Xi Jinping administration has emphasized “core interests,” such as unification with Taiwan and expanded control in the South and East China Seas, and stepped up its campaign to overthrow the rules of the existing international order—that is, the rules that forbid the use of force to unilaterally change the status quo. Furthermore, an international order based on universal values, such as freedom and democracy, became unfavorable for Xi’s centralization of power. His goal is to transform the post-Cold War international order into one which allows “core interests” to be secured, backed by force, and which does not threaten the CCP’s authoritarian political regime. By working more closely with developing countries that do not necessarily share the same values and interests as the West, China is steadily challenging the existing international order.

China has been striking a more confrontational posture toward the United States. Beijing denies the rules and values of the existing international order, rejects U.S. leadership, and demands that the United States respect Chinese “core interests.” China has boosted its anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, mainly maritime, aerial, and missile, in order to weaken the U.S. military presence in the periphery of China. Additionally, it has rapidly built up its nuclear capabilities. If China were to acquire a robust nuclear deterrent against the United States, it would substantially facilitate in securing its “core interests” and reforming the U.S.-led international order. At the same time, China is enhancing its cooperation with Russia with a view to transforming the existing international order. With Putin increasingly hostile toward Western values and aspiring to reform the European security order led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Xi Jinping administration views the Russian regime as a key strategic partner for transforming the existing international order. Even after the Russian forces invaded Ukraine, China continues to collaborate and has reinforced its military

cooperation with Russia, including joint patrols in the surrounding areas of Japan.

The Putin regime, which has emerged as a challenger to the existing international order, harbors a strong sense of rivalry against the international order favored by the West. At the root of this rivalry is built-up dissatisfaction with the restructuring of the post-Cold War international order, particularly among the siloviki, and the transformation of the regime, especially the growing rigidity of the inner circle due to Putin's personalization of power.

Today, the Russian and Chinese political regimes share a common aversion to Western liberal values, which are embodied by diversity and inclusivity, as well as to civic movements that underpin democracy and constitutionalism and civic freedoms that guarantee them. With the war on Ukraine, this aversion has become a powerful driving force for inter-regime cooperation. Particularly for deterring the United States, China and Russia have deepened tangible cooperation in critical policy areas, such as military, nuclear, and Arctic development. This trend is likely to continue as long as the two political regimes do not undergo any major changes.

Furthermore, the waters around Japan, including the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan, which lead to the Arctic Sea route, and the East China Sea, are gaining strategic significance not only for China. Their value as a strategic juncture is also increasing for Russia, which is locked in intense confrontations with the West and wants to build up its resilience against economic sanctions. We need to monitor joint actions by Chinese and Russian military/quasi-military organizations in the maritime and air domains, as well as carefully assess the extent to which China and Russia are coordinating and keeping checks on each other over these strategic junctures.

In the post-Cold War era, the United States sought to foster cooperative relations with China and Russia. However, Russia, which began to express dissatisfaction with NATO and the West, illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine in March 2014 and continued its military involvement in eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, in China, military modernization continued without transparency. After Xi Jinping came into power, China not only made hardline territorial claims in the East and South China Seas but also intensified its use of *faits accomplis*—for example, constructing artificial islands on an enormous scale. The United States gradually became more concerned by China and Russia's attempts to change the status quo, and the Trump administration declared the onset of an era of great power competition with the two “revisionist powers.”

The Biden administration seeks to maintain an international order based on existing rules, such as territorial integrity and respect for universal human rights, in “a world that is free, open, [and] prosperous.” In this regard, Biden, too, has not altered the U.S. view of China and Russia as challengers to the existing order. Believing that the efforts over the next decade will determine the future international order, the administration places a greater emphasis on prevailing in the strategic competition with China, the “most consequential geopolitical challenge.” With an aim to curb Russian threats to the region, as seen in the aggression against Ukraine, the United States has bolstered security assistance for Ukraine on an unprecedented scale while maintaining economic sanctions against Russia. In doing

so, the administration has pursued not only bilateral cooperation with allies and partner countries, but also multilateral cooperation such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and AUKUS. Moreover, emphasis is placed on strengthening engagement with the Global South.

The geopolitical competition with China has major implications for the future international order, with the military/diplomatic domain being a particularly critical arena. In this competition, the challenges confronting the United States are: (i) responding to Chinese and Russian activities below the threshold of armed conflict; (ii) maintaining U.S. force capability for power projection and operational actions against China's A2/AD threats and defending the U.S. forces' kill chain; and (iii) adapting to changes in the balance of nuclear forces considering China's rapid expansion of nuclear capabilities. The Biden administration gives priority to preventing the competition from escalating, while on the other hand, actively ensuring that U.S. military superiority is maintained into the future.

The above discussions on China, Russia, and the United States suggest that China and Russia will further enhance their cooperation for transforming the existing international order. Both the Xi and Putin regimes have hostile views toward the existing international order, which is based on universal values such as freedom and democracy, and regard it as an obstacle to expanding their respective national interests. The two countries share common strategic goals: diminishing the influence of Western countries in the existing international order, and thereby, averting international criticism and pressure on their non-democratic governance systems; and creating a new international order that is more conducive to using force to unilaterally change the status quo. China and Russia have a shared strategic interest in deepening their mutual cooperation to achieve these goals.

Both China's vision for a "new type of international relations" and Russia's vision for a "multipolar world" primarily entail working more closely with emerging and developing countries, the so-called "Global South," and building a united force to counter the Western-led existing international order. China and Russia had encouraged multilateral cooperation frameworks with emerging and developing countries, such as through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. In the future, Beijing and Moscow are expected to form groups around authoritarian emerging and developing countries which do not necessarily share universal values, such as freedom and democracy. As a number of emerging and developing countries are dissatisfied with the existing international order, China and Russia are predicted to exert more influence on these countries, which will increase their competitiveness in the international order rivalry.

Additionally, China and Russia are anticipated to reinforce their military cooperation for countering the West. They have strengthened operational cooperation through joint exercises, joint patrols, and other activities. If Russia condones China's nuclear buildup and if bilateral cooperation advances in areas such as early warning capabilities, the two countries could effectively enter into a de facto alliance.

By contrast, the United States has a strategic interest in maintaining and strengthening the existing rules-based international order founded on universal values. The United States explicitly

recognizes China and Russia as challengers to the existing international order and is expected to repel these challenges with full force. The Biden administration is expanding investments in strengthening the manufacturing industry and developing advanced technologies, aiming to enhance U.S. economic competitiveness. Furthermore, it is building up its military capabilities with the goal of countering military challenges posed by China and Russia. If similar policies continue, the United States is forecast to steadily gain economic and military power.

Moreover, the United States is partnering with allies and like-minded countries to maintain the existing international order. NATO cooperation and U.S. leadership have strengthened considerably after Russia launched its aggression against Ukraine. The United States has also deepened its collaboration with allies in the Indo-Pacific, such as Japan, Australia, Korea, and the Philippines, alongside boosting multilateral cooperation mechanisms such as the Quad and AUKUS. With the United States demonstrating initiative, more countries are working together across the globe for maintaining the rules-based international order. Furthermore, the United States is predicted to enhance its competitiveness in the rivalry with China and Russia over the international order.

The biggest uncertainty facing the current strategic environment is the fate of the Putin regime. Discussions on the medium to long-term strategic environment cannot ignore the question of who will follow Putin. In examining this question, the Soviet Union and Russia's experience with rapid political changes in relatively short periods of time needs to be taken into account. If such rapid changes were to give rise to a new political order in Russia, it could lead to an overhaul of the rules of the game in East Asia. In other words, if the current China-Russia relationship is defined by insufficiently institutionalized trust between the leaders and short-term interests, the uncertainty and instability surrounding the post-Putin bilateral relationship are bound to increase. In the long term, the post-Putin era may witness traditional Russian mistrust toward China and shifts in the diplomatic posture toward Europe. In discussing the East Asian strategic environment, changes in the Sino-Russian relationship must be observed with objectivity and calmness.

During the Ukraine war, the Putin regime is expected to mobilize maximum state resources as an immediate foreign strategy for regime survival, and pursue a situationism-type foreign policy based on short-term interests. It appears that Russia will engage further with emerging and developing countries, known as the Global South, independently or through multilateral frameworks that include China. As the Global South becomes more involved with the Chinese and Russian regimes, how will it view the agility and responsiveness of policies taken under authoritarian regimes? This, too, will be an essential aspect in forecasting the medium to long-term international order. This is a topic for future study.

Based on the above analysis, we draw the following conclusions. Unless rapid political changes occur in Russia, the contest between the United States and China/Russia over the international order will accelerate in the next foreseeable decade. It is expected to involve the Global South and expand into a contest between the forces seeking to maintain the current order, centered around the United

States, and the forces seeking to change it, centered around China and Russia. As both sides are anticipated to enhance their competitiveness, the outcome will not be determined quickly, and the confrontation will likely persist over the long term with tensions rising. Such a situation may lead to further destabilizing factors, such as accidental clashes and unexpected escalations. It will be incumbent on both sides to manage the competition effectively to prevent the manifestation of such destabilizing factors.

How about the longer-term outlook for the bilateral rivalry for maintaining and transforming the existing international order? China and Russia seek to construct a new international order that is conducive to unilaterally changing the status quo by force. If the two countries succeed in making and maintaining changes to the status quo by force, it may be deemed that the existing international order has been transformed by China and Russia. By this criterion, Russia's attempt at altering the status quo by force, as exemplified by its aggression against Ukraine, faces strong opposition from the forces that prioritize the maintenance of the existing international order, primarily Western countries, and is very likely to fall short of changing the international order. China, on the other hand, has expanded its military presence in the seas, using *faits accomplis* to alter the status quo in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. If China's incremental changes to the status quo backed by force continue to be tolerated, or if large-scale changes to the status quo are achieved through use of military force, it can be considered that the existing international order has been transformed by China. Therefore, for countries seeking to maintain the existing international order, whether China's unilateral changes to the status quo by force can be prevented or not will be the most crucial determinant of the long-term course of the competition for the international order.

Japan has established a liberal democratic political system and attaches importance to universal values, such as respect for human rights. As such, Japan cannot allow China and Russia's to create a non-democratic international order that tolerates unilateral changes to the status quo by force. Japan must further strengthen the necessary defense capabilities to deter attempts to change the status quo through reliance on force. At the same time, it must deepen multifaceted cooperation with the United States, which wishes to maintain the existing order and has strong deterrence capabilities, including nuclear. Furthermore, just as Japan has long conducted economic and people-to-people exchanges with Southeast Asian and Pacific island countries with shared values, such as freedom and democracy, Japan must carry out diplomacy with emerging and developing countries in the Indo-Pacific to expand common interests—namely, protecting the existing international order. It demands that Japan take more proactive and independent actions to secure its national interests and maintain peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 3

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