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*Overcoming American Hegemony:
The Central Paradox of Chinese and Russian Revisionism*

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China and Russia have emerged as the two most serious great power rivals to American primacy and hegemony. Primacy refers to the United States' (US) preponderance of material capabilities.¹ Hegemony refers to the relationship between

¹ Primacy is largely seen by realists as preponderant military power, specifically power projection capabilities. However, military power is built from, and usually employed in conjunction with, other power capabilities such as economic, technological, and ideological which other schools of thought focus on, including hegemonic studies and International Political Economy. For example, Susan Strange argues that US hegemonic power rests on four 'structural' power bases – military, economic/finance, technology, and knowledge. These have been used in various combinations to produce and reproduce the structure of American hegemony, which goes beyond just an assortment of specific partnerships and towards a constellation of systems, networks and flows which others must decide if/how to interact with, and its

the US and several major and minor powers in Europe and East Asia, in which the former possesses the material resources and desire to be a leader in constructing, maintaining, and defending political, security, and economic networks with the latter as followers and supporters of these projects in general at both global and regional levels.²

Efforts to ensure the acquiescence of China and Russia into these networks in the post-Cold War era have been ultimately unsuccessful. While different types of powers and kinds of challengers, both are increasingly adopting more assertive dispositions towards eroding American power, influence, and legitimacy at international but especially regional levels to create more favorable local geopolitical realities to their strategic advantage.³ These developments, encapsulated within the nomenclature of Great Power Competition, have spurred debates about how the US should manage its 'decline' in the face of global power shifts in general and these revisionist challengers in particular. The primary axis of this debate is between *restrainers*, who argue the US should claw back its global footprint and commitments to focus on a far more limited set of core interests which necessities accommodating to certain degrees the interests, including security-wise, of these powers, and *containers*, who advocate for comprehensively confronting these authoritarian powers by mobilizing society and allies to retain America's superpower position and defend the *Rules-Based International Order (RBIO)*. Currently, this debate is being played out in terms of what the US response should be amidst augmenting tensions between China and Taiwan and the

central role within it. Susan Strange,, "The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony," *International Organization* 41, 4 (1987): pp 551-74.

² This paper does not treat hegemony and material preponderance as synonymous, though the latter is a pre-condition for the former. Hegemony is a process which has perpetuated the asymmetrical distribution of autonomy between the US and her allies and others, given the acceptance of the latter to be followers and not comprehensible challenge American leadership. See: G. John Ikenberry and Daniel H. Nexon, "Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders," *Security Studies* 28, 3 (2019): pp. 395-421. While hypothetically possible that a material preponderant power may chose not to pursue hegemony, it remains unclear if empirically there has even been such a power. This opens questions about whether, and if so why, all materially powerful states choose to be leaders in the sense of wanting some influence in shaping the relationships and institutions in the international space. See: Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2014).

³ Michael Mastanduno, "Partner Politics: Russia, China, and the Challenge of Extending US Hegemony after the Cold War," *Security Studies* 28, 3 (2019): pp. 479-504.

Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁴ While offering considerably different prescriptions, both perspectives agree a radical rethink and retooling of American grand strategy is required to adjust to this new reality of waning primacy.

This paper does not focus on nor contribute to this prescriptive debate over what American grand strategy should/should not be, but rather takes a step back to examine the premise of it. Specifically, do Russia and/or China constitute such severe challenges to US-anchored hegemonic networks and its central role within them, specifically at regional levels in Europe and East Asia, to compel a drastic change in the conceptualization and conduct of American grand strategy? This paper argues that they do not, though it is clear the era of engagement with these powers is coming to an end. Despite American primacy being degraded to a certain extent by Chinese and Russian material power developments and activities, there is a central paradox in both these powers' revisionist strategies which is and will severely compromise their prospects of success: their actions inhibit desired new geopolitical realities, principally defined by alignment patterns, from emerging by strengthening rather than displacing American hegemonic regional networks. This outcome is the product of two mutually reinforcing dynamics. First, China and Russia are increasingly seen as threatening to other regional powers who are ever more working together to counteract them. Second, these counterbalancing efforts reinforce the importance of the US, given its still preponderant capabilities and networked centrality (the power derived from its positionality within regional networks), in facilitating the coordination of existing and new political, economic, and security arrangements which are increasingly oriented against both.⁵

⁴ For example, see: C.L. Glaser, "Washington is Avoiding the Tough Questions on Taiwan and China," *Foreign Affairs*, 28 April 2021; B. Herzinger, "Abandoning Taiwan Makes Zero Moral or Strategic Sense," *Foreign Policy*, 3 May 2021. For Ukraine see: Tim Hains, "Mearsheimer: Ukraine is a Vital Strategic Interest to Russia, It is Not to the United States," *Real Clear Politics*, 26 January 2022, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2022/01/26/mearsheimer_ukraine_is_a_vital_strategic_interest_of_russia_not_the_united_states.html; Michael McFaul, "How to Make a Deal with Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, 11 February 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2022-02-11/how-make-deal-putin>

⁵ The strengthening of relations, specifically security ones, in the face of a mutual threat is in line with the expectation of Walt's Balance of Threat theory (see: Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, 4 (1985): pp. 3-43) where balancing behavior is not solely a function of power but also threatening intentions. What is different, though, is the way in which the US has maintained its networks and leadership positions which ties allies into these as followers and supporters. This is because the US is not just focused on confronting manifest challengers but precluding alternative regional strategic relations forming within and between its allies and others regional powers,

China and Russia are not existential challenges but in fact are re-invigorating American hegemonic networks and its leading role within these, as the dominant geopolitical organizing principle in Europe and East Asia.

China and Russia face a power translation dilemma: they cannot convert their power as resources into desired outcomes geopolitically given the flawed revisionist dispositions adopted which are creating ever negative strategic realities for both. Despite these developments, it is expected both powers will double down on their current approaches in the near-medium term to try to impose favorable regional realities before their power generation capacity which can be dedicated to foreign pursuits wanes as domestic challenges grow. These trends will accelerate over the next few decades as China and Russia become *faltering powers* – not declining powers per se in terms of material capability metrics but frustrated by not being able to achieve their strategic goals. Given the permissive external environment, specifically allies and other powers seeking American support against China and Russia, the US remains in a beneficial position to maintain its hegemony-based regional and global networks and its central role within these. How the US decides to pursue this competition, however, may jeopardize their hegemonic standing somewhat, such as any overreaction in trying to re-assert across-the-board primacy and restraining the autonomy of local powers which are already heavily aligned/aligning with them. Most importantly, though, the maintenance of American hegemony will be dependent on continued domestic support, which over the past few years has waned not just among the public but elites as well.

The paper is structured into five sections. The first section outlines the continued importance of the core regions of Europe and East Asia, and the balance of power within them, in American grand strategy in the post-Cold War era. The second section

even in the absence of a common threat to them (see: See: Christopher Layne, and Benjamin Schwarz, "American Hegemony: Without an Enemy," *Foreign Policy* 92 (1993): pp. 5-23). The motivation to prevent the development of a regional hegemon/hegemonic bloc in other regions is a central premise of Offensive Realism (see: John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2001)), but the US example is contrary to the prescription of offshore balancing as the best strategy to achieve this. Specifically, the US is not focused on ensuring a pluralistic balance of system where no one power/group of powers is dominant in the core regions of Europe and East Asia but rather creating a hierarchical system of hegemonic followership of the major powers in these spaces. The US wants allies and partners to contribute to its rivalry with China and Russia, but to do so in a way which entrenches US leadership and prime position in dealing with these powers.

details the revisionist approaches pursued by Russia and China respectively. The third section indicates the negative strategic regional environments emerging for China and Russia due to their *assertive turns*. The fourth section seeks to explain why both powers continue to pursue such strategies despite these negative developments and the possibility of them joining forces to form a counter-hegemonic bloc. The concluding section comments on the future of US primacy and hegemony in Europe and East Asia as largely dependent on internal political dynamics within the US.

Core Regions, Balances of Power, and Hegemonic Ordering in US Grand Strategy

The US became interested and involved in influencing balances of power via alliances throughout the Eurasian supercontinent during and after the world wars, specifically the "rimlands" of Europe and East Asia.⁶ These regions were of particular concern given the concentration of great powers residing there. As a result, if any one power or group of hostile powers was able to control these regions, and their industrial strengths and geography, they would then be able to develop and deploy significant power abroad, including towards and into the Americas. After the wars, concerns about the Soviet Union becoming a Eurasian hegemon was the major impetus for the US continental commitment - militarily, economically, and politically – to these rimlands as a bulwark against any Soviet expansionism.⁷ However, these processes were also motivated by a desire to remake Germany and Japan into allies and lock in its wartime allies, most importantly Great Britain and France, as perpetual subordinate followers with the US taking the lead role in organizing security relations on the continent.⁸

⁶ Nicholas J. Spykman, and Helen R. Nicholl, *The Geography of the Peace* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1969); Michael Green, *By More Than Providence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

⁷ The Soviet Union was a "heartland" power, as defined by Halford Mackinder, which could become a Eurasian hegemon, occupying a vast landmass in which to resource and lines of communication to move its large armies throughout Eurasia, which occupied Eastern Europe and parts of Northeast Asia following WWII. Later on in his career, Mackinder realized the North Atlantic as a heartland region as well with large resources, lines of communication and major industrial centres in which a power – the US- who controlled this space would be able to deploy and project power throughout the world system. Torbjorn L. Knutsen, "Halford J. Mackinder, Geopolitics, and the Heartland Thesis," *International History Review* 36, 5 (2014): pp. 835-57; Brian Blouet, *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defence of the West* (Routledge, 2020).

⁸ Michael Mastanduno, "Partner Politics: Russia, China, and the Challenge of Extending US Hegemony after the Cold War," *Security Studies* 28, 3 (2019): pp. 479-504.

Germany and Japan became “trading states” rather than returning to “normal (great) powers,” not building up their military power or pursuing an independent foreign policy, and were vital access points facilitating American power and influence into these core regions and important partners of the US’ larger efforts to create and extend an international order.⁹ Alliances were not solely collective-action devices to pool resources and coordinate against a mutual threat, but also as controlling devices to limit the autonomy of and collaboration between other powers.¹⁰

The US aimed to eliminate the balance of power as a political practice among great powers regionally and globally, and instead bring about an institutional order, commonly referred to as the Liberal International Order (LIO), conducive to its superpower position and leading role. The realities of the Cold War stymied but did not extinguish these desires.¹¹ While the US worked to construct and expand the LIO, centered on the United Nations (UN), which included non-allied powers this did not come at the expense of the hegemonic core it was building via its tight security and economic relations with its allies and close partners, and employing this network as the privileged vehicle to structure regional and international realities. As a result, US hegemony rested not only on its material preponderance but by situating itself in a central position (known as positional power)¹² within these networks, specifically as a hub in which major power relations run through which lessened the possibility of alternative networks forming and thus securing its networks as the dominant ones in core regions.

American hegemony, however, was and is not a territorial empire¹³ or composed of subjected satellite allies.¹⁴ It enjoys a high degree of willing compliance and support

⁹ Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, 4 (1991): pp. 904-33; Daniel H. Nexon, "The Balance of Power in the Balance," *World Politics* 61, 2 (2009): pp. 330-59; Victor Cha, "Informal Hierarchy in Asia: The Origins of the US-Japan Alliance," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 17 (2017): 1-34.

¹¹ Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹² Emilie Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H Montgomery. "Network Analysis for International Relations." *International Organization* 63.3 (2009): 559–592.

¹³ US hegemonic actions vary across time and space, including those which were imperial such as the removal or overthrowing of governments and in general extensive intervention in states’ domestic affairs.

from its followers,¹⁵ though the US has never been able to ensure complete alignment with its preferences on some strategic matters.¹⁶ While the US has at times been unsuccessful in extending its hegemonic networks, they have been overall successful in inhibiting alternative arrangements forming among or between its allies, partners, and outside powers, especially in term of macro ordering dynamics and alignment patterns in the core regions of Europe and East Asia. The extent and nature of hegemonic systems, specifically alliance structures, differ significantly in Europe and East Asia. In the former, the US created and facilitated multilateral institutional structures bringing together the leading regional powers under the same “tent” to further regional ordering, while in the latter these systems were largely bilaterally based on direct relations between the US and its hegemonic partners in a hub-and-spoke configuration.¹⁷ These differences are important,¹⁸ but the main commonality is the

These actions are particularly pronounced in Central and South America and not as much in Europe and Northeast Asia, though the US was extensively involved in remaking the internal dynamics of Germany and Japan to turn them into allies and working to eliminate communist forces in Western European states. The US, also, has had and retains some overseas, imperial possessions which were/are not afforded full inclusion in the Union such as the Philippines, Guam, American Samoa and Puerto Rico. Daniel H. Nexon and Thomas Wright, "What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate." *The American Political Science Review* 101, 2 (2007): pp. 253-71

¹⁴ This is particularly apparent in the nature and operation of American alliance relations in Europe compared those of the Soviet Union which had to increasingly employ military force to ensure communist regimes remained in power in their Eastern European “allies.” David A. Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations," *International Organization* 50, 1 (1996): pp. 1-33.

¹⁵ Major periods of tension in this new adjustment for European major power allies was the American intervention in resolving the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956 against the interests of France and the UK, and France leaving NATO's Unified Command Structure in 1966. In these incidents the US acted to ensure these powers remained allies (in the case of France establishing alternative security and defence arrangements) and did not become more autonomous in terms of strategic relations and actions.

¹⁶ This included regularly push back by allies to reduce the number of items on the export restriction list to the Soviet Union and Comecon states. M. Mastanduno, *Economic Containment: CoCom and the Politics of East-West Trade* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, N.Y, 1992). Other examples include trade with Maoist China in the 1960s by allies like Canada, and many allies' refusal to send military forces during the Vietnam War.

¹⁷ The US did try to create multi-lateral security organizations throughout Asia, most notably the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). These efforts failed to take hold in any meaningful way, with many members contributing little.

¹⁸ There are a number of rationales for the differences in hegemonic structures between these regions, including variation in US commitment to defend certain partners compared to others, the ability of binding local powers together given pre-existing tensions, and varying concern about the risk of and ability to balance Soviet/Communist expansionism. See: Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein,

perpetuation of American-constructed and led hegemonic structures in these regions as the dominant security architectures.

Economically, American hegemonic moves were based on building and expanding a larger international trading, investment, and, most importantly, financial system which others operated within. While over time other powers, especially allies such as Germany and Japan, became economically powerful, and intra-regional trade decreased America's share in local trading and investment flows, at the system level the US retained its prime position, based on the dominance of the US dollar, in the international economic network. A position within which it was successful in ensuring continued support from other major power allies¹⁹ and able to be a "privilege taker" in terms of growing government spending without raising taxes due to its control of the supply of American dollars and the demand from other powers to buy US treasury bonds to promote US spending and consumption.²⁰ American political-economic interests in the core regions, therefore, were not about suppressing the economic growth of other powers but ensuring the region remained economically open and with major regional powers being supporters of the larger economic-financial system in general.

Unlike many realists who expected the US to move "offshore" from these regions with the removal of their only peer competitor in the Soviet Union, the US not only retained its alliances and leadership posture but expanded these over the recent decades.²¹ The US, also, did not seek to divest significantly its leadership roles or duties onto its allies as order managers as liberal institutionalism would expect. Successive

"Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism," *International Organization* 56, 3 (2002): pp. 575-607; Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, 3 (2009): pp. 158-96; Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "Why Is There No NATO in Asia?' Revisited: Prospect Theory, Balance of Threat, and US Alliance Strategies," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, 2 (2012): pp. 227-50.

¹⁹ Examples include continued allied support for the major institutions of Bretton Woods even with the US ending its backing of the gold standards in the 1970s and the major capitalist economies signing a series of agreements – including the Plaza and Louvre Accords – in the 1980s to adjust their currencies to help alleviate American concerns about its growing trade deficit.

²⁰ Michael Mastanduno, "System Maker and Privilege Taker: U.S. Power and the International Political Economy," *World Politics* 61, 1 (2009): pp. 121-54.

²¹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15, 1 (1990): pp. 5-56.

American Administrations believed not only that US leadership was beneficial to global politics but necessary given the assessed inability/unwillingness of others, including major allies, to provide this in a large-scale, meaningful, and consistent way. The transition to the post-Cold War era was guided by a determination to retain its superpower position as well as its hegemonic role and networks in these regions.²² While the US focused on expanding key normative and institutional elements of the LIO in the post-Cold War world this did not come at the expense of retaining its hegemonic core, prioritizing major European and Asian allies remained committed to these US-anchored networks even if these states' contributions, such as militarily, waned from their heights during the Cold War. To this end, the US pursued a number of *shoring-up* activities to ensure allies' continued embeddedness in and in general the centrality of American-anchored security and economic networks in global affairs in the transition to and early stages of the post-Cold War era.

First, the US retained its onshore force commitments in these regions (though these were reduced to a certain extent²³) to further the indispensability of American capability and leadership in the security ordering in Europe and East Asia. Second, the US moved to restrain and inhibit any autonomous predilections of its allies. This desire influenced the determination to expand NATO into Central and Eastern Europe in order to preclude alternative security networks forming among European states, such as through the European Union or a European-only force like the Eurocorps which

²² This is clear from the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance (PDG) and the 1993 Regions Strategy (which the PDG informed). In particular these documents declared: the US would not allow a hegemon or hegemonic bloc to emerge in the core regions of Europe, Northeast Asia, Central and South America and the Middle East; stressed the indispensability of American leadership globally and regionally, specifically in relations to security matters; and portrays the world as entering a very dangerous, unpredictable security environment.

²³ Some of this downsizing was part of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty to reassure Soviet/Russian leaders during their decline, and some due to desires to reduce the defence budget with the ending of the Cold War. However, the US never seriously considered withdrawing entirely from either Europe and Northeast Asia, maintaining around 100,000 military personnel in both continents, the maintenance of bases in allied countries, most importantly Germany and Japan, and significant overseas naval and air forces for power projection purposes. The 1993 Regions Strategy, the 1993 Bottom-Up Review; and the 1995 'Nye' Report cemented American overseas military posture in these regions moving forward past the Cold War.

could displace NATO from the continent.²⁴ As well, the continued primacy of NATO in Europe along with ensuring a continued open trading regime with the continent alleviated concerns of a “Fortress Europe” emerging based on its own security structures and semi-closed economic bloc.²⁵ American support for the continued development and integration of the European Union (EU), therefore, was not seen as a threat in this regard given continental security continued to run through NATO, and European powers were major proponents for and supporters of the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In East Asia, the US pressured Japan into accepting economic, trade, and monetary reforms. These efforts were motivated to adjust the US bilateral trade deficit, as well as to ensure Japan did not develop more autonomous views of and actions towards economic leadership in the region.²⁶ Following the Nye Report, the US updated its alliance with Japan while pursuing an engage-but-hedge approach to China, effectively ensuring relations with these two Asian powers flowed through the US. The US, furthermore, was not opposed to Asian-led institutionalization efforts, such as APEC, as long as these did not exclude them or jeopardize their hub-and-spoke network.²⁷ Third, the US repurposed the nature of their alliances *outwardly* as part of Washington’s global agenda in the post-Cold War world. This included emphasizing non-self defence missions and out-of-area operations for NATO and Japanese contributions to US military campaigns in the Middle East.

Finally, the US attempted through a strategy of engagement to bind (and ideally convert them into more liberal states) China and Russia into US hegemonic structures, specifically economically. Though the nature of these efforts differed among the two relationships, a key commonality was to ensure direct strategic relations with both in order to wedge and disrupt any such relations forming between them and other major

²⁴ Kori Schake, “NATO after the Cold War, 1991–1995: Institutional Competition and the Collapse of the French Alternative,” *Contemporary European History* 7, 3 (1998): pp. 379-407; Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, “Eastbound and Down: The United States, NATO Enlargement, and Suppressing the Soviet and Western European Alternatives, 1990-1992,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, 6-7 (2020): pp. 816-46.

²⁵ Liviu Horowitz and Elias Götz, “The overlooked importance of economics: why the Bush Administration wanted NATO enlargement,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, 6-7 (2020): pp. 847-868,

²⁶ J.A. Frankel and M. Kahler, *Regionalism and Rivalry: Japan and the United States in Pacific Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²⁷ For example, the US vocally opposed the Malaysian suggestion of creating the East Asia Economic Caucus which would exclude the US.

powers (including US allies) in regional ordering issues.²⁸ There are some arguments that the US focused too much on shaping China and Russia into liberal states, which combined with being distracted by other projects such as the War on Terror (WOT) and deep involvement in the Middle East, came at the expense of maintaining a favorable strategic environment and its hegemonic standing by bringing these peers into the system allowing their material capabilities to grow unabated. In particular, supporting Chinese (and eventually Russian) admittance into the WTO; permitting both to buy large amounts of US Treasury bonds; facilitating China becoming the largest trading country in the world and Russia one of the most important oil-and-gas exporters; and in general, little/non-opposition to them developing their military power which is increasingly deployed aggressively in their home regions are common critiques of a flawed American grand strategy.²⁹

In this regard, it is important to remember that the US is not an omnipotent power directing all international events and other states' relations. Much of the time it is reacting to events and determining if and how to respond. These developments, also, did not sacrifice the US hegemonic position, nor its hegemonic networks, given their maintenance, especially military ones regionally and economic ones globally. Furthermore, many of these developments reflect American attempts to ensure its networked centrality by precluding the ability of other powers to develop their own economic-security relations with these powers by incorporating them in, to varying degrees, in to different elements of these networks.³⁰ Given that these networks are now being mobilized against China and especially Russia, in response to its ongoing war in Ukraine, demonstrates continued American hegemonic standing by its ability orient these networks against these increasingly assertive powers; an ability which no other

²⁸ This included regular summitry with both Russia and China, playing the leading role in determining the nature of financial and economic assistance to Russia and facilitating China's entry into the global economy, and being the leader of its alliance partnerships towards both Russia (with respect to NATO) and China (with respect to Japan).

²⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions. America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2018).

³⁰ Daniel W. Drezner, "Would a Realist Approach to China Have Been Better for the United States?" *The Washington Post*, 03 November 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/11/03/would-realist-approach-china-have-been-better-united-states/>

power, or group of powers, are capable of or willing to undertake.³¹ Admittance of China and Russia partially into these hegemonic networks was a gamble by the US but not a reckless, self-defeating one.³² While debates continue as to how much of the blame for the deterioration in relations with China and Russia is attributable to the US retaining, and in some cases expanding, its regional footprint and networks (specifically security-wise) in their home regions, in general, this presence is widely supported by regional powers.

As to why several powers have continued to be hegemonic followers, both in terms of supporting American leadership and not hard balancing against it, a number of explanations have been offered. These include the maintenance of deep normative and relationship linkages between elites and their larger publics;³³ fear of being targeted by the hegemon if they try to balance against it;³⁴ the fact the US continues to provide and bears the greatest burden to ensure, a number of semi-public/club goods which benefit these powers;³⁵ and in general maintenance of an overall benevolent/non-hostile posture towards them which engenders continued consent.³⁶ In the 2000s, however,

³¹ Burton et al describe such an ability as demonstrating the ‘fungibility’ of a network, the way in which a leading/hegemonic power can orient the structure towards/away issues and challenges which it was not originally designed to address. “Network Analysis for International Relations,” pp. 573-574.

³² Another contributing factor to the slowness on the US part to respond to China’s and Russia’s growing assertiveness is seeing their concerning actions in the 1990s and 2000s as atomized, unconnected and in general at the tactical revisionist level (ie getting a better position in an existing dispute or tension) rather than part of a larger, connected and determined approach to undermine (and possibly introduce an alternative to) American hegemony at the strategic revisionist level. Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America’s Alliances*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), pp. 153-154.

³³ Charles A. Kupchan, “The Normative Foundations of Hegemony and The Coming Challenge to Pax Americana,” *Security Studies* 23, 2 (2014): pp. 219-57.

³⁴ Schweller and Pu argue hard balancing – military buildups and alliances – are seen as revisionist behavior in a unipolar system and thus of high concern and attention from the unipole to disrupt and oppose. Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, “After Unipolarity: China’s Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline,” *International Security* 36, 1 (2011): pp. 41-72.

³⁵ Charles P. Kindleberger, “Dominance and Leadership in the International Economy: Exploitation, Public Goods, and Free Rides,” *International Studies Quarterly* 25, 2 (1981): pp. 242-54; Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security* 28, 1 (2003): pp. 5-46.

³⁶ Ian Clark, *Hegemony in International Society* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

there were growing concerns about the US becoming a “liberal leviathan,”³⁷ an unchecked superpower determined to invade Iraq, as part of its War on Terror (WOT), regardless of international law, concerns from international organizations and opposition from allies and other powers.

This period witnessed an upsurge in “soft balancing” - actions aimed to frustrate, undermine and increase the cost of unilateral action by the US through economic, institutional, and diplomatic means,³⁸ between allies and others, most notably China and Russia who had long been concerned about American hegemony and unipolarity.³⁹ The coercive aspects of the American superpower position evident in the WOT were coupled with the realization of the world’s reliance on American financial hegemony with the near collapse of the global financial system in 2008 stemming from the US housing market crisis.⁴⁰ As well, the Snowden intelligence leaks caused great concern among allies and others about the degree of intrusion into their domestic spheres conducted by American espionage agencies.⁴¹

These developments were seen by some as the culmination of the “imperial overreach” of the American hegemonic system.⁴² The US was over-extending its military-economic capabilities on non-strategically important overseas missions and wars (specifically in the Middle East), with its increasingly dismissive and imposing posture causing allies to distance themselves and other powers to construct alternative systems and networks.⁴³ American primacy and hegemony were being degraded, ushering in the return of the balance of power dynamics with the rise of other “great

³⁷ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011). See, also, Christian Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004).

³⁸ Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30, 1 (2005): pp. 7-45; T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30, 1 (2005): pp. 46-71.

³⁹ Examples include Turkey denying US military overflight rights; blocking American efforts to gain support in the UN Security Council by France, Germany, China and Russia; and many traditional allies not joining the *coalition of the willing*.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Kirshner, *American Power after the Financial Crisis*. 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁴¹ Thierry Balzacq and Benjamin Puybureau, "The Economy of Secrecy: Security, Information Control, and EU-US Relations," *West European Politics* 41, 4 (2018): pp. 890-913.

⁴² Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York (NY: Random House, 1988).

⁴³ Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy*. 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2005).

powers”⁴⁴ populating the ranks of international and regional politics.⁴⁵ China and Russia were playing important roles in these processes, finding common positions on some issues with American allies to try to limit US unilateral actions and in general promoting regional constructs, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which placed prime positions to resident powers. Internationally, China and Russia were strengthening links with other emerging powers who could be regional hegemony through structures like the BRICS to further the reality and narrative of a growing multipolar arrangement forming. Both powers, as well, positioned themselves as constructive and non-threatening regional powers despite their growing material capabilities and outstanding territorial disputes.⁴⁶

Russia and China Emerge as Overt Rivals

Since the early 1990s, China and Russia have advocated for a return to multipolarity as both a reality in terms of the distribution of power and practice of great power relations with the removal of permanent alignment and alliances under one hierarchical, hegemonic structure.⁴⁷ Both, however, have not become fully revisionist in terms of completely removing themselves from all structures, institutions, and practices associated with the *Liberal International Order* (or Rules-Based International Order as it is commonly known now) or establishing formal alliances against US-based ones. While not promoting an entirely fully developed alternative and mutually exclusive global or regional ordering arrangement, both powers seek to create a more malleable environment in which to reconstitute regional relations with themselves in more central, autonomous, and stronger positions to service their strategic interests.

⁴⁴ Here the concept of great power is as much normative and psychological as it is material. Specifically, an expectation of more major/great powers adopting a great power *mindset* in terms of less reliance on and alignment with the US in order to do more for its own security and become more autonomous in security and strategic affairs.

⁴⁵ Christopher Layne, "This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, 1 (2012): pp. 203-13.

⁴⁶ David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security* 29, 3 (2004): pp. 64-99; Andrej Krickovic and Igor Pellicciari, "From 'Greater Europe' to 'Greater Eurasia': Status Concerns and the Evolution of Russia's Approach to Alignment and Regional Integration," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 12, 1 (2021): pp. 86-99.

⁴⁷ "China-Russia: Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order," *International Legal Materials* 36, 4 (1997): pp. 986-989.

In order to achieve this, both use a mixture of *positive balancing* (augmenting one's own power bases) - namely building up their material, especially military, power bases and binding strategies to pull/lock-in other regional actors into their own systems of control - and *negative balancing* (undermining the power bases of one's opponents) - wedge strategies designed to undermine solidarity within US hegemonic networks and even within the domestic realm of these states.⁴⁸ China and Russia are increasingly undermining all three pillars of American hegemony - its material bases, exclusive hold on the conduct of certain duties and functions, and compliance and cooperation from followers. These efforts have been long-standing, but there has been a noticeable shift over the past 10-15 years toward a more assertively revisionist posture than compared to the 1990s and early 2000s. While the disposition and strategy changes of these two powers are different in terms of specific timelines and behavior, there are broad parallels centered on an increasingly assertive and confrontational posture towards US hegemony.

Russia's strategic challenge to American hegemony is largely based on its reconstitution as a conventional military power, along with the maintenance of sizable nuclear forces, with the ability to project power into its 'near-abroad' and further afield.⁴⁹ Such capabilities have been employed both in Georgia and Ukraine - seizing territory and supporting breakaway factions to prevent any further alignment toward the West.⁵⁰ NATO expansion eastwards, especially incorporating former Soviet republic states, remains a central declaratory security concern, and historical grievance, for Russia.⁵¹ Combined with its current invasion of Ukraine, the nature and conduct of large-scale military exercises in close proximity to NATO allies, specifically in the

⁴⁸ On positive and negative balancing see: Kai He, "Undermining Adversaries: Unipolarity, Threat Perception, and Negative Balancing Strategies after the Cold War," *Security Studies* 21, 2 (2012): pp. 154-91. On wedging (meant to disrupt or undermine alignments between others) and binding (meant to ensure continued alignment of others to oneself) strategies see: Yasuhiro Izumikawa, "Binding Strategies in Alliance Politics: The Soviet-Japanese-US Diplomatic Tug of War in the Mid-1950s," *International Studies Quarterly* 62, 1 (2018): pp. 108-20.

⁴⁹ Keith Crane, Olga Olikier, and Brian Nichiporuk, *Trends in Russia's Armed Forces* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019).

⁵⁰ Similar motivations exist for the maintenance of Russia peacekeepers in the breakaway republic of Transnistria in Moldova.

⁵¹ "NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard," *National Security Archive*, 16 March 2018, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard>

Baltics, are causing growing concern, strengthening relations among themselves, NATO, and the US.⁵² The collapse of Military Confidence Building Measures between Russia and other European states regarding military transparency, especially for exercises, is an additional strain on Moscow's security relations with the rest of the continent.⁵³ Putin has become increasingly explicit that the current security architecture in Europe, specifically Eastern Europe, centered on NATO is unacceptable and demands a new structure that more properly incorporates and respects Russian strategic interests.⁵⁴ Alongside the use of hard-edge military power in its near-abroad, Russia has developed and deployed a number of "grey zone" capabilities meant to silence regime critics and opponents throughout Europe, undermine NATO solidarity, and influence member states' domestic political environments, all the while feigning plausible deniability for these actions.⁵⁵ Some of these tactics include assassination squads, funding far-right political parties, and cyber-attacks. Russia, as well, has attempted to coercively leverage its position as Europe's main oil and gas provider to try to blunt sanctions following its 2014 annexation of Crimea and the current ones under consideration for its invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁶

Russia's undermining/disruption-based European approach reflects and furthers Moscow's strategic reorientation away from the promotion of a *Greater Europe* towards a *Greater Eurasia*. Frustrated by the continued alignment of European major powers with the US and the growing strategic importance of East and South Asia, the *Greater Eurasia* concept appears to be Russia's promotion of a (mostly still vague) concert of powers system. Such a system would be comprised of a handful of great powers which directly engage one another as strategically autonomous equals in the economic integration of Eurasia, managing the political and strategic tensions and ramifications of

⁵² Ann-Sofie Dahl and Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2018).

⁵³ Thomas Hughes, "The Art of War Games: Canada and the Political Effects of Military Exercises," *Conference of Defence Associations Institute*, March 2019.

⁵⁴ Andrew Roth, "Russia Issues List of Demands It Says Must Be Met to Lower Tensions in Europe," *The Guardian*, 17 December 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/17/russia-issues-list-demands-tensions-europe-ukraine-nato>

⁵⁵ Dani Belo, "Conflict in the Absence of War: A Comparative Analysis of China and Russia Engagement in Gray Zone Conflicts." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 26, 1 (2020): pp. 73-91.

⁵⁶ Stephan Blank and Younkyoo Kim, "Economic Warfare a La Russe: The Energy Weapon and Russian National Security Strategy," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 30, 1 (2016): pp. 1-39.

this process.⁵⁷ Given its central geography, resource endowment, and overland (and possibly via the Northern Sea Route, maritime) transportation linkages, Russia is positioning itself as a central actor and leader in such a structuring of various Eurasian sub-regions/rimlands. Any such system, however, would require other powers' respecting Russia's geographically defined Sphere-of-Influence over its "near-abroad," specifically in Central Asia, the Caucuses, and parts of Eastern Europe.⁵⁸ In these spaces, Russia would not be challenged or undermined as the predominant regional power and leader, including placing limitations on the autonomy of states' within these spaces both in their domestic politics and their relations with outside powers. In this regard, Russia has developed several security and economic institutions over the past decades, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), to bind former Soviet republic states to Russia and wedge against linkages forming between them and outside powers.⁵⁹

Like Russia, China has steadily developed its military capabilities over the past number of decades which has transformed the country into a sizable military power with ever-increasing power projection capabilities at sea and in the air.⁶⁰ These developments have been made possible by China's rapid and sustained economic growth since the 1980s, increasingly becoming embedded in the global economic system and currently the number one trade partner of the vast majority of Asian states.⁶¹ As a result, China possesses the world's largest navy (in terms of number of

⁵⁷ Andrej Krickovic and Igor Pellicciari, "From 'Greater Europe' to 'Greater Eurasia:' Status Concerns and the Evolution of Russia's Approach to Alignment and Regional Integration," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 12, 1 (2021): pp. 86-99.

⁵⁸ Van Jackson, "Understanding Spheres of Influence in International Politics," *European Journal of International Security* 5, 3 (2019): pp. 1-19; Stephen Page, "The Creation of a Sphere of Influence: Russia and Central Asia," *International Journal (Toronto)* 49, 4 (1994): pp. 788-813; Alexey Bogdanov, "Contested 'Logic of Anarchy' in the Post-Soviet Space: The 'Near Abroad' Faces Russia's Power," *Problems of Post-communism* (2020): pp. 1-11.

⁵⁹ Ksenia Kirkham, "The Formation of the Eurasian Economic Union: How Successful Is the Russian Regional Hegemony?" *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7, 2 (2016): pp. 111-28.

⁶⁰ M. Taylor Fravel, "China's 'World-Class Military' Ambitions: Origins and Implications," *The Washington Quarterly* 43, 1 (2020): pp. 85-99.

⁶¹ Issaku Harada, "ASEAN Becomes China's Top Trade Partner as Supply Chain Evolves," *Nikkei Asia*, 15 July 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/ASEAN-becomes-China-s-top-trade-partner-as-supply-chain-evolves>

ships) and second-largest economy. While historically a land power, China is transforming into a land-sea power, with significant naval capabilities along with Asia's largest coastguard, a growing merchant and fishing fleet, and significant investments in domestic and international commercial harbors and marine research.⁶²

The sheer growth potential of China, combined with its authoritarian system of governance and outstanding territorial (namely Taiwan) and maritime disputes, caused many concerns in the US and other Asian states in the 1990s about the future trajectory of the state, specifically whether it would become an aggressive power trying to impose its version of regional ordering onto others.⁶³ However, China's *smile diplomacy* of the late 1990s and early 2000s assuaged these concerns, with China playing a largely constructive, benign, and inclusive role in regional politics as well as contributing to international security missions such as UN peacekeeping operations and anti-piracy patrols in the Indian Ocean.⁶⁴ Strategic tensions have always been a part of US-China relations, but this period saw growing economic interdependence between these two, with the US calling on China to become a 'responsible stakeholder' in assuming more of the burdens of public goods provisions in the international system from which it had benefitted from immensely.⁶⁵

Beginning around 2008-09, however, China began an "assertive turn" in its regional diplomacy, simultaneously antagonizing relations with most of its neighbors, most importantly in the South China Sea.⁶⁶ While many of these disputes have been

⁶² Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel Collins, "China's Maritime Evolution: Military and Commercial Factors," *Pacific Focus* 22, 2 (2007): pp. 47-76; Zhengyu Wu, "Towards Naval Normalcy: 'Open Seas Protection' and Sino-US Maritime Relations," *Pacific Review* 32, 4 (2019): pp. 666-93.

⁶³ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security* 18, 3 (1993): pp. 5-33;

⁶⁴ Constructive matters also including settling a number of border disputes with neighbors, emphasizing trade and stability in regional affairs, and participating in the South China Sea dialogues. While Taiwan remained a point of tension with the US, evidence in the 1995/96 Taiwan Straits Crisis, as well as other maritime disputes in the South and East China seas, Beijing tried to emphasize these would be resolved over time and should not impact progressing regional relations in general. David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security* 29, 3 (2004): pp. 64-99.

⁶⁵ Robert Zoellick, "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?" Remarks to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, 21 September 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm>.

⁶⁶ While many argue President Xi ushered in a decisive change towards a more assertive Chinese foreign policy, there is good behavioral and archival evidence that this shift occurred before around 2008-09. This

outstanding for decades, the most important change in Beijing's behavior was the omnidirectional coercive approach taken straining several relationships at once. The intensity of these disputes has fluctuated in severity over the past decade, but it appears China remains uncommitted to working peacefully towards a diplomatic solution to any of these unless it involves complete acquiescence to their position.⁶⁷ As well, China's continued building of military power, specifically in naval, air, and missile capabilities, appears designed to counter American military power projection regionally.⁶⁸ These Anti-Access and Area Denial efforts, however, were coupled with the development of power projection capabilities (such as blue-water naval forces) as well as investments in marine transportation infrastructure throughout East, Southeast, and South Asia.⁶⁹ Combined, these seemed to indicate not only a desire to block American power deployment to and within the region, especially in disputed maritime space along China's periphery but possibly to replace the US as the dominant military and maritime power in the region. The tone and language, as well, of Chinese diplomacy have changed dramatically, with Chinese representatives regularly warning smaller states of crossing Beijing and warning outside powers to not get involved in regional matters.⁷⁰ China's promotion of an "Asia for Asians" and "a new type of major power relations" have generated muted responses from local actors and the US which largely view these constructs as narrative devices to promote subordination to and respect for a Chinese-centred regional hegemony.⁷¹

was based on assessments that the US was in relative decline and not as strong as Beijing assumed due to the financial crisis. Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁶⁷ Nien-chung Chang Liao, "Winds of Change: Assessing China's Assertive Turn in Foreign Policy," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (Leiden) 53, 6 (2018): pp. 880-95.

⁶⁸ Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response," *International Security* 34, 2 (2009): pp. 46-81.

⁶⁹ Yves-Heng Lim, "Expanding the Dragon's Reach: The Rise of China's Anti-access Naval Doctrine and Forces," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, 1-2 (2017): pp. 146-68.

⁷⁰ J. Micallef, "The Origins and Consequences of China's 'Wolf Warrior Diplomacy'," *Military.com*, 26 April 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/opinions/2021/04/26/origins-and-consequences-of-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy.html>.

⁷¹ Curtis Chin, "Xi Jinping's 'Asia for Asians' Mantra Evokes Imperial Japan," *South China Morning Post*, 14 July 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1553414/xi-jinpings-asia-asians-mantra-evokes-imperial-japan>; Byun, See-Won. "China's Major-Powers Discourse in the Xi Jinping Era: Tragedy of Great Power Politics Revisited?" *Asian Perspective* 40, 3 (2016): pp. 493-522.

Relatedly, China's growing economic power has generated increasing concern Beijing seeks to create a new economic system that places itself in the central, commanding position. This is most evident in President Xi's flagship foreign project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): a series of bilateral-based investments with many states throughout Eurasia to restructure transportation, technology, and regulatory regimes at land and at sea. Despite some important holdouts, like India, Japan, and the US, many states, including several US allies, have signed BRI deals as well as become members of China's Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). Alongside concerns about social and environmental standards, the US and others worry that China's BRI will confer upon it geo-economic, geopolitical, and strategic benefits by altering market dynamics to favor Chinese companies; create domestic constituents who benefit from these economic linkages to lobby and influence state decision-making on other matters to support Beijing's interests; acquire assets, resources, and infrastructure which can be used for military purposes; and in general place China in a central position to structure rules and regimes governing continued economic and technological links and investment.⁷² As well, several Western and some Asian countries are rethinking allowing, if not already outright banning, Chinese companies access to their high tech industries, networks and resources which could be leveraged for espionage and surveillance purposes and in general make states reliant on (and thus vulnerable to) China in these critical spaces of future global economic and technological growth and interdependence.⁷³ Finally, China has increasingly resorted to the weaponization of economics to coerce others not only with respect to trade and investment disputes but also for non-economic reasons as well.⁷⁴

⁷² Nadège Rolland, "China's Vision For a New World Order," *The Ambassador's Brief*, 20 February 2020, https://www.ambassadorsbrief.com/posts/gFihcp7yEdENCpwtq?escaped_fragment=

⁷³ "America's War on Huawei Nears its Endgame," *The Economist*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/07/16/americas-war-on-huawei-nears-its-endgame>

Chia-Chien Chang and Alan H. Yang, "Weaponized Interdependence: China's Economic Statecraft and Social Penetration against Taiwan," *Orbis (Philadelphia)* 64, 2 (2020): pp. 312-33.

⁷⁴ Christina Lai, "Acting One Way and Talking Another: China's Coercive Economic Diplomacy in East Asia and beyond," *Pacific Review* 31, 2 (2018): pp. 169-87; Jaebeom Kwon, "Taming Neighbors: Exploring China's Economic Statecraft to Change Neighboring Countries' Policies and Their Effects," *Asian Perspective* 44, 1 (2020): pp. 103-38.

China has repeatedly committed to never pursue expansionism, hegemony, a sphere of influence or engage in arms racing no matter how powerful it becomes.⁷⁵ However, China's motivation for and path to pursue hegemony does not need to stem from some top-down, well-thought-out grand plan to "take over the world," though there is good evidence to suggest the Chinese leadership does have a grand strategy of American hegemonic displacement and imposition of their own order.⁷⁶ Rather, hegemony can also come from the bottom up with increasing investments in states and regions (such as through the BRI which is in part economically driven to export excess domestic capital and industrial capacity)⁷⁷ gradually increasing the desire to shape the political-security realities of these places to make them pliant to their expanding interests.⁷⁸ These efforts cumulatively are becoming a grand strategic interest in and of itself to structure networks in and through regions with China in a position of centrality.

China is seen by several Western observers as the more significant great power challenger of the two. China is categorized as a hegemonic rival as it is assessed as having multiple ways to influence others to comply, if not outright support, Chinese interests given its growing structural power bases – technological, economic, military and ideological- in building an alternative ordering system which could compete against US-anchored hegemonic networks. These power bases can be employed in different ways to generate compliance through a combination of creating fear, dependence, interest-alignment and ideological/normative affinity. Russia does not possess such structural power bases, though its military power is significant and does have an influence on its neighbors. Russia is a major oil and gas power, specifically to the European market, but as indicated above this dependence has not arrested growing European coordination against Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine. Russia is and will

⁷⁵ Y. Nee Lee, "Xi Says China 'Will Never Seek Hegemony' No Matter How Strong it Becomes," *CNBC*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/20/chinese-president-xi-jinping-on-globalization-multilateral-trade.html>

⁷⁶ M. Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015); Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁷⁷ Hongyi Lai, "The Rationale and Effects of China's Belt and Road Initiative: Reducing Vulnerabilities in Domestic Political Economy," *The Journal of Contemporary China* 30, 128 (2021): pp. 330-47.

⁷⁸ Lukas K. Danner and Félix E. Martín, "China's Hegemonic Intentions and Trajectory: Will It Opt for Benevolent, Coercive, or Dutch-style Hegemony?" *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 6, 2 (2019): pp. 186-207.

continue to be extremely limited in its ability to influence geopolitical realities in Europe (specifically Eastern Europe), Eurasia and globally towards their favor. As a result, Russia is seen as more of a spoiler or disrupter to American hegemonic networks rather than offering an alternative to them, except for some limited successes along its immediate periphery.⁷⁹

Negative Strategic Realities Forming

Chinese and Russian material capability development and activities have not significantly altered the nature of great power relations regionally or globally, most importantly the central role and position the US occupies in diplomatic, security, and to a lesser degree economic (especially regionally) structures and networks. It is unrealistic that Russia and China would be able to *run over* these regions in a blitzkrieg-like military conflict.⁸⁰ Discarding the prospects of entire subjugation, creating new ordering dynamics away from American hegemonic networks requires not necessarily conversion (realignment) of major, and minor, powers towards their side but to ensure:

- 1) Stemming any movement among unaligned powers towards the US (pre-alignment);
- 2) Weakening of relations between regional allies and the US, including possibly moves towards neutrality (dealignment); and
- 3) Preventing the joining of forces among regional powers into a united front against them (dis-alignment).⁸¹

⁷⁹ Dobbins, James, Shatz, Howard J. and Wyne, Ali. "Russia is a Rogue, Not a Peer; China is a Peer, No a Rogue," *RAND Corporation*, 2019, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE310.html>

⁸⁰ Roy, Denny. "China Won't Achieve Regional Hegemony." *The Washington Quarterly* 43.1 (2020): 101-17; Shiffrinson, Joshua. "Russia: A Problem, Not a Threat." *Newsweek*, 21 April 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-problem-not-threat-opinion-1584852>

⁸¹ Wedging strategies be in the service of a number of outcomes pertaining to alignment (usually defined by closeness in military relations). These include: 1) re-alignment (convert an ally of a rival/adversary to one's own side); 2) pre-alignment (ensuring the neutrality of targeted states); 3) dealignment (trying to get aligned states of a rival/adversary to move towards neutrality); and 4) disalignment, (efforts to diminish alignment between powers but not necessarily aimed towards severing these relations).

Timothy W. Crawford, "Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics." *International Security* 35, 4 (2011): pp. 155-89.

Chinese and Russian behavior, however, are producing the exact opposite results:

- 1) Strengthening alignment with the US by its hegemonic allies and some non-aligned powers;
- 2) Growing organized regional efforts by powers to balance against them; and
- 3) Non-recruiting of non-aligned powers into its ordering pursuits.

While the political environment of these regions has become more diversified in terms of relationships and organizations which do not all run exclusively through US-dominated ones, especially economically, the networked centrality of the US is being reinforced as the major conduit in organizing the growing collection of powers seeking to coordinate activities among themselves to push back against Chinese and Russian aggression, specifically security-wise. This phenomenon is not only a function of the US retaining superpower capabilities but also because it occupies central nodes in political, economic, and security networks that orient regional powers towards them, especially in times of crisis.

In terms of results, the biggest sign of failure of Russian and Chinese regional geopolitical projects is the growing, coordinated balancing against them, including not just militarily but diplomatically and economically. Russian military growth and activity have reinvigorated NATO as the central security network in Europe. More dramatically has been the growing integration of “new” NATO states in Central and Eastern Europe into the Alliance, including “old” NATO states contributing forces and expertise into these regions as a bulwark against Russia.⁸² As well, non-aligned states Finland and Sweden, who have increasingly worked with NATO and the US in defence and intelligence matters over the past decade, have applied to join the Alliance due to

⁸² Such activities included the creation of Enhanced Forward Presence units in several Central and Eastern European NATO states led by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the US, the NATO training mission in Ukraine, and regular sailing of NATO ships and task groups in the Black Sea. There are, also, moves by the Alliance to establish permanent forces in several NATO states in Eastern Europe, including beyond the original four framework host states (Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

growing concerns about Russia.⁸³ There have been some successes for Moscow in blunting further alignment towards the US and its European allies, including ensuring Belarus and Serbia remain supporters.⁸⁴ While Turkey has become a more autonomous power, increasingly at odds with its NATO partners over a variety of issues, it has increasingly become a rival to Russia in the Black Sea, Syria, and most importantly the Caucasus. Russian allies, like Kazakhstan and other members of the CSTO and EAEU, are increasingly adopting more diversified foreign policies to blunt demands and expectations of their subservience to Moscow's strategic preferences and possible future imperialist designs.⁸⁵

Efforts to drive wedges between and among the US and her European allies have been largely unsuccessful, including the maintenance of the EU despite BREXIT. While Moscow has for the last two decades been able to benefit somewhat from disagreements between the US and some European states, most importantly Germany over Nord Stream II, it appears these issues never caused a significant rift in their overall alignment relations. Furthermore, the room for Russian economic aggression is small given they remain largely dependent on European markets, technology, and finance.⁸⁶ The ability, furthermore, of avoiding the coupling of security and economic issues is diminishing, with coordination of sanctions between the US and European partners growing. This is increasingly apparent in the rapid, large scale and significant actions

⁸³ "Finland, Sweden Set to Join NATO as Soon as This Summer, The Times Reports," *Reuters*, 10 April 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-sweden-set-join-nato-soon-summer-times-2022-04-10/>

⁸⁴ This does not imply these states do not have agency in their strategic alignments, specifically that the only thing preventing their movement towards the US/West is Russian pressure/incentives. Many of these states have troubled and tense relations with the West. Russia, however, is keen to blunt any the success of any attempted wedge strategies between them and these partners which the US/West does/could exploit.

⁸⁴ This does not imply these states do not have agency in their strategic alignments, specifically that the only thing preventing their movement towards the US/West is Russian pressure/incentives. Many of these states have troubled and tense relations with the West. Russia, however, is keen to blunt any the success of any attempted wedge strategies between them and these partners which the US/West does/could exploit.

⁸⁵ "The Stans Want Nothing to Do With Vladimir Putin's Invasion of Ukraine," *The Economist*, 26 March 2022, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2022/03/26/the-stans-want-nothing-to-do-with-vladimir-putins-invasion-of-ukraine>

⁸⁶ Adam N. Stulberg, "Out of Gas? Russia, Ukraine, Europe, and the Changing Geopolitics of Natural Gas," *Problems of Post-communism* 62, 2 (2015): pp. 112-30; Nivedita Kapoor, "Russia-EU Relations: The End of a Strategic Partnership," *ORF Issue Brief* No. 451, March 2021, Observer Research Foundation.

taken by the West against Russia recently in response to its war of aggression against Ukraine.

The strategic environment has rapidly deteriorated for Russia in only a few months since its invasion of Ukraine. In short, there has been a growing, extensive decoupling of relations between the West and Russia, including massive economic and financial sanctions (such as the eviction of Russian banks from SWIFT, sanctions on the Russian Central Bank, and some energy and oil import bans); the closing of airspace and territorial waters for Russia planes and ships; and large arms, intelligence and surveillance support to Ukraine. Even neutral states, such as Switzerland, Monaco, and Austria, are increasingly following suit and imposing restrictions on Russia. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a desperate attempt to alter the strategic environment to its advantage, but it has led to the complete opposite outcome: it has further entrenched the US hegemonic networks, specifically NATO, as the most significant force and security provider in Europe. While some powers remain somewhat supportive of Russia such as China and India who have not followed suit with the West, Russia has few allies and friends willing to help in a substantial way.

In Asia, China faces a growing constellation of major powers increasingly aligned against it who are furthering coordination and collaboration between themselves across a number of spaces. China, however, is a major regional power with many states unwilling to decisively choose between them and the US.⁸⁷ This non-commitment to complete alignment, however, does not mean these states are seeking to hedge exactly between these two powers. Rather, there is a growing desire for the US to remain committed to and involved in the region as a major security and economic actor.

Furthermore, the weak institutionalization of the region has reinforced the importance of US networks, with new major powers arrangements layering on top of the existing US hub-and-spoke architecture. This is most evident in the growing importance of the *Quad* not as a formal alliance but increasingly as a foundation in which major powers are coordinating military, diplomatic and economic efforts to

⁸⁷ Lee Hsien Loong, "The Endangered Asian Century: America, China, and the Perils of Confrontation," *Foreign Affairs* 99, 4 (2020); Sung Chul Jung, Jaehyon Lee, and Ji-Yong Lee, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy and US Alliance Network Expandability: Asian Middle Powers' Positions on Sino-US Geostrategic Competition in Indo-Pacific Region," *The Journal of Contemporary China* 30, 127 (2021): pp. 53-68.

prevent Chinese regional hegemony. As well, regional powers, such as Japan, India, and Indonesia, are increasingly taking the lead in constructing normative and material networks and structures to order the Indo-Pacific region. The US, however, remains a vital power in these processes and is in an ideal position to further strategic relations with rising powers like India and Indonesia increasingly concerned about China's growing power and bellicosity.⁸⁸ While it is unlikely these rising powers will become formal allies, they are increasingly being connected to the US and its networks with existing allied powers like Japan and Australia. Tensions and differences exist among these powers, but as they all are concerned about China their strategic orientation will gradually move closer to the US in general which reinforces its hegemonic role and diminishes the prospects for other ordering alternatives to form as envisioned by Beijing.

As with Russia, China has been able to prevent some states from drifting toward the US such as Cambodia and Myanmar (who have been useful in disrupting the unity of ASEAN over adopting a common position on the South China Sea) and leveraged its financial power to get some Pacific Island States to switch diplomatic recognition of China from Taipei to Beijing. In general, though, the trend is towards growing support of the US as the central security actor and increasing linkages between major regional powers and Washington to ensure China does not become dominant. China's weaponization of trade and investment, furthermore, has motivated many powers to seek ways to develop alternative supply chains and technology sectors that do not run through or exclusively rely on China.⁸⁹

Many states are pushing back – inside Asia and beyond- including the EU which recently halted the implementation of a major investment treaty with Beijing.⁹⁰ As well,

⁸⁸ Jeffery M. Smith, "Strategic Autonomy and U.S.-Indian Relations," *The Heritage Foundation*, 09 November 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/strategic-autonomy-and-us-indian-relations>

⁸⁹ Shruti Srivastava and Isabel Reynolds, "Japan, India and Australia Eye 'Supply Chain Pact' to counter China," *The Japan Times*, 23 August 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/08/23/business/economy-business/japan-india-australia-supply-chain-china/>

⁹⁰ Janka Oertel, "The New China Consensus: How Europe is Growing Wary of Beijing," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 07 September 2020, https://ecfr.eu/publication/the_new_china_consensus_how_europe_is_growing_wary_of_beijing/ "EU Suspends Efforts to Ratify Investment Deal with China," *EUROnews*, 19 May 2021,

many European allies are adopting Indo-Pacific policies, including deploying military power to the region due to concerns about China's growing power.⁹¹ These developments further reinforce the US hegemonic position - having European and Asian allies, and some non-aligned Asian rising powers like India - increasingly working together against China strategically, offering US opportunities to help coordinate and direct these processes given its strong relations with these powers.⁹² The US, however, is playing an increasingly central role, maneuvering to ensure the re-networking of security relations runs through them.⁹³ Like Russia, also, it appears unlikely China will be able to silo economic and security issues away from one another as a number of powers increasingly coordinate on both fronts, and there are growing desires to ensure more diversified sources of investment and funding for desperately needed infrastructure matters throughout Asia.⁹⁴

As a result, the prospects of attempting to introduce alternative ordering constructs by Russia and China are diminishing. Russia's attempt to create a geographically defined SOI has been mostly unsuccessful, with mixed participation rates by local states and repeated intrusions by outside powers, not only the US and the EU but Turkey and China too. As well, under current conditions, any move to a concert of powers systems would still lean heavily in favor of the US given its strong relations with the EU and Japan. Such a formalized system, therefore, could just be another layer of American hegemony rather than a decisively new system of major power relations.

<https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/04/eu-suspends-efforts-to-ratify-controversial-investment-deal-with-china>

⁹¹ Garima Mohan, "A European Strategy for the Indo-Pacific," *The Washington Quarterly* 43, 4 (2020): pp. 171-85.

⁹² One way of combining these groups of hegemonic supporters is to expand the membership of existing organizations, like the G7 or Five Eyes, or create new bodies designed to specifically address various aspects of the growing competition and concern with Russia and China, layering on top existing networks and structures.

⁹³ The AUKUS agreement, pertaining to sharing of military technology and greater integration of defence industrial bases, between the US, the UK and Australia is the latest example of American networked centrality being exercised at the expense of European states, specifically France. As well, the US has recently commented on European states, including the UK, should focus more on their home region and not try to pursue an independent Indo-Pacific approach or divert too many assets to this theatre. Kathrin Hill, Jasmine Cameron-Chileshe and Demetri Sevastopulo, "Britain 'More Helpful' Closer to Home Than in Asia, Says US Defence Chief," *Financial Times*, 27 July 2021.

⁹⁴ "Closing the Financing Gap in Asian Infrastructure." *Asian Development Bank*, June 2018, <https://www.adb.org/publications/closing-financing-gap-asian-infrastructure>

As for China, the ordering project anchored on the BRI is increasingly being challenged by the growing acceptance of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic system tethering the Indian and Pacific Ocean complexes together through growing economic and geopolitical connections.⁹⁵ Furthermore, growing use of (but not total conformity over its exact meaning) the normative language of “Free and Open” to define and inform the principles and practices governing this region is seen as a direct challenge to China.⁹⁶ While there are no calls for a complete exclusion of, or decoupling from, China, it is clear regional powers, in conjunction with and support from the US, are increasingly coordinating in a way to balance China to prevent it from attaining a unilateral position of centrality and leadership. Indeed, there is growing alignment among Western states regarding limiting/excluding Chinese companies from a number of technology spheres, creating an environment where the US will increasingly be able to control and get buy-in regarding a new industrial-economic policy against China.

As a result, US hegemonic relations with regional allies are being strengthened and reinvigorated. A number of non-aligned rising powers, also, are likely to increasingly work with the US as a counterbalance towards China and Russia, due to the US’s advantage of its power, position, and centrality in security, diplomatic and economic networks.⁹⁷ Facing such an environment, it will be very difficult to degrade the role of the US as a hegemonic power in Europe and Asia for the foreseeable future given the *demand* for such involvement is growing and there exists no other power which can coordinate and align other concerned powers against China and Russia.

Committed to a Losing Strategy?

⁹⁵ Medcalf, Rory. *Indo-Pacific Empire: China, America and the Contest for the World’s Pivot Region* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

⁹⁶ Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question: Countering China or Shaping a New Regional Order?" *International Affairs (London)* 96, 1 (2020): pp. 49-73; Jagannath P. Panda, "China as a Revisionist Power in Indo-Pacific and India's Perception: A Power-Partner Contention," *The Journal of Contemporary China* 30, 127 (2021): pp. 1-17.

⁹⁷ While external trade figures demonstrate the breadth and depth of Chinese growth as an economic power regionally and globally, the US retains important economic advantages in the global system including possessing the world’s dominant currency, strong leads in a number of technology sectors, and investment services. See: Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World’s Sole Superpower* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

Given these negative geopolitical realities forming, why have China and Russia decided to maintain these assertive and coercive strategic approaches, particularly in their home regions? Why not employ a more restrained approach looking to take advantage of tensions between regional allies, local powers, and the US over concerns of the latter *going rogue* and becoming a more coercive hegemonic power to build new relations and networks? This is particularly relevant for China whose shift towards more across-the-board coercion has been more dramatic recently than compared to Russia which has a longer history of a highly antagonistic approach towards the West for almost two decades.⁹⁸ What explains the paradoxical choice of maintaining these paradoxical strategies?

This shift in posture and orientation is a mixture of a number of factors, some of which are more or less important to each power. Some of the most common rationales include the following. First, this is a function of these regimes' assessment of and confidence in long terms trends of US hegemonic decline and balances of powers forming in their favor, especially after the 2008 financial recession.⁹⁹ Chinese and Russian behavior, therefore, is driven by a desire to take advantage by accelerating these trends. Second, the confrontational posture adopted by the Trump Administration, including the declaration of great power competition against both powers as the central anchor governing American grand strategy, contributed to more aggressive pursuits and posturing by Beijing and Moscow.¹⁰⁰ Third, both powers suffer from 'great state autism', the inability to appreciate and anticipate different perspectives held by others, especially those who are/would be negatively by their actions, due to an

⁹⁸ China has seemingly abandoned its *lay low and bid its time* grand strategy premised on ensuring a favorable economic and strategic environment to facilitate and allow China to become a materially powerful great power before a counter-great power coalition formed against it. Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁹⁹ Christopher Layne, "This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, 1 (2012): pp. 203-211; Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁰⁰ While questions about the relationship between President Trump and Russia plagued his presidency, in official policies China and Russia were lumped together as revisionist challengers, the US continued operations and training exercise designed to counter both powers, and sanctions remained in place against Moscow. This suggest that while President Trump may have wanted a more benign relationship with Russia, other forces in politics and government, and in general the national security establishment were successful in blunting these desires.

excessive focus on domestic politics which produces simplistic and inaccurate conceptions of international politics.¹⁰¹ China and Russia, therefore, enact and maintain counter-productive strategies due to an inability to foresee its negative consequences and adjust accordingly.

These explanations play an important role in understanding Chinese and Russian revisionist behaviour, but do not adequately answer this phenomenon in terms of timing. The Trump Administration's posture and actions against both powers, specifically China, accelerated tensions with them but did not mark the beginning of Russian and Chinese turns towards assertiveness which had begun well before. Furthermore, while great state autism can help explain the lack of garnering major power allies for Russia and China over the years, it does not account for the abandoning of their more benevolent regional approaches – *Greater Europe* for Russia and *Smile Diplomacy* for China – towards more coercive-assertive ones altering relations with other powers from wary partnerships to alienation and enmity. Finally, while assessments of power trends are important, it is plausible China and Russia are acting not out of confidence but out of concern, specifically that future conditions will be less strategically favorable than currently. Furthermore, there appears to be growing pressure on both to capitalize on a finite 'window of opportunity' to establish and lock-in favorable environmental settings while they still can. Rather than riding long-term favorable power trends, Russia and China, to differing degrees and intensities, face problematic futures which motivate them to act now before their ability to do so wanes. There are three sources contributing to this pressure to act, which signal the weakness, short-term and long-term, of these powers' abilities to alter and construct favorable regional strategic environments.

First, such actions can be attributed to the mobilization strategies of both regimes towards rehabilitating their states back to great power status which is *respected* in the world. Both the Putin and Xi regimes employ strategic narratives of restoring their states to their proper status after suffering calamitous geopolitical declines that the West produced, contributed to, and/or took advantage of. For Putin, this is the collapse of the Soviet Union and for Xi this is China's *Century of Humiliation*. Such projects are

¹⁰¹ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

becoming more central in the legitimation of these regimes, which are increasingly authoritarian and personalist in nature.¹⁰² For China, the self-imposed timelines, particularly around 2049 marking 100 years of Chinese Communist Party Rule, of achieving this status places pressure to ‘produce results’ specifically in relation to “core interests” such as Taiwan and the South China Sea.¹⁰³ Similarly, the Putin regime sees Russia as incomplete, driving imperialistic desires to physically control parts of the former Soviet Union as a necessary condition to regain its place as a great power. These actions, as well, are in part fueled by and furthering, nationalist sentiments which are an important catalyst in mobilizing society for these great power projects. Looking strong in international affairs is increasingly important to portray themselves as great powers which is a worthy pursuit, even if these efforts take away, or come at the expense, of other domestic priorities and reforms.¹⁰⁴

Second, despite the portrayal of confidence, both powers are largely acting on the defensive. China has not altered the strategic realities in the “three-island chains” confronting its coastlines, remaining populated by allied powers allowing the US to station and project power in these spaces and thus denying China’s ability to deploy power unencumbered.¹⁰⁵ While it has altered the facts on the ground in the South China Sea in terms of deploying and stationing military forces on reclaimed islets, China has increasingly strained relations with all other claimants and there is a growing rate of extra-regional powers, besides the US, increasingly operating there.¹⁰⁶ Consensual unification with Taiwan is unrealistic, leaving only military coercion or invasion as the only options – which are highly dangerous given continued US commitment to peace across the Taiwan Straits and its official policy of strategic ambiguity to say nothing of

¹⁰² Stacie E. Goddard and Ronald R. Krebs, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy," *Security Studies* 24, 1 (2015): pp. 5-36.

¹⁰³ David Dollar, Yiping Huang, and Yang Yao, *China 2049: Economic Challenges of a Rising Global Power* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2020).

¹⁰⁴ Charles E. Ziegler, "Russia as a Nationalizing State: Rejecting the Western Liberal Order," *International Politics (Hague, Netherlands)* 53, 5 (2016): pp. 555-73; Jessica Chen Weiss, "How Hawkish Is the Chinese Public? Another Look at ‘Rising Nationalism’ and Chinese Foreign Policy," *The Journal of Contemporary China* 28, 119 (2019): pp. 679-95.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew S Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, "Barriers, Springboards and Benchmarks: China Conceptualizes the Pacific “Island Chains,”” *The China Quarterly (London)* 225 (2016): pp. 1-22.

¹⁰⁶ China has continued to alienate every claimant in the SCS, including the Philippines which should be an ideal candidate to wedge away from the US given mounting tension between Washington and Manila.

the difficulties of conducting a large scale amphibious operation. Furthermore, Japan has become increasingly vocal in working with the US in developing contingencies to assist Taiwan in the event of a war. Repressive actions in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, as well, have demonstrated the continued fixation on domestic control and have led to a growing coalition of international actors sanctioning and speaking out against these actions. As for Russia, much of their diplomatic and military activity has been directed towards propping up allies, such as Syria and Belarus, or preventing others from gravitating towards the West such as their failed attempts in Ukraine. Moscow, also, faces encroachments into its near abroad by Turkey in the Caucuses and China in Central Asia challenging its regional leadership role and position. Overall, Russia is acting on its back heel in the sense of trying to retain the status-quo amidst a hostile environment of intrusive outside powers, gravitational pressures towards the EU and NATO into its near-abroad, and persistent democracy revolutions threatening to remove many of its autocratic allies.¹⁰⁷

As well, despite periods of heightened concern about American unilateralism and assertiveness during the GW Bush and Trump Administrations, allies and close partners remain committed to American hegemonic networks and their leading role in them in providing security and economic goods. This has led to increasing frustration for Russia and China in trying to cleave them apart, and take advantage of any such alienation between them, to create space for new ways of regional ordering. It is unclear under what conditions American allies and partners would seriously consider re-orient geopolitically away from the US other than complete abandonment by Washington.¹⁰⁸

Finally, and most importantly, both China and Russia face problematic domestic futures which will most likely constrain their ability to develop material capabilities that can be deployed to further their international interests. Russia faces a very bleak future, experiencing anemic economic growth, a declining population, and a lessening

¹⁰⁷ Elias Götz, "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited," *International Studies Review* 19, 2 (2017): pp. 228-53.

¹⁰⁸ Robert E. Kelly and Paul Poast, "The Allies Are Alright: Why American Can Get Away With Bullying its Friends," *Foreign Affairs* 101, 2 (2022): p. 131.

of quality-of-life factors such as life expectancy.¹⁰⁹ With these latent power bases under strain - shrinking workforce, increasing demands to care for a growing elderly population, and less wealth to tax alongside large-scale kleptocracy of elites - Russia will struggle to continue to maintain and increase its military power, and will most likely have to spend more efforts and energy keeping the Russian state integral than expanding beyond its borders either in direct control or influence.¹¹⁰ The current economic and financial decoupling with the West due to sanctions imposed on them for their war against Ukraine, and the material losses suffered by its military, will accelerate the erosion of these power bases. China is not in as dire an immediate situation as Russia, but in the long term faces bleak power development prospects as well. Its population is rapidly aging, creating similar demographic strains caused by a shrinking workforce and growing demands to take care of an increasingly elderly population.¹¹¹ Economic growth is slowing, and much of that is based on government spending.¹¹² China, as well, faces massive environmental damage which will only be exacerbated by climate change.¹¹³

Both these powers are not *houses of cards* that will collapse in the future. They are and will remain great powers important to regional, and in some ways global, politics. The amount of power, however, they can devote to international issues - either in the form of military forces, investments, trade, and aid, or soft/cultural power - will decrease in the decades ahead as more of their power will be needed to service domestic issues, including maintaining their centralized, authoritarian governance systems. Other states, such as Japan and Germany, are confronting similar demographic challenges, but unlike China and Russia are relatively well-developed, wealthy

¹⁰⁹ Robert F. Bennett and John P. Hardt, *Russia's Uncertain Economic Future* (Taylor and Francis, 2015); V.I. Zhukov, "Sovereignty of Russia: National Interests, Demographic Threats and Challenges., *RUDN Journal of Economics* 26, 3 (2018): pp. 335-46.

¹¹⁰ Simon Saradzhyan and Nabi Abdullaev, "Measuring National Power: Is Putin's Russia in Decline?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 73, 2 (2021): pp. 291-317.

¹¹¹ Minchung Hsu, Pei-Ju Liao and Min Zhao, "Demographic Change and Long-term Growth in China: Past Developments and the Future Challenge of Aging," *Review of Development Economics* 22, 3 (2018): pp. 928-52.

¹¹² Michael Beckley, "China's Economy Is Not Overtaking America's," *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance* 32, 2 (2020): pp. 10-23.

¹¹³ Ligang Song and Wing Thyee Woo, *China's Dilemma: Economic Growth, the Environment, and Climate Change* (Canberra: Brookings Institution, 2008).

countries that can more sustainably allocate more of their wealth to addressing and preparing for these changes.¹¹⁴ China and Russia will face a more stark trade-off given their lower wealth positions causing concerns these countries will get old before they get rich, creating additional societal stresses given the growing incongruence between economic/wealth desires and realities. As a result, they may become increasingly frustrated “faltering powers” who are not able to achieve their strategic goals in shaping regional and global environments as a growing amount of their power and focus must be managing these sizable and seismic demographic-wealth issues.¹¹⁵

Given these pressures and the lack of success in undermining American hegemonic networks and alliances, is it possible China and Russia would form a united, formal counter-hegemonic bloc? Such an arrangement would be a major strategic concern for the US, with a heartland and rimland power combining forces able to generate and project power both on land and at sea.¹¹⁶ Such a development would be a “Eurasian nightmare” for the US and its allies which have worked to prevent since World War II.¹¹⁷ There are several factors that could push these two powers together along such a trajectory. These include: being governed by authoritarian regimes hostile, and fearful, of liberal promotion and other elements of the existing international order; common concern about American power projection and influence via its hegemonic networks in its home regions; and increasingly being treated as the same - strategic rivals by the US, her allies, and other powers necessitating being increasingly balanced against militarily and marginalized/excluded from major economic and diplomatic ordering projects.

Relations between the two have been strengthening and deepening since the 1990s. Such collaboration can be seen diplomatically in blocking the US and other

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Eberstadt, "Growing Old the Hard Way: China, Russia, India," *Policy Review* 136 (2006).

¹¹⁵ Andrej Krickovic and Chang Zhang, "Fears of Falling Short versus Anxieties of Decline: Explaining Russia and China's Approach to Status-Seeking," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 13, 2 (2020): pp. 219-51.

¹¹⁶ Zhengyu Wu, "Classical Geopolitics, Realism and the Balance of Power Theory," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, 6 (2018): pp. 786-823; Benjamin Schreer, "Towards Contested 'Spheres of Influence' in the Western Pacific: Rising China, Classical Geopolitics, and Asia-Pacific Stability," *Geopolitics* 24, 2 (2019): pp. 503-22.

¹¹⁷ Hal Brands, "The Eurasian Nightmare: China-Russian Convergence and the Future of American Order," *Foreign Affairs*, 25 February 2022.

Western states' resolutions on the UN Security Council; growing scope and regularity of military exercises between the two; and interlinking their economic projects, the BRI and EAEU, including in terms of resource developing and shipping in the Russian Arctic.¹¹⁸ Despite these developments, there exists a plethora of strong strategic, elite, and regional tensions and differences making any formal strategic alignment akin to an alliance unlikely.¹¹⁹ Specifically, both are united by the world they *want to move away from* – an international system dominated by the US and the West materially, institutionally, and ideologically– but whether they are aligned with respect to what *world they want to move towards* is not so clear.

In particular, Russia is pursuing a strategy based on respecting exclusive Spheres of Influence whereas China appears to be pursuing a strategy involving occupying central nodes and positions in the ongoing economic, security, and diplomatic networks running in, through and between various regions.¹²⁰ Complete exclusion politically and economically of both, however, may further their relations towards a more strategically aligned pact if there is a complete lack of options and alternative partners in their regional and global affairs. The current war in Ukraine is a major inflection point for the nature and future of Russia-China relations. While China has leaned more towards Russia in this conflict compared to previous crises (such as during the 2014 annexation of Crimea), they remain unwilling to offer direct support and is trying to distance itself somewhat from being caught in the fallout of Western actions against Russia. Nevertheless, China will most likely take advantage of the significant fissure between the West and Russia to extract more favorable economic, specific resource, deals from Moscow, which will increasingly draw them into China's orbit.

¹¹⁸ Alexander Lukin and Dmitry Novikov, "Sino-Russian Rapprochement and Greater Eurasia: From Geopolitical Pole to International Society?" *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 12, 1 (2021): pp. 28-45.

¹¹⁹ K.J. Hancock and S.E. Lobell, "Realism and the Changing International System: Will China and Russia Challenge the Status-Quo?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 8, 4 (2010): pp. 143-165. Marcin Kaczmarek, "Convergence or Divergence? Visions of World Order and the Russian-Chinese Relationship," *European Politics and Society* 20, 2 (2019): pp. 207-24. P.K. Baev, "The Limits of Authoritarian Compatibility: Xi's China and Putin's Russia," *The Brookings Institute*, June 2020.

¹²⁰ Two regions of particular interest in terms of how China-Russia strategic relations evolve are Central Asia and the Arctic. Alexander Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging: China-Russia Relations," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, 4 (2016): pp. 375-97.

At this juncture, their relationship remains best defined as an entente: an understanding to regularly cooperate, consult, and in some cases coordinate activities across multiple domains due to mutual, but not perfectly aligned or comprehensive, strategic interests while remaining autonomous and equal actors with limited hard commitments between them.¹²¹ While they are increasingly coordinating efforts where their interests align, they will most likely continue to pursue their own strategic affairs which are not aligned, and at times conflict with one another, with neither willing to sacrifice these to support the other, especially during a crisis. The nature of this relationship will most likely continue unless they are pushed together by facing similar excessive exclusion and/or one, most likely Russia becomes a junior partner to the interests and lead of the other. It remains unclear if the US will adopt wedging strategies and postures to try to prevent such an arrangement from forming, continue to deal with both as separate strategic rivals, or begin to view and treat them as 'on the same side'.¹²² Even as the two powers continue to develop their strategic relationship, the US retains favorable relations with most of the other world's leading powers to deal with their regional revisionism, either separately or if they work in tandem.

The Future of American Hegemony

China and Russia are not existential threats to US hegemony even though they have and will continue to degrade American primacy to an extent not experienced since the Cold War. Russian and Chinese actions have:

- 1) failed to decisively wedge apart allies from the US;
- 2) motivated regional powers to coordinate more among themselves against them; and
- 3) furthered relations between non-aligned regional powers and the US in these processes. The US does not face an impossible task confronting a *two-front* strategic rivalry environment against these powers simultaneously given they

¹²¹ Adam Perry MacDonald, "China-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: A Cause for Concern for the Western Arctic States?" *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 27, 2 (2021): pp. 194-210.

¹²² Timothy W. Crawford, *The Power to Divide: Wedge Strategies and Great Power Competition* (Cornell: Cornell UP, 2021).

have strong allies and partners in both regions, whose relationships will grow stronger and more aligned as China and Russia double down on their regional revisionist postures.

In confronting these powers, American hegemonic networks, specifically alliance-security networks, will increasingly become more regional, rather than systemic, level-focused like their origins and operations during the Cold War. Economically, however, actions against China and Russia will be operating at both regional and system levels. While a complete decoupling is not likely (especially with respect to China), the expansion and intensification of the global political economy towards integration and interdependence between US hegemonic networks and Russia and China will continue to slow down and increasingly be defined by exclusion and expulsion.¹²³

American-based hegemonic networks will continue to remain durable and strengthened in this period of great power competition, even as the US faces a relative decline in terms of its power resources to some degree. The US has strong alliance relations with a number of other very capable secondary states who have deep buy-in and normative attachment to the RBIO and their position within it.¹²⁴ American material capabilities, however, should also not be underestimated. While its extremely preponderant position in the 1990s has diminished, the US remains the world's only superpower with a strong base of structural power. The US faces a good demographic future, with expected population growth and maintenance of a sizable workforce into the rest of this century.¹²⁵ While many fixate on the size of China's economy and when it will take over the number one spot, the US has decades' worth of accumulated economic wealth and military power which is undervalued by focusing on year-on-year changes in relative economic and military budgets and sizes.¹²⁶ As well, despite the rise

¹²³ Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Growing Rivalry Between America and China and the Future of Globalization," *Texas National Security Review* 5, 1 (2021-22): pp. 95-119.

¹²⁴ Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

¹²⁵ Mark L. Haas, "A Geriatric Peace? The Future of U.S. Power in a World of Aging Populations," *International Security* 32, 1 (2007): pp. 112-47; Nicholas Eberstadt, "America Hasn't Lost Its Demographic Advantage," *Foreign Affairs*, 24 May 2021.

¹²⁶ Michael Beckley, "China's Economy Is Not Overtaking America's," *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance* 32, 2 (2020): pp. 10-23.

of China the US share of global wealth has not appreciably diminished, remaining about 25 percent since 1970.¹²⁷ The US, furthermore, is a far more efficient power in terms of lower domestic costs than either China or Russia and thus has more ability to develop and deploy power capabilities towards international matters.¹²⁸ The Trump and now Biden Administrations have accelerated defence spending on a massive, but still manageable, scale to retain global leads in military and technological power.¹²⁹

It is hard for Russia and China to challenge US superpower position and regional hegemonic roles for three primary reasons. First, both powers reside in tough neighborhoods, populated by a number of major powers which are, to varying degrees, concerned about them more so than about the US. This dynamic strengthens American geographic insularity (a great power separated from other powers via water spaces), making it easy for the US to project power into the home regions of China and Russia, but making it more difficult for these powers to project power in North America, specifically to alter its geopolitical nature, given it is largely tied regionally contested with other major powers.¹³⁰ Second, it appears unlikely they will be able to take advantage of wars involving other great powers¹³¹ in order to augment their own relative standing as the US was able to do in the 20th century.¹³² Finally, they will

¹²⁷ Instead, China's growing percentage of the global economy is coming at the expense of Europe. Thomasingar, "The Logic and Efficacy of Engagement: Objectives, Assumptions, and Impacts," in *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, edited by Anne F. Thurston (Columbia University Press: New York, 2021), pp. 32-55.

¹²⁸ Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

¹²⁹ J. Adam Tooze, "The New Age of American Power," *The New Statesman*, 09 September 2021, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/americas/north-america/us/2021/09/the-new-age-of-american-power>

¹³⁰ John M. Schuessler, Joshua Shiffrin, and David Blagden, "Revisiting Insularity and Expansion: A Theory Note," *Perspectives on Politics* (2021): pp. 1-15.

¹³¹ Taking advantage can come in many forms. For the US experience in World War I it was primarily 1) the established European great powers wore each other down by physically fighting one another, destroying their material capabilities; and 2) relatedly, to finance the war all the major combatants required external financing. The US was the only power able to provide this financing, which they then leverage against its allies in Great Britain and France, and the defeated Central Powers, in generating support for their post-war plans and asserting themselves at the heart of a new global financial order. J. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (New York, New York: Penguin, 2015).

¹³² There are possibilities China and/or Russia would try to coax a conflict between the other and the US and/or its allies, or at least be prepared to take advantage should the US get focused on one of these

unlikely be able to catch up to the structural power bases of the US given the low starting point they are building up from; the increasing pressure on state finances and focus due to domestic challenges; their growing restrictedness and exclusion from certain Western economic and technological sectors; and the geographic, demographic, resource and strategic advantages enjoyed by the US which are very difficult to undermine.¹³³

While these powers do not pose a serious challenge, that does not mean American hegemony does not face any severe risks. These risks can be divided into two broad categories 1) those pertaining to the recalibration of American grand strategy and 2) more existential, how changing domestic realities may fundamentally alter the nature of the US as an international actor. With regards to the first category, adjustment to American grand strategy has and will continue to be made to more sharply orient American hegemonic networks against China and Russia. However, any attempt to return to military primacy, specifically in the form of arms racing in established and emerging arenas, could accelerate tensions and risks of conflict and misunderstandings. Strategic arms control should be a primary issue area in the US relationships with both states. The US, and others, must find ways to pursue *responsible* competition to ensure zero-sum logic do not come to entirely dominate these relationships, which will require restraint and willingness to negotiate and accommodate on the US and her allies' part to some degree.

Moves towards re-establishing primacy, as well, may create pressures on allies to contribute to such efforts in ways that diminish their autonomy over such matters. For example, the promotion of concepts like *integrated defence* with Asian allies may try to pressure partners to conform to American preferences on defence developments,

powers to the exclusion of the other. Another possibility is China and Russia synchronize destabilizing incidents to stretch American focus on multiple allies and regions simultaneously, though this level of coordination would be difficult to achieve practically and most likely would only be pursued if both powers were in a far closer strategic arrangement than currently. B. Devlen, "Facing the Authoritarian Challenge: The Sino-Russian Alignment and What to Do About it," *Macdonald-Laurier Institute*, 18 March 2021.

¹³³ B. Buzan and M. Cox, "China and the US: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'?" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6, 2 (2013): pp. 109-32.

postures, and activities in these regions.¹³⁴ This raises a second concern regarding the extent of alignment expected by the US in its rivalry against China and Russia. Many regional powers, specifically major ones, are concerned about China and Russia, and as a result, are increasingly seeking to work with the US in developing capabilities, strategies, and networks to reduce these powers' ability, specifically coercively, to alter regional geopolitical-economic dynamics. However, allies and other *like-minded* powers may increasingly have to deal with an America which is seeking greater control over and across-the-board conformity to its preferences in dealing with China and Russia across an ever-growing number of *strategic* issues to act as a *bloc* against these powers.

The world, however, is not like the Cold War in many important respects, and any overbearing approach of complete alignment may cause tensions and disputes which would undermine the US hegemonic position.¹³⁵ In Europe, NATO is still the main security vehicle but there may in the future be a desire by some European states, or the EU, to be more involved in security matters, specifically towards Russia.¹³⁶ In the Indo-Pacific, there are growing desires by India, Indonesia and Japan, and others such as ASEAN to play more leadership roles in structuring the diplomatic, economic, and security networks of the region.¹³⁷ These developments will challenge whether the US will loosen its concerns about autonomous major powers in these regions and support these developments. A particularly interesting case will be close strategic and arms sales relations between India and Russia, and whether the US will try to force New Delhi to distance itself from these as a condition for closer US strategic relations.

The US will remain in a central position in regional ordering efforts, but the desire for greater autonomy and leadership from regional and local powers should be supported. Greater burden sharing, both materially and politically, is needed for the

¹³⁴ Ken Moriyasu, "US Eyes Using Japan's Submarines to 'Choke' Chinese Navy," *Nikkei Asia*, 05 May 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/US-eyes-using-Japan-s-submarines-to-choke-Chinese-navy>

¹³⁵ Thomas J. Christensen, "No New Cold War: Why US-China Strategic Competition Will Not be Like the US-Soviet Cold War," *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, 10 September 2020, <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/no-new-cold-war-why-us-china-strategic-competition-will-not-be-like-the-us-soviet-cold-war/>

¹³⁶ Stephanie C. Hofmann, *European Security in NATO's Shadow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹³⁷ Rory Medcalf, *Indo-Pacific Empire: China, America and the Contest for the World's Pivot Region* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

US. This is so because it is unclear whether the US can endlessly leverage the global financial system to continuously grow both defence and domestic spending (such as President Biden's Build Back Better program), both of which are increasingly linked together within the American grand strategy of competing with China and Russia.¹³⁸ This is not, however, simply a US challenge. While there are some positive developments in both Europe (with a far more active EU regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine) and Asia (with many powers working together in the development of the FOIP-based regional order) historically, especially in the post-Cold War era, allies and other powers have shown in general a reluctance to assume greater material and leadership burdens in being order managers and defenders.

With respect to the second category, the most important unknown is what type of power the US will be moving forward. There are three distinct but interrelated aspects of this. First, whether the US remains a *superpower*, specifically having substantial military, economic, and technological material power. Second, whether the US will remain a *hegemonic power*, being a leader, specifically of the Western world, working with willing followers to protect one another and construct solutions to address mutual challenges. Finally, whether the US will remain a *liberal power*, specifically the retention of an open society and democratic political nature domestically and promotion of democracy, liberal values, and institutional types of ordering internationally. As outlined above, it seems certain, barring a societal collapse¹³⁹, that the US will remain a superpower, but whether it will remain a hegemonic and/or liberal power is far less certain.

The Trump Administration caused serious consternation among allies and regional powers about the future trajectory of the US as hegemonic power committed to its alliances and systems of political-economic networks regionally and globally. While there have always been American concerns about burden-sharing and the benefits of trade from its hegemonic project, the Trump Administration was really the first time in

¹³⁸ James McBride and Anshu Siripurapu, "The National Debt Dilemma," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 01 October 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/national-debt-dilemma>

¹³⁹ This risk, however, should not be underestimated as stresses and tensions in the social cohesion of the country can have real, sizable detrimental effects on national power and international competitiveness. For more see: Michael J. Mazarr. *The Social Foundations of National Competitiveness* (RAND: Santa Monica, California, 2022).

the modern era that there was serious questioning of whether the US wanted to be a hegemon in general, specifically spending the resource and commitment costs.¹⁴⁰ A major shift is the US retrenchment from trade pacts, most importantly the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. If the US is focused on being a liberal hegemonic power, it will need to not just focus on ensuring its allies' and like-minded partners' compliance and support regarding issues of confrontation and exclusion, but also provision of club/public goods as a way of competing against China and Russia regarding pressing regional challenges like finance, telecommunications, and infrastructure needs, especially in adapting to climate change and transforming into a greener society.¹⁴¹ For example, many regional initiatives by the Biden Administration, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, are largely about regulating supply chains and other sensitive economic activities and resources among partners with an obvious exclusionary purpose towards China (and Russia) but are missing such elements as market access normally associated with trade and investment agreements.

Given the turbulence within the US domestically about whether hegemony pays off, it remains to be seen if the US is truly committed to its hegemonic project moving forward.¹⁴² As a result, the impetus for regional powers to work together as regional managers has been strengthened to not rely on an unpredictable US while pushing back Chinese and Russian revisionism. While there was some movement in this direction during the Trump era, since Biden's assumption to the presidency it appears many American allies and close partners have stopped these efforts and simply returned to the fold under the assumption that the US has 'returned to normal' in its international character and role. Such changes are understandable given the Biden Administration's

¹⁴⁰ The disruption taken towards international institutions and alliance partnerships by the Trump Administration was somewhat reminiscent of the Nixon Administration who in the early 1970s believed the US was bearing too many of the costs of maintaining the Bretton Woods based economic order and fighting communism while its allies were free riding to an unacceptable degree. Both Presidents only had one term in office thus it is difficult to determine if the moves they did in office were more of a hegemonic course correction of something more transformational if they had a second consecutive term.

¹⁴¹ Lindsey Ford, "Refocusing the China Debate: American Allies and the Question of US-China Decoupling," *The Brookings Institute*, 07 February 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/07/refocusing-the-china-debate-american-allies-and-the-question-of-us-china-decoupling/>

¹⁴² Michael Beckley, "Rogue Superpower: Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century," *Foreign Affairs* 99, 6 (2020).

emphasis on working with allies and partners in developing united positions against China and Russia. Also, it is very difficult, materially, organizationally, and psychologically, for secondary, “like-minded” powers to be order maintainers and managers in the absence of a status-quo superpower.¹⁴³ Despite, therefore, the uncertainty about the internal nature and external behavior of the US given the ongoing polarization of their society and politics, it is expected that American allies and partners will continue to work in and through US hegemonic networks even with such concerns.

Concerns about China and Russia towards American hegemony and its superpower position are but the latest round in the US decline narratives which have existed since the 1950s.¹⁴⁴ The durability of American power – both its structural power bases and the favorable strategic environment in which it operates – is constantly being underestimated.¹⁴⁵ China and Russia are rivals, but they do not threaten these foundations. In fact, they will most likely further these as the US can energize its hegemonic networks against them. The future of American hegemony is largely in US hands, avoiding overreaction in the short term and determining long-term if they want to remain a leading power in the maintenance of order and major power relations in East Asia and Europe. As with other periods of concern, the greatest threat to American hegemony currently is domestic alienation against the hegemonic project itself, not just among the public but more importantly within the elite. As long as precluding balancing probabilities among major powers in the core regions of Europe and East Asia remains a central premise in its grand strategy, it is expected the US will remain committed to its hegemonic project and have many willing followers and supporters internationally among major and minor powers.

¹⁴³ Robert O. Keohane, “After Hegemony: Transatlantic Economic Relations in the Next Decade,” *The International Spectator* 50, 4 (2015): pp. 80-91.

¹⁴⁴ Similar periods of declinism sentiments occurred in the 1950s/60s (Soviet economic development, technological advancements such as in Space, fears of reaching nuclear parity with the US); the 1970s (collapse of Bretton Woods, retreat from Vietnam); and the 1980s (West Germany and Japan becoming economic rivals). Susan Strange, “The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony.” *International Organization* 41, 4 (1987): pp. 551-74; Carla Norrlof and William C. Wohlforth, “Raison De L’Hégémonie (The Hegemon’s Interest): Theory of the Costs and Benefits of Hegemony,” *Security Studies* 28, 3 (2019): pp. 422-50.

¹⁴⁵ This also includes demographic trends in many long-time allied states which will decrease their ability to develop and deploy power abroad, thus furthering the ‘demand’ for US presence and leadership there. Nicholas Eberstadt, “With Great Demographics Comes Great Power: Why Population Will Drive Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, 4 (2019).