



CSBA

Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

WINNING WITHOUT FIGHTING

CHINESE AND RUSSIAN POLITICAL
WARFARE CAMPAIGNS AND
HOW THE WEST CAN PREVAIL

VOLUME I

ROSS BABBAGE

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WITH A CHAPTER CONTRIBUTED BY
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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND BUDGETARY ASSESSMENTS (CSBA)

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments is an independent, nonpartisan policy research institute established to promote innovative thinking and debate about national security strategy and investment options. CSBA's analysis focuses on key questions related to existing and emerging threats to U.S. national security, and its goal is to enable policymakers to make informed decisions on matters of strategy, security policy, and resource allocation.

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Cover: Official Kremlin photo of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in Beijing in June 2018.

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	I
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICAL WARFARE CHALLENGE	3
CHAPTER 2: SOVIET AND AMERICAN POLITICAL WARFARE DURING THE COLD WAR	11
Primary Instruments of Soviet Political Warfare	12
Effectiveness of Soviet Political Warfare Efforts	14
U.S. Political Warfare during the Cold War	15
Primary Instruments of U.S. Political Warfare	16
Effectiveness of U.S. Political Warfare Efforts	19
CHAPTER 3: THE GOALS OF RUSSIAN AND CHINESE POLITICAL WARFARE SINCE 2000	21
The Putin Regime's Strategic Goals	23
The Chinese Regime's Strategic Goals	24
CHAPTER 4: KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF RUSSIAN AND CHINESE POLITICAL WARFARE	27
CHAPTER 5: THE POLITICAL WARFARE TOOLKIT: THE FIVE KEY SETS OF INSTRUMENTS	35
One: Information Instruments	35
Two: Geostrategic Instruments	37
Three: Economic Instruments	38
Four: Military and Paramilitary Instruments	39
Five: Legal and Paralegal Instruments	40
Indicators of Russian and Chinese Political Warfare Operations from the Illustrative Case Studies	41
Box A	43
Box B	44
CHAPTER 6: SUCCESS OF RUSSIA'S AND CHINA'S POLITICAL WARFARE CAMPAIGNS	45
Russia	45
China	46
CHAPTER 7: THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL MISMATCH BETWEEN THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES AND THE WEST	49
Box C	54
CHAPTER 8: DEVELOPING A WESTERN COUNTERSTRATEGY	55
Political Warfare Campaigns: Strengths and Weaknesses	55
Primary Strategy Options	60
Toward an Integrated Allied and Partner Strategy	68
Box D	71
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS	73
CHAPTER 10: RECOMMENDATIONS	79
LIST OF ACRONYMS	84

FIGURES

FIGURE 1: INDICATORS OF AUTHORITARIAN STATE POLITICAL WARFARE OPERATIONS	42
FIGURE 2: GRAPHICAL SUMMARY OF THE GERASIMOV MODEL	51
FIGURE 3: ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY MIXES FOR THE WESTERN ALLIES	69

Executive Summary

Political warfare operations have been central to the Chinese and Russian regimes' international operations and strategic advances for the last two decades. Indeed, they have long featured prominently in Chinese and Russian strategic culture and practice. Both regimes are well-equipped, very experienced, and highly skilled in the conduct of these political warfare campaigns. The West, by contrast, largely abandoned high-level political warfare operations at the end of the Cold War. It has put the United States, its close allies, and its international partners at a disadvantage that needs to be remedied.

Volume I of this report reviews the nature and track record of recent Chinese and Russian political warfare operations. Volume II considers the lessons from eight illustrative case studies. It then addresses a number of alternative strategies for countering such campaigns and reaches 12 key conclusions. They highlight the need to:

- Recognize, understand, and discuss the challenge
- Construct a powerful narrative to support a countercampaign
- Develop a highly effective and inclusive strategy
- Build a formidable arsenal of political warfare instruments
- Assemble a powerful international coalition
- Place early priority on denying or thwarting authoritarian state operations and strengthening coalition resilience
- Assist vulnerable states and communities
- Develop tailored organizations to design and conduct countercampaigns
- Build human capital for political warfare
- Prepare for the long haul

- Recalibrate the management of risk
- Be prepared to pay a price

Deterring, confronting, and defeating authoritarian state political warfare campaigns is critically important for the West. Failing to properly address this challenge risks a further shift in the global balance of power, the loss of additional strategic space, a serious weakening of allies and international partners, a demoralization of the democratic world, and an emboldening of authoritarian regimes to launch new and more threatening campaigns. Ignoring the political warfare domain could mean that in a future crisis U.S. and allied forces would have little choice but to arrive late to a battlefield that has been politically prepared by the West's opponents.

Introduction

This report assesses the role of political warfare in the international operations of the Putin and Xi Jinping regimes. How deeply is the strategy, doctrine, and operational practice of political warfare held in Russia and China? What forms does it take, and what instruments are used? How much of a threat does Chinese and Russian political warfare pose to the United States, its close allies, and its broader international partners? And what are the options for Western governments to counter such campaigns?

Some Westerners might be tempted to define political warfare to encompass only diplomatic persuasion, influence operations, intimidation, and some types of subversion. This narrow definition would see political warfare standing alongside economic warfare, cyber warfare, and many other forms of coercion short of conventional military combat. This report takes another path by drawing on Clausewitzian logic to argue that political warfare encompasses the use of a very wide range of national and international instruments in efforts to persuade, intimidate, coerce, undermine, and weaken opponents, and hence achieve desired political goals. This approach mirrors that of the Russian and Chinese regimes, both of which marshal and maneuver numerous instruments in coordinated political warfare operations in order to win political advances. The only major activity excluded from this conception of political warfare is the use of kinetic force.

In consequence, political warfare is defined in this report as “diverse operations to influence, persuade, and coerce nation states, organizations, and individuals to operate in accord with one’s strategic interests without employing kinetic force.” The techniques range widely from more political measures such as assertive diplomacy, intense media campaigns, economic sanctions, subversion, corruption, and the theft of intellectual property to more strategic measures such as exerting coercive pressure through the deployment of powerful paramilitary and military forces. Political warfare is used extensively by the regimes in Beijing and Moscow to shape the strategic space, but it can also be used to prepare targeted environments for more substantial unconventional and conventional kinetic military operations.

Political warfare is clearly distinguished from so-called hybrid warfare and other forms of conflict that inhabit the gray area between Western conceptions of “peace” and “conventional

war.” Whereas political warfare employs a range of instruments, it does not involve combat by military or para-military forces. Hybrid warfare operations, by contrast, involve the use of or commitment to use military or paramilitary forces in kinetic combat operations or a strategic commitment to engage in combat if deploying forces are seriously challenged. In short, political warfare involves coercive operations without kinetic force, whereas hybrid warfare involves coercive operations with the actual or authorized use of kinetic force. In some situations, political warfare may be employed for some time prior to and following a temporary escalatory phase of kinetic hybrid warfare, as was the case with the Crimea crisis in 2013–2015.

Volume I of this report addresses the challenges and the opportunities posed by Russian and Chinese political warfare in the following sequence. Chapter 1 briefly describes the historical development of political warfare in Russia and China and the nature of the challenge it poses to the United States, its close allies, and its partners. Chapter 2 details the use of political warfare by both the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. Chapters 3–6 discuss the goals, key characteristics, and tool kits that the Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin regimes have used in their political warfare operations since 2000, as well as the level of success they have achieved. Chapter 7 argues that there is a serious mismatch between the major authoritarian states and the West in the political warfare domain. In short, Russia and China are well-equipped and have been heavily engaged in such operations for many years, whereas the West has not addressed the challenge seriously since the end of the Cold War. Chapter 8 discusses a range of potential allied counterstrategies and proposes a new conceptual approach. Chapters 9 and 10 draw together the primary conclusions of the report and list a series of recommendations. Volume II comprises two annexes: Annex A contains the full texts of eight illustrative case studies that describe recent Chinese and Russian political warfare operations in a range of theaters; Annex B lists some key indicators of authoritarian state political warfare campaigns and offers insight into the progression of some campaigns from the commencement state, to the contested state, and finally to the client state.

CHAPTER 1

The Political Warfare Challenge

The highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy's plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities. Thus one who excels at employing the military subjugates other people's armies without engaging in battle, captures other people's fortified cities without attacking them, and destroys other people's states without prolonged fighting. . . For this reason, attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence.

Sun Tzu, ~500 B.C.¹

The United States and its allies are facing an unprecedented challenge: two authoritarian states possessing substantial human, economic, technological, and other resources; armed with conventional and nuclear forces that, in many respects, rival those held by the Western allies; and working actively to undermine the core interests of the West. Their operations are designed to subvert the cohesion of the Western allies and their partners; erode their economic, political, and social resilience; and undermine the West's strategic positions in key regions.

The Putin regime has made clear that it aims to force Western acquiescence in Russia's reemergence as a great power. As Dmitri Trenin stated, "Russia's military doctrine makes clear that even if the West is not officially an adversary, it is a powerful competitor, a bitter rival and the source of most military risks and threats."² The leadership in Beijing, for its part, aims to equal, if not surpass, the United States in global power and influence. As Aaron Friedberg testified before Congress, one of Beijing's core goals is "to become a truly global player, with

1 Sun Tzu and Sun Pin, *The Art of War*, translated with a historical introduction and commentary by Ralph D. Sawyer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), p.50.

2 Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's New Military Doctrine: Should the West be Worried?" *The National Interest*, December 31, 2014.

power, presence, and influence on par with, and eventually superior to, that of the United States.”³ The Director of the FBI, Christopher Wray, reinforced this judgment by stating, “China’s goal, simply put, is to replace the U.S. as the world’s leading superpower—and they’re breaking the law to get there.”⁴

The Russian and Chinese regimes have made substantial progress towards these goals during the last two decades without conducting conventional military operations. Rather, Moscow and Beijing have employed sophisticated political warfare strategies and a wide range of mostly non-military instruments. Until recently, these operations were often viewed by Western leaders to be unconnected, mildly irritating, and of limited consequence, falling below the threshold of warranting direct confrontations with the authoritarian regimes or escalation to major conventional conflict.⁵

The primary instruments used by Moscow and Beijing have been intense information campaigns, diverse espionage and cyber operations, the theft of vast troves of intellectual property, the use of economic inducements and economic pressures, programs of geostrategic maneuver, the seizure and militarization of contested territory, coercion by military and paramilitary forces, and the assertive use of legal and paralegal instruments, all backed by well-coordinated propaganda programs to help justify their international interference and their re-writing of history and international laws.⁶ These operations are being conducted by Russian and Chinese organizations that are directly controlled by regime leaders and carried out by well-trained personnel who possess extensive experience in these “gray zone” operations.⁷ As noted in a previous CSBA report, the conceptual and doctrinal foundations for these activities are shared by the Russians and Chinese and are deeply etched their respective strategic cultures.⁸

The idea of subverting, undermining, and eventually defeating an opponent without fighting can be traced back at least as far as Sun Tzu in 500 B.C., but the concept developed new

3 Aaron L. Friedberg, hearing on “Strategic Competition with China,” testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, February 15, 2018, p. 3.

4 “FBI Director Christopher Wray’s Remarks Regarding Indictment of Chinese Hackers,” prepared remarks, *FBI.gov News*, December 20, 2018, available at <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wrays-remarks-regarding-indictment-of-chinese-hackers>.

5 Political Warfare is defined in this report as “diverse operations to influence, persuade and coerce nation states, organizations and individuals to operate in accord with one’s strategic interests without employing kinetic force.”

6 Programs of geostrategic maneuver include the Russian and Chinese initiatives to support ideologically aligned distant states such as Venezuela, Cuba, and some Middle Eastern and African states. Another notable example is Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative. These and related programs make Moscow and Beijing serious players in parts of the world in ways that can significantly alter the global strategic balance. All these operations are discussed in some detail in Thomas G. Mahnken, Ross Babbage, and Toshi Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion: Competitive Strategies Against Authoritarian Political Warfare* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2018), pp. 10–13.

7 For details of the relevant command, control and administrative arrangements in Russia and China see Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*, pp. 23, 28–31.

8 For details see *Ibid.*, pp. 9–15, 25–27.

prominence early in the 20th century through the intense study of Clausewitz's writing by Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin.⁹ These Soviet revolutionaries were taken by the logic that if war was politics by other means, then the reverse was also true: aggressive political action could be considered war by other means. This thinking helped them conceptualize how proletarian revolutions could be fostered in other countries at relatively low risk. They could see great scope for exploiting the gap between what capitalist societies called "war" and what they called "peace" to conduct offensive political operations that stayed below the threshold that would trigger major conventional conflict.

Keen to foster revolutionary change in Europe while avoiding an invasion from the Soviet Union's stronger neighbors, Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin developed a first-generation form of political warfare.¹⁰ They decided that Russian foreign policy would employ revolutionary propaganda tailored to achieve the greatest traction in each targeted country. For example, in countries possessing few Russian speakers, they would encourage a revolt of the working classes and generate dissension within the ruling government. In countries containing significant Russian-speaking or multi-ethnic populations, they would make strong efforts to foster a "fifth column" to operate in support of Russia's interests within the society.¹¹ The Communist International, run out of Moscow, helped establish local communist parties and raised cells to conduct unconventional operations. Extensive training, funding, and other support started to flow from Moscow, normally via indirect routes.¹²

Lenin and his colleagues appreciated from an early stage the great potential of what they called their "indirect strategy."¹³ Their political warfare campaigns would exploit contradictions in capitalist societies and distract enemy governments, forcing them to focus on domestic troubles. They believed that if they could drive changes in neighboring states, strengthen Moscow's political leverage, and eventually force some opposing governments to collapse, they would succeed in their core mission of propagating the global socialist revolution.

One person who took an intense interest in this Soviet thinking was Mao Zedong, who worked to combine the deep Chinese tradition of unconventional intelligence- and subversion-heavy strategic culture with insights from Clausewitz, Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky. Indeed, Mao rephrased Lenin's thinking by stating that "Politics is war without bloodshed, while war is

9 See this discussed in Jacob W. Kipp, "Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914–1921," *Military Affairs*, October 1985, p.189.

10 See this discussed in Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*, pp. 20–23, 35–40.

11 Stephen J. Blank, "Class War on a Global Scale: The Leninist Culture of Political Conflict," in Stephen J. Blank, Lawrence E. Grinter, Karl R. Ware, and Bryan E. Weathers, *Culture and History: Regional Dimensions* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1993), pp. 10–12.

12 For details see Jeffrey V. Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare: Origin, Evolution, and Application*, thesis (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), pp.44–52, available at https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/45838/15Jun_Dickey_Everett_Galvach_Mesko_Soltis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

13 See this discussed in Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*, pp. 11–15; and Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*.

politics with bloodshed.”¹⁴ Drawing further on this logic, he developed, tested, and refined a new concept of revolutionary war to overthrow the nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek and defeat the Japanese invaders. The importance of early political operations throughout the theater of operations, including in enemy strongholds, became the foundation of Chinese military doctrine for revolutionary and unconventional war, as well as for a broader range of operations.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the communist regime in Beijing applied these revolutionary and political warfare skills offensively in other countries by funding, supplying, and helping to train the leaders and key functionaries of revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia and South Asia.¹⁵ Robert Taber, a leading counter-insurgency analyst of the mid-20th century, summarized how the Chinese undertook these political and propaganda campaigns in “enemy countries”:

Usually the revolutionary political organization will have two branches: one subterranean and illegal, the other visible and quasi-legitimate.

On the one hand, there will be the activists—saboteurs, terrorists, arms runners, fabricators of explosive devices, operators of a clandestine press, distributors of political pamphlets, and couriers to carry messages from one guerrilla sector to another, using the towns as communications centers.

On the other hand, there will be sympathizers and fellow travelers, those not really of the underground, operating for the most part within the law, but sustaining the efforts of the activists and, of themselves, accomplishing far more important tasks. The visible organization will, of course, have invisible links with the revolutionary underground, and, through it, with the guerrillas in the countryside. But its real work will be to serve as a respectable façade for the revolution, a civilian front . . . made up of intellectuals, tradesmen, clerks, students, professionals, and the like—above all, of women—capable of promoting funds, circulating petitions, organizing boycotts, raising popular demonstrations, informing friendly journalists, spreading rumors, and in every way conceivable waging a massive propaganda campaign aimed at two objectives; the strengthening and brightening of the rebel “image,” and the discrediting of the regime.¹⁶

This extensive historical experience of offensive political warfare is a strong pillar of Chinese strategic culture. Although the circumstances of mid-20th century revolutionary war differ from those in most theaters today, the habitual Chinese practice of offensive political operations bears a close relationship to Beijing’s recent international operations. Indeed, from the perspective of a Chinese strategic planner, it is difficult to conceive of large-scale operations

14 Mao Zedong, *On Protracted War*, 3rd revised edition (Beijing [Peking]: Foreign Language Press, 1966), Section 64.

15 These operations are discussed in detail in Franklin Mark Osanka, ed., *Modern Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

16 Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (London: Paladin, 1970), pp. 32, 33.

against foreign powers that do not involve intrusive political and psychological operations from an early stage.

In the first decade of this century the regimes in Moscow and Beijing reaffirmed the potential for harnessing offensive political warfare to undermine the United States and its Western allies and partners.¹⁷ Most obviously, it provided an opportunity to exploit the successes and exceptional depth of experience in political warfare that both regimes had inherited from earlier eras.

The conduct of political warfare against foreign countries is an inexpensive instrument of foreign policy that can potentially yield a great amount of leverage to be used against multiple targets simultaneously and sustained for extended periods. The diversity of instruments available for use in political warfare campaigns also allows operations to be tailored to suit a range of situations. But perhaps the greatest attraction for Moscow and Beijing in launching a 21st century version of political warfare was that it exploited serious weaknesses in the West.

Strategic culture in the United States and its Western allies is characterized by a sharp distinction between “peace” and “war,” with very little scope for active conflict in between. In this Western conception there is scope for debates, disputes, demands, tensions, and major geostrategic contests without compromising the fundamentals of peace. War only occurs when formal or informal armed forces engage each other using kinetic force. This is markedly different to the conception held by the regimes in Moscow and Beijing, which views their struggles with the West and its partners as being existential, continuous, and, at present, being fought primarily by political means.¹⁸ They see the role of military and paramilitary forces as mostly confined to shaping the international environment and, periodically, contributing coercive power.

One of the clearest explanations of this way of thinking appears in the 1999 volume *Unrestricted Warfare*, written by two serving PLA colonels, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui:

As the arena of war has expanded, encompassing the political, economic, diplomatic, cultural and psychological spheres, in addition to the land, sea, air, space, and electronics spheres, the interactions among all factors have made it difficult for the military sphere to serve as the automatic dominant sphere in every war. War will be conducted in nonwar spheres . . . so that people’s dream of winning military victories in non-military spheres and winning wars with nonwar means can now become reality.

Warfare is now escaping from the boundaries of bloody massacre, and exhibiting a trend towards low casualties, or even none at all, and yet high intensity. This is information warfare,

17 These developments are described in Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2018), pp. 1–5; Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015), pp. 201–213; and Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*, pp.15–18.

18 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, pp. 10–15.

financial warfare, trade warfare, and other entirely new forms of war, new areas opened up in the domain of warfare. In this sense, there is now no domain which warfare cannot use, and there is almost no domain which does not have warfare's offensive pattern. . . . We believe that some morning people will awake to discover with surprise that quite a few gentle and kind things have begun to have offensive and lethal characteristics.¹⁹

Western and partner societies are remarkably open to infiltration by these types of “nonwar” campaigns. There are, for example, few constraints on using embassy and consulate staff in targeted countries to recruit and train local agents, establish front organizations, fund political candidates and parties, and even to mount espionage operations and steal troves of intellectual property. Hence, the Russian and Chinese regimes have found the conditions for employing new-generation political warfare tactics in the West to be permissive and enticing. There are several reasons why the United States and the other close allies have been slow to focus their attention on countering political warfare operations.

One reason is that in the early years of the 21st century, the United States and its allies were heavily distracted by operations in the Middle East, the demands of counterterrorism, and a deep sense of war weariness. This meant that the appetite in Washington and all Western capitals for directly confronting Moscow and Beijing was weak. It has also been argued that Western thought leaders severely miscalculated the strategic trajectories of the major authoritarian states over this period by assuming that over time they would transition from being revisionist to status quo powers.²⁰ In combination, these factors meant that there was little Western interest in a prolonged “peacetime” struggle with the rising authoritarian regimes; to the contrary, there was a deep sense of risk aversion.

In this situation, so long as the regimes in Moscow and Beijing did not trigger Western governments to switch from “peace” to “war” and confront them directly with conventional force, they could dominate the political warfare battlefield with little, if any, serious resistance. The means and modes they have employed to exploit this permissive environment to win many tactical victories during the last twenty years are detailed in the case studies in Annex A.

The lack of recent preparedness to confront authoritarian political warfare sits in contrast to the fact that the United States and its allies conducted quite sophisticated political warfare operations in both world wars and during the Cold War. Indeed, one of the most insightful definitions of political warfare was penned by the U.S. State Department's first Director of Policy Planning, George Kennan, early in the Cold War. Writing in 1948, he described the Soviet and allied operations he was observing as follows:

Political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such

19 Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America*, translation (New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2007), pp. 17, 144, 162.

20 Hal Brands, “The Chinese Century?” *The National Interest*, February 19, 2018.

overt actions as political alliances, economic measures..., and “white” propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of “friendly” foreign elements, “black” psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.²¹

By the 1980s, the United States and its allies conducted political warfare operations that achieved numerous successes. The Active Measures Working Group in Washington and its companion organizations in allied capitals proved to be effective in exposing and rebutting Soviet political warfare operations and thus helped undermine the credibility and authority of the Russian leadership globally, including within the Soviet Union itself.²²

With the end of the Cold War, however, the United States and nearly all of its allies and partners dismantled their political warfare capabilities, closed relevant agencies, and redeployed nearly all of their highly skilled and experienced staff. In the period since, most of those with first-hand experience in political warfare have left government service. The limited political warfare capabilities that remain are mostly located in military and associated intelligence units and, with rare exceptions, have been engaged in the narrow tactical support of military operations.

The aggressive political warfare operations launched by Moscow and Beijing during the last two decades have all been, in Western vocabulary, “left of launch,” or “phase zero activities.” Because they have not involved the use of significant kinetic force, they have not been seen to constitute a form of warfare. Nor, until recently, have such actions been perceived to be part of carefully crafted campaigns designed to undermine the West and win strategic advances. Rather, they have been perceived as individual, unconnected actions of limited consequence. This situation poses serious challenges that require the Western strategic community to re-conceptualize its understanding of conflict. Encouragingly, there has been increasing recognition that Moscow and Beijing have been engaged in an intense struggle with the West for years, even if the primary weapons they have been using have been political and non-kinetic.

The leaders of the United States, its close allies, and their international partners need to think deeply about the nature of Russian and Chinese political warfare operations, consider the full implications for Western and partner security, and agree to a coherent strategy to deter, defend against, and ultimately defeat these campaigns. This report aims to contribute some relevant insights and ideas.

A good place to start is the lessons from the political warfare operations conducted by the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. What types of operations were

21 Department of State, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” Policy Planning Staff Memorandum, May 4, 1948, available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d269>.

22 Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference* (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2012), pp. 97–107.

conducted? How did they evolve? What worked and what didn't work during this extended political warfare struggle? These key questions are addressed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

Soviet and American Political Warfare During the Cold War

by *Thomas G. Mahnken and Gillian Evans*

Political warfare was a key instrument of Soviet strategy throughout the Cold War. These were not short-term operations intended to achieve discrete, localized results; they were often long-term and sometimes multi-generational efforts intended to support the Soviet leadership's objective of shaping the global geopolitical landscape in ways favorable to Soviet interests.²³ The Kremlin sought to push its security sphere as far beyond the Soviet Union's borders as possible.

In the Soviet lexicon, political warfare was termed "active measures." Active measures included interference in domestic and foreign political systems and support for political opposition groups, criminal organizations, antiwar movements, and paramilitary groups that were deemed favorable to communism. Active measures also included information operations such as media manipulation and propaganda efforts, as well as assassinations. The Soviet Union conducted active measures in order of descending strategic priority: (1) in the Soviet Union and the immediate Soviet periphery of Eastern Europe, where efforts focused on keeping Soviet-aligned states within the Soviet sphere of influence; (2) in Western Europe, where political warfare operations sought to curb and expel U.S. influence; (3) in the Third World, where the Soviet Union sought to influence the political environment and alignment of developing states to ensure a political order sympathetic to Soviet communism; and (4) in the United States and against its close allies where the primary activities were intelligence gathering and disruption operations.²⁴

23 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 43.

24 Ibid., p. 44.

Primary Instruments of Soviet Political Warfare

The Soviet Union used support for communist and socialist opposition parties, propaganda and disinformation, agents of influence, military and paramilitary operations, covert operations, economic levers, and even education as instruments of political warfare during the Cold War.

In the late 1940s and through the 1950s Soviet efforts to support fraternal communist parties were focused on Europe, where the Kremlin sought to establish a buffer zone of Soviet-aligned states that would protect it from invasion and subversion and contribute to the security of the Soviet state. Moscow also moved to consolidate communist control of Eastern Europe by providing political and financial assistance to Soviet-aligned political parties to ensure the ideological uniformity of the Eastern Bloc. As the Cold War continued, Moscow expanded the geographic range of its support to include the Third World, with a special focus on foreign political groups in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East.

A second major component of Russian political warfare was an effort to shape the information environment through the use of propaganda and disinformation (дезинформация, or *dezinformatsiya*). Soviet propaganda and disinformation operations were tightly controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and employed the full range of Soviet media outlets. Disinformation campaigns attempted to undermine the credibility of Western-aligned political actors and often sought to portray the United States or U.S.-aligned political figures as hypocrites. For instance, in 1964 the KGB collaborated with Czech intelligence to plant forged documents that implied that members of the West German government were former Nazis. This ambitious disinformation campaign, known as Operation Neptune, foreshadowed later successful Soviet efforts to control the information environment during the 1968 Prague Spring.²⁵

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union fed forged documents—often purporting to be from the U.S. government—to both Western and Third World journalists and attempted to plant pro-Soviet stories in the international press. Journalistic standards in the West mitigated the impact of Soviet disinformation, but the Kremlin’s efforts did achieve some success in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. During the Korean War, the Soviet-sponsored World Peace Council released a report falsely accusing the U.S. military of using biological warfare against the North Korean population; the story ultimately appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*. Soviet disinformation was often successful in stoking anti-American and anti-Western sentiment across the globe, especially where existing grievances or dissatisfaction with U.S. policy could be exploited.

The Soviet Committee on State Security (Комитет государственной безопасности, *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, or KGB) also recruited and trained “agents of influence”

²⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

outside the Eastern bloc who filtered intelligence to Soviet handlers, supported Soviet ideology and objectives abroad, and helped spread disinformation. These agents included Europeans sympathetic to the Soviet Union who organized sabotage missions in Europe—for example, German KGB agent Conrad, who led resistance movements in West Germany.²⁶ They were also journalists, government officials, civil society leaders, and academics. Some were well-trained and sophisticated KGB operatives, some were Western “fellow travelers” sympathetic to Soviet ideology, and some were just “useful idiots” who unwittingly spread pro-Soviet propaganda and furthered the Soviet agenda.²⁷

On the kinetic end of the political warfare spectrum, the Soviet Union committed its armed forces to thwart anti-communist uprisings and maintain pro-Soviet governments in countries that were part of the Soviet sphere of influence. When an anti-communist revolution in Hungary threatened the country’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact in 1956, Moscow sent troops to Budapest to put down the revolution and reinstall the communist government, ushering in a purge of the Hungarian political and military leadership and decades of tighter Soviet control over Hungarian politics and society. The Soviet Union similarly intervened in Czechoslovakia in 1968 when a reformist government took steps to decentralize the economy and enact democratic political reforms.²⁸ Armed intervention in Czechoslovakia was followed by a period of “normalization,” during which security forces imposed a post-conflict state of peace by jailing dissidents, restricting civil society, and imposing strict media censorship.²⁹

Soviet political warfare also included efforts to provide military, paramilitary, and intelligence support to friendly nations and governments in the Third World: for example, Soviet-manned aircraft and missile systems were sent to Egypt in 1970.³⁰ The Soviet Union also supported left-wing terrorist organizations in Europe during the later stages of the Cold War in efforts to compensate for weakening pro-Soviet political movements. The KGB funneled support both directly and indirectly to the Italian Red Brigades, the German Red Army Faction, Belgian Communist Combatant Cells, and terrorist organizations outside Europe including the Palestine Liberation Organization.³¹

Some Soviet political warfare operations were less restrained than U.S. covert operations. The Soviet Union conducted politically motivated assassination as a tool of political warfare, and

26 Vasilii Mitrokhin, “The Conrad Case. Folder 72. The Chekist Anthology,” History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, contributed to CWIHP June 2007, available at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113611>.

27 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 54.

28 Tad Szulc and Clyde H. Farnsworth, “Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week,” *New York Times*, September 2, 1968.

29 Yuri Bezmenov, *Love Letter to America* (Los Angeles, CA: W.I.N. Almanac Panorama, 1984), available at <https://archive.org/details/BezmenovLoveLetterToAmerica>.

30 “National Intelligence Estimate: Soviet Military Policy in the Third World,” Central Intelligence Agency, October 21, 1978, p. 3, available at https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000273313.pdf.

31 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 63.

the CPSU considered its disregard for human rights uncontroversial.³² Such actions, which hid behind threads of plausible deniability, allowed the Soviet Union to take action without provoking a U.S. military response.

On the subtler side, the Soviet Union used economic levers to support state interests, which often meant that the government prioritized political benefits over economic ones. Soviet instruments of economic statecraft included aid to the Third World, manipulation of Soviet export markets, and activity that sought to link the Soviet and Western European economic markets. Not only did the Soviet Union seek to integrate the economies of the Warsaw Pact states with that of the Soviet Union, Moscow also sought to build dependency upon the Soviet Union with its Third World client states, such as Cuba.³³

The Soviet leadership also viewed the education of students from the Third World as a way to influence future global elites. In 1960 the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia was founded in Moscow with the express purpose of educating students from developing nations; by 1975 over 4,200 students from 89 countries had graduated from it. At the Cold War's end, the Soviet Union was hosting 126,500 foreign students, or more than 10 percent of the world's foreign student population.³⁴

Effectiveness of Soviet Political Warfare Efforts

Although Soviet efforts to disseminate propaganda and foment political dissent produced marginal results in the United States, they were more successful in Europe—and even more so in the Third World. For a time, Soviet efforts to stoke anti-American sentiment and spread falsehoods about U.S. policy gained traction. Pro-communist movements and parties gained power in several Third World countries, expanding the number of states that were sympathetic to the Soviet ideology and government.

However, efforts to promote Soviet ideology and movements outside the Eastern Bloc became increasingly difficult due to the inability of the Soviet system to match its rhetoric with performance over the course of the Cold War. The violent repression of political movements in Hungary and Czechoslovakia damaged the global standing of communism and alienated many groups that had been sympathetic to the Soviet Union. The absence of examples of successful communist governance forced the CPSU to rely increasingly on disinformation and false propaganda. Both of these activities were vulnerable to U.S. and allied political warfare efforts

32 See "Soviet Use of Assassination and Kidnapping," Central Intelligence Agency, 1964, available at https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol19no3/html/v19i3a01p_0001.htm.

33 Kosmas Tsokhas, "The Political Economy of Cuban Dependence on the Soviet Union," *Theory and Society* 9, no. 2, March 1980.

34 Inna Vershinina, Artemiy Kurbanov, and Nataliya Panich, "Foreign Students in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia: Problems of Adaptation and Communication," *Procedia Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, December 2016, p. 3, available at https://ac.els-cdn.com/S1877042816316652/1-s2.0-S1877042816316652-main.pdf?_tid=bofdcc64-9c4f-4b25-8898-179765doc910&acdnat=1530874853_91cfe0a0516e9c15a6b1ef51404974fd.

that emphasized transparency and the dissemination of alternative media sources within Eastern Europe.

Additionally, Moscow's dedication to centralized economic planning precluded economic reforms that could have strengthened the country's economic foundations. As the Soviet economy struggled to overcome its many flaws, the utility of economic levers to influence non-Soviet states diminished, and the efficacy of economically oriented active measures flagged.

Finally, the ideological homogeneity of the Soviet system contributed to groupthink, cognitive biases, and operational blind spots that made the Soviet enterprise increasingly vulnerable and discouraged operational innovation in political warfare campaigns. Marxism colored the Soviet view of the West and skewed Moscow's efforts to influence global events.³⁵

U.S. Political Warfare during the Cold War

For the United States, political warfare served as an instrument to curb the spread of communism and weaken Moscow's hold within the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War. However, the U.S. government's employment of political warfare was less uniform than that of the Soviet Union. The politically diverse, democratic U.S. political system, with its separated powers and system of checks and balances, proved an impediment to the formulation and implementation of a consistent, coherent, long-term political warfare strategy. The scope of what was considered acceptable in waging political warfare varied across administrations, and this influenced the pace and scope of U.S. activities.³⁶

Whereas the Soviet Union pursued political warfare consistently throughout the Cold War, U.S. enthusiasm waxed and waned. During the early Cold War period, from roughly 1948 until the mid-1950s, the United States became proficient, and was at times aggressive in its conduct of, political warfare, using economic, diplomatic, and military tools to counter Soviet ideological influence in Europe and the Third World.³⁷ George Kennan, the first Director of Policy Planning in the U.S. State Department and the architect of U.S. containment strategy, favored the employment of a wide range of measures spanning from the negotiation of political alliances, economic measures such as the European Recovery Program (better known as the Marshall Plan), and "white" propaganda, on the one hand, and covert operations, such as clandestine support of "friendly" foreign elements, "black" psychological warfare, and

35 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 56.

36 Ibid., p. 91.

37 See, for example, Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War Between The United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2014); Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War: Waging Political Warfare, 1945–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Mario Del Pero, "The United States and 'Psychological Warfare' in Italy, 1948–1955," *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 4, March 2001.

the encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states on the other.³⁸ The political warfare operations conducted during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations reflected this very diverse mix.³⁹

The mid-Cold War and détente period from the late-1950s through the 1970s brought a relative ebb in U.S. political warfare efforts. President Reagan, however, revitalized U.S. political warfare during the last decade of the Cold War. In National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75, the Reagan administration outlined the forms of political action that it would use against the Soviet Union. It instructed U.S. policymakers to exploit “the double standards employed by the Soviet Union,” including human rights abuses, chemical weapons usage, and the poor treatment of labor.⁴⁰ The Reagan administration put its political action campaign into practice in Poland, among other places.⁴¹

Primary Instruments of U.S. Political Warfare

The United States used covert action, diplomatic and political aid, and information operations as instruments of political warfare throughout the Cold War. Washington also sought to expose Soviet disinformation efforts and relied upon non-government organizations to support its efforts.

Covert action was the closest U.S. analog to what the Soviets defined as active measures and included propaganda, political action, paramilitary activity, and intelligence assistance. Paramilitary covert action, specifically, included political assassinations, special operations, and unconventional warfare, largely restricted to Third World territory. The Eisenhower administration oversaw an expansion of the geographic scope of U.S.-Soviet confrontation to include Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and the administration launched a range of successful (Iran and Guatemala) and unsuccessful (Indonesia and Cuba) covert operations against governments that were perceived to be pro-Soviet.⁴² The CIA was likewise involved in efforts to assassinate foreign political leaders in Cuba, Congo, the Dominican Republic, and South Vietnam in the early Cold War.⁴³

38 Department of State, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare.”

39 Stephen J.K. Long, “Strategic Disorder, the Office of Policy Coordination and the Inauguration of US Political Warfare Against the Soviet Bloc, 1948–1950,” *Intelligence and National Security* 27, no. 4, 2012.

40 “National Security Decision Directive 75 on ‘U.S. Relations with the USSR,’” memorandum for the White House, January 17, 1983, p. 4, available at <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-75.pdf>.

41 Seth G. Jones, *A Covert Action: Reagan, the CIA, and the Cold War Struggle in Poland* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018).

42 John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 156.

43 Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: An Interim Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Senate, 94th Congress, 1st Session, November 20, 1975), p. 4, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83-01042R000200090002-0.pdf>.

Like the Soviet Union, the United States designed covert actions to minimize the risk of U.S. attribution or an escalatory confrontation between U.S. and Soviet military forces. As a result, Europe was largely considered off limits for U.S. military covert actions. The decision against intervention in the 1956 Hungarian uprising reflected this U.S. aversion to direct U.S.-Soviet military confrontation on the European continent.⁴⁴

The 1974 Hughes-Ryan Amendment, passed in response to growing public opposition to CIA activities abroad, increased congressional oversight of covert action and reflected a fundamental asymmetry in the Soviet and American approaches to political warfare. The nature of the U.S. political system renders the executive branch accountable to both the legislature and the broader American electorate, and, hence, U.S. political warfare was circumscribed by limits of public acceptability. The Soviet Union, by contrast, faced no such check. For example, the congressional Pike and Church Committee investigations into CIA operations during the 1970s led to President Ford's Executive Order 11905, which banned assassination as a tool of U.S. policy.

U.S. covert actions nonetheless continued in the wake of increased congressional oversight, and operations during the Reagan administration successfully eroded the Soviet sphere of political influence and divided Soviet attention between its many priorities. Covert action in Afghanistan, for instance, helped bleed the Soviet Union of both political will and financial resources for close to a decade. This came at a time when the Soviet economy was floundering and the Soviet grasp on Eastern Europe was becoming tenuous.

Diplomatic and political aid proved a highly successful tool of U.S. political warfare and remained a mainstay of U.S. policy throughout the Cold War. The U.S. provided aid to non-Communist left-wing political parties in Europe in the years following WWII in order to shore up anti-Communist political parties. That assistance helped ensure the election of the Italian Christian Democrats over their communist competition during the 1948 elections.⁴⁵ Discretely funded private organizations that supported anti-communist movements known as "state-private networks" had mixed success in countering Soviet appeal abroad, and they were vulnerable to popular backlash when their U.S. sponsorship was revealed. Later Cold War efforts, like the National Endowment for Democracy, were more transparent and generally more successful.⁴⁶ Most famously, U.S. political and financial support to the Polish Solidarity trade union movement in the 1980s encouraged a more independent Polish government and provided the momentum that led to the Eastern bloc's dissolution.

American political warfare efforts also leveraged U.S. cultural influence to engender pro-American sentiment across the Third World. Notably, President Kennedy formed the U.S.

44 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 93.

45 Linda Robinson et al., *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), p. 18, available at https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1772/RAND_RR1772.pdf.

46 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 100.

Peace Corps in 1961, which sent Americans to Third World countries to “promote world peace and friendship.” The Food for Peace project and Alliance for Progress in Latin America also sought to weaken support for communist movements abroad.⁴⁷

Economic policies made additional important contributions to U.S. political warfare activities. The Marshall Plan, which provided over \$13 billion to revitalize the economies of Western Europe in the wake of WWII, was an ambitious and overwhelmingly successful application of economic policy to achieve U.S. strategic objectives, and it helped deter the rise of pro-Soviet movements in Western Europe. The Mutual Defense Assistance Act complicated Soviet efforts to gain a foothold in Western Europe through similar means.

Importantly, U.S. policy emphasized the denial of Soviet access to U.S. technology. This became an increasingly powerful tool as the information age developed. Policy under President Reagan in the 1980s emphasized exploitation of the United States’ asymmetric economic advantage. Efforts to target the economies of Soviet satellite states and deny a trans-Siberian gas pipeline contributed extra stresses to an already overextended Soviet economy.⁴⁸

Although U.S. efforts to shape the information environment lacked the coordinated ideological focus that characterized Soviet information operations, U.S. information operations played a crucial role during later stages of the Cold War and helped dismantle Soviet political alliances both in Europe and in the Third World. Rather than spreading disinformation and propaganda, U.S. information programs focused on public diplomacy, transparency, and exposing Soviet falsehoods and repression. The United States also engaged in “gray” propaganda, which largely avoided U.S. government attribution, but also eschewed the dissemination of falsehoods.

President Eisenhower established the U.S. Information Agency in 1952 to centralize U.S. public affairs efforts under one bureaucracy. The agency’s limited mandate involved countering propaganda and promoting human rights, accountability, and governance.⁴⁹ The U.S. government also used radio to reach populations abroad: Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia were all efforts to counter pro-Soviet narratives and propaganda in Soviet-aligned states.

The U.S. government also sought to expose Soviet active measures. President Reagan established the Active Measures Working Group (AMWG), which included the CIA, USIA, U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the Departments of Defense and Justice, in 1981 to counter Soviet disinformation. By publicizing Soviet disinformation campaigns, the AMWG

47 Ibid., p. 89.

48 Ibid., p. 118. See also Thomas G. Mahnken, “The Reagan Administration’s Strategy Toward the Soviet Union,” in Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds., *Successful Strategies: Triumphant in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

49 Matt Armstrong, “The Politics of Political Warfare and the Need for a Political West Point,” in Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik, and James C. Pearce eds., *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare: New Labels, Old Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2018), p. 9.

increased the reputational costs of Soviet disinformation and ultimately convinced Gorbachev that it was an ineffective method of advancing Soviet objectives.⁵⁰

Not all U.S. political warfare was state-sponsored. U.S. efforts drew upon a network of non-governmental and civil society organizations that favored U.S. objectives. One example was Helsinki Watch, a private American NGO founded to investigate Soviet compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords that ensured European states' right to self-determination and political and territorial sovereignty. This group helped raise the profile of human rights and publicized Soviet abuses during the 1980s.⁵¹ The high professional standards of U.S. and allied journalism proved a formidable bulwark against Soviet disinformation efforts, including those to plant false stories and "leak" forged documents in the Western press.⁵² As former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously noted, "Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants."⁵³ An active domestic and global press, facilitated by U.S. liberal norms, helped expose Soviet ideological hypocrisy, state-sponsored falsehoods, and political repression without the necessity for a government-coordinated campaign.

Effectiveness of U.S. Political Warfare Efforts

U.S. efforts to improve access to information and expose Soviet disinformation helped discredit the CPSU and bolster anti-Soviet movements worldwide. Later U.S. efforts that emphasized transparency and access to information did not carry the same credibility risks as "black" propaganda and disinformation campaigns. As a result, the United States had fewer vulnerabilities than the Soviet Union in the information competition, and a robust network of non-government civil society and media organizations only enhanced this asymmetry as the Cold War progressed.

By the end of the Cold War, the inefficient Soviet economy was crippled by low productivity, limited technological access, and an expanding set of financial obligations. By contrast, the strength of the U.S. economic system made it much easier for Washington to use economic levers to influence the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. The vibrancy of the U.S. economy in the 1980s provided the United States with substantial financial resources and policy options with which to exploit Soviet economic vulnerabilities.

Congressional oversight also likely improved the conduct and outcomes of U.S. political warfare efforts, to an extent. It restrained the more reckless impulses of the executive branch

50 Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference*, Strategic Perspectives no. 11 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, June, 2012), p. 3.

51 Sarah Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 5.

52 Denis Kux, "Soviet Active Measures and Disinformation: Overview and Assessment," *Parameters* 15, no. 4, p. 26, available at https://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20131120_KuxSovietActiveMeasuresandDisinformation.pdf.

53 Louis D. Brandeis, "What Publicity Can Do," *Harper's Weekly*, December 20, 1913.

and the intelligence community, but it also increased oversight that complicated U.S. policy-makers' efforts to organize and execute political warfare operations. It broadened the range of actors permitted to weigh in and circumscribe the scope of U.S. activities, and the added layers of bureaucracy and the decentralization of political warfare activities likely contributed to the uneven application and scope of allied operations.

Despite the ultimate success of the United States and its allies over the Soviet Union, the U.S. approach to political warfare still had its weaknesses. Incongruence between the methods of political warfare and the purported U.S. values of self-determination, democracy, and anti-imperialism meant frequent changes to what was considered acceptable forms of political warfare. As a result, U.S. political warfare operations were intense for a decade, then greatly reduced for some fifteen years before ramping up in a modified form for a further decade. The more intense operations left the United States open to charges of hypocrisy, encouraging the spread of anti-American sentiment in the Third World in ways that continue to reverberate today. The evolution of U.S.-sponsored political assistance to foreign political organizations over the course of the Cold War is also instructive. Earlier state-private networks were discredited when their CIA affiliations were revealed; the later shift to publicly acknowledged USG-funded programs (like the National Endowment for Democracy) in the 1980s helped avoid accusations of U.S. interference in foreign political processes.⁵⁴

54 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 100.

CHAPTER 3

The Goals of Russian and Chinese Political Warfare Since 2000

At the end of the Cold War, Russia and China were both confronted by serious political and economic challenges. In Russia the demise of the Soviet Union and the effective defeat of the Communist Party led to deep soul-searching about the political direction of the country, the scope for strengthening democratic processes, and the pattern and pace of economic reform. In China the pressure for reform was also building and ultimately led to widespread civil disruptions and the Tiananmen crisis of June 1989. The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party acted decisively to prevent the overthrow of the regime and restore central authority. It also moved to accelerate economic liberalization, broaden Party membership, and strengthen the professionalism and loyalty of the armed forces and the other central organs of the Party-state.⁵⁵

It took some years for stability and clear strategic direction to be fully restored in Moscow and Beijing. In Russia, the messy and brief flirtation with something approaching liberal democracy ended with the election of Vladimir Putin as president in 2000. He moved rapidly to expound a strategic narrative for the country's future direction, tighten control over the main media organizations, and greatly strengthen the central organs and agencies of the state under his personal control. In China Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and their colleagues successfully pursued rapid economic growth, dramatically improved infrastructure and technological sophistication across the nation, and strengthened the authority of the Chinese Communist Party. By the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the regimes in both countries

55 See, for example, Mary Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, updated edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); and David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

had fully recovered their composure and were looking to press their international interests more assertively.

Russia's economy was heavily dependent on its exports of oil and gas. It was also only a fifth the size of the rapidly growing Chinese economy. Nevertheless, Putin and his colleagues launched programs to modernize the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal and selectively upgrade some priority conventional force capabilities.

By the time Xi Jinping was appointed General Secretary of the Party in 2012 and national President in 2013, the Chinese economy had surged to become the second largest on the globe, the Party was further tightening its control of all parts of the society, the key government departments and organs of the state had been substantially modernized, and the People's Liberation Army was moving to become the dominant military force in the Western Pacific. What's more, signs started to emerge that the long-standing fraternal ties between the regimes in Moscow and Beijing were warming, dialogue and cooperation were increasing, and the two leaderships appeared to share a strategic sense that international political, economic, and strategic trends were running in their favor.

Neither Vladimir Putin nor Xi Jinping has wished to confront the United States and its Western allies directly; an alerted and mobilized West would be a formidable rival, and a global conflict might result in the demise of their regimes. However, they do view their authoritarian systems of governance as viable alternatives to Western democratic models and are prepared to sustain a long-term struggle in order to prevail. Moreover, Russia and China are well equipped for this fight. They both possess deep cultures, extensive experience, and impressive arsenals for a form of offensive strategic operations that are unmatched in the West.

The resulting political warfare campaigns have been driven by relatively clear objectives that guide each regime's selection and resourcing of operations, as well as the theaters, countries, and communities they have targeted. Their political warfare goals also inform the narratives that drive each regime's messaging to key domestic and international audiences.

Although Moscow and Beijing's political warfare operations use a similar playbook, there are some significant differences which spring largely from the two countries' unique geostrategic circumstances; their different demographic, economic, and technological resources; and the balance each regime has struck between their sense of insecurity and their level of strategic aspiration.

The Putin Regime's Strategic Goals

Vladimir Putin appears to have five main strategic goals.⁵⁶ The first is to ensure the future of his regime. In consequence, the Russian Federation is making substantial efforts to defend itself—and hence the regime—against physical attacks, perceived attempts to destabilize the Russian economy, and the “pollution” propagated by foreign non-government agencies and media channels. In pursuit of this goal, Moscow propagates a nationalist narrative that helps justify its oppressive security measures and its diverse operations to disrupt perceived threats. It is in this context that Russian political warfare operations aim to seize the short-term initiative, keep opponents off balance, and force them to divert much of their attention to defensive activity.⁵⁷

A second Russian goal is a modernized version of a long-standing Tsarist and Soviet objective of dominating the so-called near abroad to secure a buffer zone of aligned states and provide defense in depth. In consequence, the Putin regime seeks to control or coerce neighboring states in the Trans-Caucasus, Central and Eastern Europe, and in the Baltic region, as well as to prevent Western encroachment in each of these areas.⁵⁸

Third, the Putin regime uses its political warfare operations to extend its influence beyond its immediate neighborhood with a strong focus on the decision-making elites in the United States, Europe, and the Far East. Extensive efforts are made to persuade key individuals in these countries to “understand” Russia’s concerns and to cooperate with Moscow.

Fourth, the Putin regime works to sow division in the strong democracies in North America, Western Europe, and the Pacific; distort democratic processes; and distract decision-makers from generating coherent security responses. Moscow would like to see an end to NATO and the broader network of Western alliances as well as to the European Union.⁵⁹ To this end Putin and his colleagues work hard to coax some member states to side with Russia against their neighbors and treaty partners.

Fifth, the Putin regime aims to de-legitimize the United States as a credible partner. It joins with the Chinese, Iranian, and other authoritarian regimes in fostering a world view in which the United States is portrayed as being in serious decline, heavily distracted elsewhere, unreliable, and led by an administration that is incompetent, erratic, and untrustworthy.

56 For details see Jolanta Darczewska and Piotr Zochowski, *Active Measures: Russia's Key Export* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, June 2017), pp. 64, 65. See also Mark Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages its Political War in Europe* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, August 2017), pp. 6, 7.

57 Stephen R. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, October 2016), pp. 42–45.

58 Darczewska and Zochowski, *Active Measures*, p. 64.

59 Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, especially pp. 39, 40.

The Chinese Regime's Strategic Goals

For its part, the Chinese Communist Party appears to have four primary goals in its conduct of political warfare operations.⁶⁰ Xi Jinping's first and most important goal is the maintenance of uncontested Communist Party rule. To this end the regime employs sophisticated political warfare operations to suppress domestic dissent and reinforce Party loyalty as well as to undermine China's international rivals.

Second, the regime aims to restore China to what it sees as its rightful place as the preponderant power in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, in both its continental and maritime domains. In pursuit of this objective, the regime has propagated a powerful narrative that emphasizes the leadership's determination to overcome the "century of China's humiliation" and restore the nation's power, wealth, and influence by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic.⁶¹

To make this "China dream" come true, the Chinese Communist Party employs a modernized version of the political warfare used by Mao Zedong in his revolutionary war campaigns. It uses proven methods to penetrate deeply into the opponent's camps, gather intelligence, plant disinformation, recruit sympathizers and spies, sow disruption, undermine morale, and seize effective control of strategically important infrastructure.⁶²

The third primary goal of the Chinese regime is to build China's influence and prestige so as to be respected as equal, if not superior, to the United States. As Michael Collins, the CIA's deputy assistant director for the East Asia Mission Center stated, "At the end of the day, the Chinese fundamentally seek to replace the United States as the leading power in the world."⁶³ In pursuit of this goal, Beijing conducts numerous political warfare and other operations so as to push the United States and its democratic allies from their predominant role in the Western Pacific and Eastern Indian Ocean and also to build strategic strength in hitherto non-aligned parts of Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and South America. A particular priority for Beijing is to dominate the geographic approaches to China, which it has redefined over the last two decades to include most of the Western Pacific, Australia and New Zealand, much of the Indian Ocean, and most of Central Asia.⁶⁴ The regime's operations within these regions routinely defy historical precedents, as well as international maritime and airspace law. They

60 Aaron L. Friedberg, hearing on "Strategic Competition with China," testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, February 15, 2018, p.3.

61 For excellent coverage of these and related themes in Xi Jinping's address to the 19th Party Congress, see Bonnie S. Glaser, "The 19th Party Congress: A More Assertive Chinese Foreign Policy," *The Interpreter*, October 26, 2017.

62 A classic case in point is China's political warfare operations in Southeast Asia and elsewhere to facilitate its effective seizure of most of the key locations and construction of strategically important facilities in the South China Sea. For details see Ross Babbage, *Countering China's Adventurism in the South China Sea: Strategy Options for the Trump Administration* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2016).

63 Joel Gehrke, "FBI: China threatens 'the future of the world'," *Washington Examiner*, December 12, 2018.

64 See this discussed in Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2018), pp. 1, 2.

are effectively forcing significant changes to established norms of international behavior in ways that are conducive to the Chinese regime's interests.

The CCP's fourth strategic goal is to export its model of tight authoritarian political control coupled with a managed but relatively open economy. In his address to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping argued that the Chinese regime's approach to governance and development was a far more attractive option to that offered by the liberal democracies of the West. He stated that China had "blazed a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. . . . It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence."⁶⁵ Part of Xi's vision is the fostering of a growing group of like-minded revisionist countries that, over time, may constitute an international partnership, alliance, or even a China-centered empire.

65 Cited in Martin Wolf, "The Challenge of Xi Jinping's Leninist Autocracy," *Financial Times*, November 1, 2017.

CHAPTER 4

Key Characteristics of Russian and Chinese Political Warfare

The experience of the last two decades and the illustrative case studies in Annex A reveal the essential characteristics of Russian and Chinese political warfare campaigns.

Clear strategic goals. First, Moscow and Beijing’s political warfare operations are driven by strongly held political objectives that are deeply strategic. Their core political warfare goals are to undermine Western and partner willpower, coerce the compliance of neighboring states, erode the network of Western alliances, and undercut institutional foundations of liberal democracies so as to, as Aaron Friedberg has stated, “make the world safe for authoritarianism.”⁶⁶ Moscow and Beijing are working to reshape the world order to be more conducive to their interests and prepare the strategic environment for their further assertion of preeminence.⁶⁷

Powerful narratives. Both regimes frame their political warfare within strong nationalistic narratives that exploit a sense of grievance, champion distorted versions of history, and paint the United States and its Western allies as weak, corrupt, exploitative, and in terminal decline.

Ideological motivations. There is also a strong ideological component to their campaigns. The leaderships in Moscow and Beijing consider that liberal democracy poses a life-and-death threat to their authoritarian rule. Xi Jinping is thought to be driven by the imperative to always strike first using an extensive array of instruments to ensure that the democratic

66 Friedberg, hearing on “Strategic Competition with China,” p.3.

67 See related comments in FBI Director Christopher Wray’s remarks, “Regarding Indictment of Chinese Hackers,” remarks prepared for Delivery, December 20, 2018, available at <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wr>.

states are continuously disrupted, weakened, and forced onto the back foot, which he learned from a close study of Stalin’s writings.⁶⁸ China and Russia also go to great lengths to thwart Western countermeasures. They work especially hard to prevent ideological “contamination” by the West, and they expend substantial resources in efforts to dominate the media and other communication channels at home and abroad.

Leninist authoritarianism. The way these operations are conducted reflects the authoritarian nature of these regimes’ domestic rule. They are highly intrusive and manipulative, making extensive use of advanced surveillance and monitoring technologies, front organizations, sympathetic populations, fellow travelers, inserted agents, conscripted corporations, and other entities in creative and often illegal ways.

Strategies are fixed, whereas campaigns are tailored and tactics are opportunistic. The political warfare concepts of both regimes are founded on extensive experience and are a core part of their strategic culture. Although their strategies for using political warfare are largely fixed, their campaigns are tailored flexibly to suit particular theaters and operational phases, and their local tactics are opportunistic and very fluid to meet changing circumstances. As the case studies make clear, penetration of some small island communities in the Western Pacific is achieved by sending waves of Chinese immigrants, establishing well-funded casinos, or offering to construct superficially attractive elements of infrastructure; in many, it is achieved by subverting, corrupting, and recruiting local officials and politicians.

Weaponization of benign activities. In conducting their political warfare operations, Russia and China have weaponized many normally benign activities. These include but are not limited to diplomatic discussions; conventional and unconventional media operations; tourism into targeted countries; flows of students; visit diplomacy; the establishment of “friendship societies” and similar front organizations; the purchase of well-located pieces of land, key infrastructure, and strategically important companies; accessing, often by stealing, protected intellectual property; managing trade and investment flows; exploiting education systems, and manipulating immigration arrangements.⁶⁹

Recruitment of ethnic diasporas. Ethnic diasporas in countries and regions of importance are priority political warfare targets for both Moscow and Beijing. Both regimes view their ethnic populations abroad, even those generationally removed, as inseparable parts of their societies. For Moscow and Beijing, the diasporas provide cultural and linguistic entry points and some members of these communities are usually sympathetic to the regimes. If they are not ideologically aligned, individuals can often be coerced to conduct intelligence and other tasks for fear of reprisals against relatives in China or Russia. When recruited and

68 See John Garnaut, “Engineers of the Soul: What Australia Needs to Know about Ideology in Xi Jinping’s China,” presentation delivered to a closed Australian Government seminar in August 2017. Text accessed via *Sinocism* newsletter, January 17, 2019 at bill=sinocism.com@substack1.sinocism.com.

69 The five primary sets of instruments being used in these political warfare campaigns are discussed in Chapter 5. For numerous specific cases, see Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2018).

properly organized, these locally based agents can be very effective in performing many functions. Notable examples include Moscow's attempts to coopt the Russian speakers in Estonia and Beijing's attempts to mobilize ethnic Chinese migrants and students in Australia and New Zealand. One tasking of Chinese-sponsored student and related associations has been to confront, abuse, and submit formal complaints against any university staff, students, or members of the public who make statements or write articles that contain views contrary to those propounded by Beijing.⁷⁰

Domination of ethnic media. Moscow and Beijing also work hard to control the ethnic language media in priority foreign countries. In Beijing's case, this is usually achieved via Chinese companies buying local newspapers, radio stations, and other media outlets; establishing strong local branches of Chinese state media organizations; and infiltrating pro-Beijing staff into local government-run radio and television stations. Moscow and Beijing also invest heavily in encouraging social media sites that are aligned with the regime and appropriately monitored and censored. The result in several key countries is that there are very few ethnic language media outlets that are not closely aligned with their respective home countries. This is most obvious in Estonia, the island states of the South Pacific, and New Zealand and Australia.⁷¹

Interference in local politics. Russian and Chinese political warfare operatives have also become directly involved in the political parties, elections, and public office-holding duties in several countries. Moscow has helped establish and sustain pro-Russian political parties and actively supported individual politicians and other political organizations. Chinese agencies, affiliated business people, and front organizations have worked to organize, fund, and conduct the political campaigns of selected candidates in a number of jurisdictions, including New Zealand and Australia.⁷²

The Chinese government has provided generous funding to politicians, journalists, academics, business people, and others who have been willing to support Beijing's positions on key issues. Many have been offered all-expenses-paid trips to China and exceptional access to senior regime personnel.⁷³ The clear intent has been to foster pro-China government decisions, public commentary, and research. Some individuals have also been recruited as intelligence agents and "agents of influence."

As U.S. Vice President Mike Pence remarked in October 2018, "Beijing has mobilized covert actors, front groups, and propaganda outlets to shift Americans' perception of Chinese

70 See, for example, Joanna Mather, "Beijing is Stirring Up 'Red Hot Patriotism' Among Chinese Students on Australian Campuses," *Australian Financial Review*, August 29, 2017.

71 See the Australian situation described in some detail in Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, pp. 40–45.

72 For details, see the New Zealand and Australia case studies in Annex A.

73 This activity is described in several of the case studies in Annex A. See the discussion in Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, pp. 104–109.

policies. As a senior career member of our intelligence community recently told me, what the Russians are doing pales in comparison to what China is doing across this country.”⁷⁴

Strong enforcement action. The Chinese and Russian regimes do not readily tolerate what they see as deviant or unhelpful behavior by foreign governments, organizations, and individuals. Reflecting the principles driving their tight controls on domestic dissent—especially the social credit system of the Chinese regime—actions taken by foreign entities that conflict with regime interests routinely trigger harsh retaliation.⁷⁵ Moscow has often launched shrill media reporting, conducted damaging cyber operations, threatened or suspended oil and gas supplies, and ordered threatening military maneuvers.⁷⁶ Beijing has threatened serious damage to bilateral relations, cut tourist traffic, delayed or halted imported goods, arbitrarily arrested nationals of the offending country, surged cyber operations, tasked front organizations overseas to launch demonstrations and other disruptive operations, and maneuvered military and paramilitary forces to apply coercive power.⁷⁷ By launching these reprisals, both regimes aim to coerce Western and partner governments and societies to acquiesce to their goals and endorse the markedly different world order they are striving to create.

Fostering relationships with local groups including criminal and terrorist organizations. Russian and Chinese agencies have made sustained efforts to build business, educational, sporting, media, and other relationships in targeted countries. Key personalities and organizations are not only befriended and coaxed using standard diplomatic means, some are also bribed, blackmailed, and corrupted.⁷⁸ Russian agencies have also periodically engaged criminal, terrorist, and extremist paramilitary organizations and other groups to help penetrate official organizations; smuggle weapons, people, and funds; and corrupt key officials and community leaders.⁷⁹ Criminal organizations have also been engaged to provide surge capacity when major cyber operations are required. Broader goals are to weaken targeted societies, undermine Western values and institutions, institutionalize corrupt practices, and build coercive leverage.

Assertion of extra-territorial rights. In recent years, Russian and Chinese security agencies have sought to extend their operations into the United States and other allied countries by attempting to operate with legal impunity and enforce their own domestic laws overseas.

74 Remarks delivered by Vice President Mike Pence on the administration’s policy towards China at the Hudson Institute on October 4, 2018. P.6.

75 See this system discussed in Samantha Hoffman, “Managing the State: Social Credit, Surveillance and the CCP’s Plan for China,” *China Brief* 17, no. 11, August 17, 2017.

76 See these matters discussed in: Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*.

77 Ibid.

78 See this discussed, for example, in “Espionage Threat to Australia Worse Than During the Cold War: ASIO,” *Australian Financial Review*, January, 31, 2018, available at <http://www.afr.com/news/espionage-threat-to-australia-worse-than-during-the-cold-war-asio-20180130->; and Fergus Hunter, “ASIO Warns of Overwhelming Level of ‘Harmful’ Foreign Spying Threats,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 18, 2017.

79 For details see Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos*, p. 6.

Notable cases of such operations have included the Russian assassinations of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006 and Alexander Perepilichnyy in 2012 and the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal in 2018, all which occurred in Britain. Beijing, for its part, has pursued its Operations Fox Hunt and Skynet into several countries to arrest or otherwise apprehend so-called corrupt ethnic Chinese and regime officials. Chinese agents even attempted to kidnap an ethnic Chinese person in New York and smuggle him onto a China-bound aircraft.⁸⁰

Intelligence and covert operations. The networks of Russian and Chinese front organizations, together with well-connected diaspora communities, also facilitate the insertion of highly trained intelligence operatives and, in some instances, military and militia personnel. On some occasions these operatives have conducted electronic and other system penetrations, robbery, kidnapping, assassination, subversion, and sabotage.⁸¹ In some notable cases, such as in Crimea, such operations have prepared the way for large-scale militia and conventional military campaigns.

Innovative campaign design and delivery. The wide span of Russian and Chinese political warfare operations is normally conducted flexibly and tailored to local circumstances, and Chinese operations during the last decade have displayed high levels of innovation. For example, it enticed key foreign politicians and officials to agree to the construction of strategic infrastructure under terms that threaten small state economies, as has been the case in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Malaysia.⁸² In other locations, lax immigration and border control systems have permitted the entry of Chinese citizens in such large numbers that the local political balance has been upset, as in Saipan.⁸³ In other locations, weak controls on foreign investment have permitted the acquisition and construction of facilities that have significantly impacted military planning and operations by the Western allies, as in Pagan and Tinian.⁸⁴ China has also been very creative in using its strong financial position and the attraction of its large domestic market to win strategic advances.

Encouragement of dependencies. Another notable feature of Russian and Chinese political warfare has been to foster strategic dependencies and notions of obligation. The targets of these operations include not only nation states, but also state and local governments, key national institutions, political parties, corporations, and many strategically important

80 Zach Dorfman, "The Disappeared," *Foreign Policy*, March 29, 2018. See also Ms. Smith, "Skynet in China: Real-life 'Person of Interest' Spying in Real Time," *CSOONLINE*, September 28, 2017, available at <https://www.csoonline.com/article/3228444/security/skynet-in-china-real-life-person-of-interest-spying-in-real-time.html>; and Kate O'Keeffe, Aruna Viswanatha, and Cezary Podkul, "China's Pursuit of Fugitive Businessman Guo Wengui Kicks Off Manhattan Caper Worthy of Spy Thriller," *Wall Street Journal*, October 22, 2017.

81 For some examples see the case study on Russian political warfare operations in annexing Crimea in Annex A.

82 Hannah Beech, "'We Cannot Afford This': Malaysia Pushes Back Against China's Vision," *New York Times*, August 10, 2018, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/world/asia/china-malaysia.html>

83 For details see the case study in Annex A of this report on China's Operations in the United States' Island Territories in the Western Pacific.

84 For details see Case Study #3, "China's Operations in the United States' Island Territories in the Western Pacific," in Annex A.

individuals. In Moscow's case, the primary national dependencies that have been developed in Europe have been three-fold. The first has been to build European reliance on Russian supplies of gas and oil. The second has been to strengthen European perceptions that their continued peace is dependent on Russian restraint in unleashing its powerful armed forces. And, third, Moscow has built a strong sense of obligation in some European political parties and key politicians that have become heavily reliant on Russian political, media, and financial support.

The primary dependencies that Beijing has developed spring from the value of Chinese trade to most targeted countries and, for some, the importance of Chinese finance, infrastructure, and technology. A few regional governments with similar ideological convictions, such as Laos and Cambodia, have also become dependent on Beijing politically. In building strategic dependencies at the national, organizational, and individual levels, China's comparative wealth has given Beijing substantial leverage that has been exploited skillfully for strategic advantage.

Powerful military cover. A further characteristic of Russian and Chinese political warfare is that these operations are conducted under the umbrella of strong and, in some theaters, dominant conventional and nuclear forces. Moscow's and Beijing's primary military capabilities are rarely in the foreground of political warfare operations, but periodic exercises, ship visits, sea and air space intrusions, and other coercive activities help shape the strategic environment and give credibility to threatening statements by regime leaders. They also serve as a powerful deterrent to Western intervention and conflict escalation.

Expanded concept of combined arms. The case studies summarized in Annex A demonstrate that Russian and Chinese political warfare operations are wide-ranging and multi-dimensional, often sophisticated, and are orchestrated to achieve strategic effects. Such campaigns are usually complex and, because of the diversity of instruments and modes, give new meaning to the concept of combined arms operations. Peter Mattis summarizes the strategic teaming employed by the CCP, as follows:

The Ministry of Education surveils, organizes, and rallies Chinese students on college campuses. The United Front Work Department, also in Mao's words, serves "to rally our true friends to attack our true enemies," which includes mobilizing overseas Chinese to support friendly politicians and official narratives as well as sponsoring research at foreign academic institutions. The Ministry of State Security uses academic fronts and think tanks to present official lines in appealing ways as well as to conduct clandestine and covert operations. The official propaganda apparatus buys up overseas Chinese-language media to extend Beijing's reach into Chinese communities worldwide. The Chinese resources for quietly influencing the world do not reside only or even primarily in the intelligence services or foreign ministry. The PLA is just one more piece of this alphabet soup of organizations.

What does the PLA bring to the table? The PLA possesses a large publishing empire, including numerous publishing houses and several newspapers apart from the PLA Daily. Moreover, a number of PLA officers are talented propagandists... The Intelligence Bureau within the PLA's Joint Staff Department controls several think tanks, such as the China Institute for

International and Strategic Studies and the China Foundation for International Strategic Studies, for research and to interact with foreign analysts. The bureau also has used academic fronts for operational purposes.⁸⁵

Centralized and sophisticated command and control. In order to plan and coordinate such operations, the Russian and Chinese regimes both employ centralized and sophisticated command and control systems. Putin appears to be personally involved in planning and monitoring all major political warfare operations. To support him and his immediate colleagues, he has a 2,000-strong Presidential Administration. Below that is the Security Council, and then linking and coordinating all instruments at the theater level is the National Defense Control Center.⁸⁶

In Beijing, Xi Jinping also exercises tight control over all key agencies engaged in political warfare operations. The Propaganda Department, the United Front Work Department, the Political-Legal Commission, and the People's Liberation Army are core political warfare agencies of the regime, and they all report directly to the Politburo Standing Committee, which Xi Jinping chairs.⁸⁷ Xi has emphasized on numerous occasions that he has a strong interest in political warfare campaigns, and he periodically champions their importance as one of his "magic weapons."⁸⁸

Acceptance of high levels of risk. In pursuit of their priority goals, the Russian and Chinese regimes have both demonstrated a preparedness to take far higher strategic and operational risks than any of the Western allies. In December 2017, senior British intelligence officials briefed the Intelligence Committee of the British Parliament that Russia's cyber and espionage units were "operating to risk thresholds which are nothing like those that the West operates."⁸⁹ In attempts to reinforce such pressures, Chinese and Russian aircraft and ships have engaged in dangerous maneuvers in close proximity to allied forces on numerous occasions, routinely breaching relevant international protocols and risking the possibility of triggering exchanges of fire and escalation to major conflict. The Putin and Xi regimes have developed an acute understanding of Western strategic intentions and the red lines that would trigger strong allied intervention. This has led them to believe that they can move aggressively

85 For more on how the CCP employs these strategic teaming tactics, see Peter Mattis, "China's 'Three Wars,'" *War on the Rocks*, January 30, 2018.

86 Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos*, pp. 10–13.

87 See these command and control arrangements detailed in Peter Mattis, "Form and Function of the Chinese Communist Party," published September 28, 2017, available at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/form-function-chinese-communist-party-peter-mattis>; and Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*, p. 29.

88 Anne-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping," conference paper from "The Corrosion of Democracy under China's Global Influence," Arlington, VA, September 16–17, 2017, available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>.

89 David Bond, "UK Spymasters Say Moscow is 'Formidable Adversary,'" *Financial Times*, December 22, 2017.

into ambiguous or contested zones and even to cross some national borders without facing a forceful escalation to major conflict.⁹⁰

Postured for the long term. Both regimes perceive their political warfare campaigns to be a permanent feature of their strategic postures. While in some instances rapid successes are seen as possible, most operations have been structured to be conducted via a succession of modest incremental steps, all of which are intended to fall below the threshold for Western escalation. Most Russian and Chinese political warfare campaigns have medium-to-long timeframes.

⁹⁰ Notable examples are the Russian seizure and annexation of Crimea and China's effective annexation and militarization of most of the South China Sea—the second busiest waterway in the world that is of similar size to the Mediterranean Sea.

CHAPTER 5

The Political Warfare Toolkit: The Five Key Sets of Instruments

A central feature of the Russian and Chinese political warfare operations described in Chapter 4 is the extensive array of instruments each regime has developed for complex “combined arms” operations. There are five primary categories of instruments in their political warfare toolkits.

One: Information Instruments

All official agencies in Russia and China operate in synch with their regime’s political warfare strategies and campaign objectives. Many implications flow from this centralized approach, but one of the most obvious is that diplomats and other official representatives are well practiced in reinforcing the leadership’s position and the propaganda lines set by their leaders. Regime spokespeople will periodically be directed to deliver strong statements or open new elements of contention in order to win more room for maneuver, distract international attention, mislead and throw Western leaders off-balance, or some other tactical or operational objective. Such official initiatives are, however, virtually never launched in isolation. They are routinely supported in combined arms operations by other political warfare instruments. The Russian and Chinese regimes’ very extensive media operations play key supporting roles.

Moscow’s global network includes RT (Russian Television) and Sputnik, and they are supported by covert botnet and cyber operations. Beijing can afford to spend even larger sums on media and information operations, all of which serve as mouthpieces of the regime. In 2016 Xi Jinping launched a makeover and re-branding of China Central Television, which is now called the Global Television Network. It has six channels tailored for international audiences. The Chinese regime also operates the Voice of China, Xinhua News Agency, and hundreds of

publications. These international operations are reinforced by the tailored use of local media outlets, strong social media capabilities, and cyber operations, all of which can be focused on current issues in particular countries. Agencies of the Beijing regime fund the monthly publication of newspaper supplements—normally supplied by the People’s Daily—containing pro-Beijing news coverage in the major cities of many Western and developing countries, including the United States, Australia, and Britain. Beijing has, in addition, fostered the Western film industry, persuading Hollywood with the scale of its domestic market to avoid issues that the Chinese Communist Party would consider sensitive and produce soft propaganda movies that portray China in a positive light to global audiences.

Moscow and Beijing strive very hard to set the terms of debate in targeted societies; dominate community attitudes and assumptions; undermine or disrupt opposing voices; rally radical sentiment; weaken key national institutions, corporations, and government agencies; and engender a range of sympathetic stances in targeted populations. Influencing key politicians, journalists, media organizations, and academics; winning their support on key issues; and arranging their compliance to distribute disinformation and fake or seriously distorted news is common behavior. Building on these information and propaganda successes, a favorable environment can be created in which to recruit prominent political party, business, trade union, and government officials to their cause.

These operations are reinforced by local networks of front organizations that are often referred to as “united front” operations.⁹¹ In most cases these activities appear innocuous at first sight. They include the operations of various “friendship,” “peace,” “exchange,” and related organizations, often focusing on particular professional, sporting, or educational activities. However, these entities are almost always under the control of intelligence or closely affiliated agencies.

Chinese companies and other entities have donated hundreds of millions of dollars to universities in the United States and other Western countries in apparent attempts to buy influence and encourage public support for Beijing’s views.⁹² Amongst these initiatives is the program to establish Confucius Institutes in Western and developing country universities and schools. This program is funded and managed by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), which reports directly to the Chinese Department of Education. There are now more than 100 Confucius Institutes in the United States and more than 500 in universities globally.⁹³ Personnel operating under the cover of these front organizations support the sponsoring regimes in numerous ways, including representing Beijing’s views to local audiences; inserting pro-CCP views into course curriculums; facilitating visits to China by influential local personalities, supporting home country officials, students, and business people when they visit

91 United Front operations are detailed in several of the case studies in Annex A. See, for example, case studies #5 and #6 dealing with New Zealand and Australia.

92 James Kynge, Lucy Hornby, and Jamil Anderlini, “Inside China’s Secret ‘Magic Weapon’ for Worldwide Influence,” *Financial Times*, October 26, 2017. See also James Kynge et al., “Confucius Institutes: Cultural Asset or Campus Threat?” *Financial Times*, October 27, 2017.

93 Ibid.

foreign countries; and, periodically, collecting intelligence, recruiting spies, and conducting espionage operations.⁹⁴

The combination of these diverse official, media, united front, and other operations can have a profound impact on the attitudes, world views, and decision-making of key personalities and organizations in targeted societies over time.

Two: Geostrategic Instruments

A second set of Russian and Chinese instruments has been developed to strengthen these regimes' political, economic, military, and infrastructure footprints in countries and regions of priority strategic interest.

Part of this tool kit is designed to improve political and strategic relationships with key leaders and elites in targeted societies. Such instruments include visit diplomacy, in which leaders, business people, and media representatives of even very small states are given all-expenses paid trips to China or Russia, where they experience red carpet treatment, are given access to key leaders, are offered generous financial and technology contributions to address local needs, and, not infrequently, are bribed with financial and other incentives to lock in their support. Through these and related measures, Beijing and Moscow seek to foster local compliance and a graduated sequence of commitment.⁹⁵

Next steps typically include expanded aid and loan programs, agreements to construct major elements of transport, telecommunication, government facilities, and sporting infrastructure. Special trade, investment, and immigration agreements are sometimes negotiated, and, in many countries, particular efforts are made to foster police and military training, exercises, and equipment supply. The overall goals are to develop favored strategic relationships and routine strategic access. While the Russians and Chinese regimes label these initiatives as win-win developments, the reality is that in many cases loans and other economic arrangements are lopsided, many promised projects never progress, the quality of the infrastructure is often poor, and the end result is that local elites are frequently enriched while the local society is burdened with greatly increased debt. In several cases, state sovereignty and independence have been undermined by strategic obligations and, sometimes, the military presence of an authoritarian power.⁹⁶

Many of these geostrategic instruments have featured in Russian operations in Crimea, occupied parts of Georgia, and Belorussia. They are even more clearly apparent in Beijing's promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative throughout the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East, and

94 Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, pp. 211–227. See also Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “The Chinese Communist Party Is Setting Up Cells at Universities Across America,” *Foreign Policy*, April 18, 2018.

95 These operations are detailed at some length in the case studies in Annex A.

96 For details see the case study on the Belt and Road Initiative in Annex A of this report.

Africa. It has been largely through these means that Chinese entities have secured strategic facilities in Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Djibouti, and even Australia. All indications are that such operations will be sustained and may be further intensified.

Three: Economic Instruments

Economic instruments are one of the most powerful weapons in the authoritarian states' political warfare arsenals. They play two important roles. The first is to win advantages for their economies. This includes stealing or otherwise acquiring foreign technologies and know-how to accelerate their economic development and reinforce their national power. Some strategically important foreign companies are bought by corporations or individuals acting as agents of the regime. Others are penetrated by spies or made targets of sophisticated cyber operations. In China's case, the theft of Western intellectual property during the last decade has been vast and has played a key role in accelerating the regime's "Made in China 2025" plan to achieve global dominance in a range of strategically critical sectors.⁹⁷

The second economic dimension of Russian and Chinese political warfare is to use financial, investment, trade, resource, and other economic instruments to leverage strategic gains. Moscow has been especially active in exploiting the dependence of its European neighbors on Russian oil and gas. Coercive negotiations, threats of price hikes, supply disruption, and actual cuts of energy supplies have been used on numerous occasions to advance Moscow's political goals. Between 1991 and 2004, Russia cut gas and oil supplies to its neighbors over forty times for political purposes.⁹⁸

The scale and relatively rapid growth of the Chinese economy has given Beijing even greater scope to use economic instruments in its political warfare campaigns. China is the largest trading partner for nearly all countries in the Western Pacific and many others elsewhere. For most of these countries, continued export and investment access into the Chinese economy is important for their development and prosperity. In addition, for a number of countries, the continued supply of Chinese technologies, construction expertise, student flows, and investment funds play key roles in the development of politically sensitive economic sectors. Hence, if the Chinese regime wishes to apply pressure on a regional country or on key corporate leaders, it has many economic levers it can pull and, periodically, it does. One notable case was China's tourism sanctions, boycott of the Lotte retail chain, and other reprisals against South Korea following Seoul's commitment to host American missile defense systems. Another instance was Beijing's cessation of banana imports from the Philippines following an

97 See references to this in the remarks delivered by Vice President Mike Pence on the administration's policy towards China at the Hudson Institute on October 4, 2018; and Tom Orlik, "Who Has the Most to Lose If China's Trade Ambition Succeeds?" *Bloomberg Businessweek*, October 30, 2018.

98 Robert L. Larsson, *Russia's Energy Policy: Security Dimensions and Russia's Reliability as an Energy Supplier* (Stockholm: Division for Defence Analysis at the Swedish Defence Research Agency [FOI], 2006), p. 262, available at <https://ntrl.ntis.gov/NTRL/dashboard/searchResults/titleDetail/PB2007106453.xhtml?jsessionid=1cb9a2e034e0cd884d71d81ca723>.

argument with Manila over Scarborough Shoal.⁹⁹ The effect of this coercive behavior is that an indirect threat—conveyed via the state media or through delays on the docks for the exports of an offending country—can be sufficient to bring a regional state back into line. Fear of economic reprisals deters the governments and major corporations of even the strongest Indo-Pacific democracies from confronting Beijing on issues such as human rights abuses, cyber intrusions, foreign investment controls, the gross subsidization of state-owned enterprises, and the regime’s behavior in the South China Sea.

Four: Military and Paramilitary Instruments

Another set of coercive instruments in Russia’s and China’s political warfare arsenals is their military and paramilitary forces. Both regimes are investing heavily in these forces partly as a bulwark against foreign threats to their regimes, partly to provide strong coercive power against priority targets, partly to secure escalation dominance in the event of a crisis in a key theater, and partly to reinforce their striving for superpower status and capacities to rival the United States.¹⁰⁰

During the last decade, Russia’s military development programs have placed highest priority on modernizing the country’s strategic nuclear forces; selectively upgrading conventional ground, air, and naval units; and strengthening and expanding a range of special force, militia, and paramilitary forces that can be used in ambiguous gray zone operations in neighboring states and contested areas, such as in parts of Syria. These forces are periodically deployed in short-notice exercises, some of which resemble more developed versions of the campaigns they conducted into Georgia, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine during the last two decades.

The Chinese regime now spends more than three times the defense budget of Russia, and during the last decade its military spending grew at an average annual rate of 8 percent.¹⁰¹ Beijing continues to modernize and expand almost all elements of the PLA and supporting Coast Guard, Maritime Militia, and other paramilitary forces. Its main priorities are to strengthen its domination of the strategic approaches to the Chinese mainland, expand capabilities to project power into more distant regions, invest heavily in advanced technological systems so as to transform the sophistication of future military operations, and flexibly support the regime’s political warfare campaigns against targeted countries.

A complication for many Western observers is that neither authoritarian regime is aiming to directly replicate the military capabilities of the United States. Rather, Moscow and Beijing have assessed their own strategic priorities and the driving features of their strategic environments and then designed and developed military forces that are tailored to win by exploiting

99 For details see Grant Newsham, “Time for US to Push Back on China’s Economic Bullying of Allies,” *Asia Times*, September 20, 2017, available at <http://www.atimes.com/article/time-us-push-back-chinas-economic-bullying-allies/>.

100 Joel Gehrke, “FBI: China threatens ‘the future of the world’,” *Washington Examiner*, December 12, 2018.

101 The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2017* (London: IISS, 2017), pp. 210, 278.

the West’s weaknesses. As a result, Moscow and Beijing possess operational advantages in key theaters that are not readily apparent from a simple comparison of budgets or numbers of military platforms and personnel. Most notably, the Russians and Chinese have been actively conducting political warfare operations in key theaters for nearly two decades preparing the environment for possible expanded operations. In priority regions in the approaches to their borders, the Russians and especially the Chinese already operate forces that out-gun locally deployed Western forces. They have developed large and sophisticated cruise and ballistic missile forces. Indeed, China’s missile forces in East Asia have the capacity to hold at risk key Western military installations throughout the theater and could inflict significant losses if not effectively countered.¹⁰² These force disparities are well understood by regional governments and serve to amplify the coercive impact of the regimes’ broader political warfare operations.

A key consequence of these substantially altered force balances has been to embolden the Russian and Chinese regimes to periodically employ their military and paramilitary forces to secure priority interests in their strategic approaches. Moscow and Beijing have demonstrated repeatedly that they are skilled in deploying their forces in creative ways to undermine, surprise, outflank, and sometimes overwhelm the forces of more conventionally structured opponents. Beijing regularly employs civilian tools such as armed fishing boats, dredging vessels, road construction crews, and civil aviation backed by powerful military forces that are deployed in the vicinity to impose control over disputed territory.¹⁰³ These large and well-organized intimidatory forces are a key part of these regimes’ political warfare arsenals.

Five: Legal and Paralegal Instruments

In conducting their assertive and often aggressive political warfare operations, the regimes in Moscow and Beijing are keen to retain their international legitimacy and prestige. Hence, their political warfare tool kits contain sophisticated capabilities for justifying the legality and principled nature of their actions and asserting the illegitimacy of their opponents.

Both regimes periodically make claims for international rights, treaty adherence, territorial acquisitions, and other interests that are at variance with established facts, based on falsified history and other evidence, and in clear breach of international law. They routinely repeat these claims with elaborate arguments and almost always stand firm, despite the factual weakness of their positions. Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and other leaders frequently assert the “indisputable facts” and their “sovereign rights” in such disputes, friendly media outlets repeat these claims as though they were unquestioned, and international commentators and “fellow travelers” are encouraged to argue their case publicly. While these regimes’ preference

¹⁰² See this discussed in Ross Babbage, *Game Plan: The Case for a New Australian Grand Strategy* (Canberra: Menzies Research Centre, 2015), pp. 16–28.

¹⁰³ See, for example, the discussion in Babbage, *Countering China’s Adventurism*; and the case study on China’s coercive posturing in the Senkaku Islands in Ross Babbage, *Stealing a March: China’s Hybrid Warfare in the Indo-Pacific: Issues and Options for allied Defense Planners* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019).

is to win international support for their stances, they are usually content to secure widespread acquiescence.¹⁰⁴

Legal and paralegal instruments are also employed in many other domains so as to justify these regimes' actions in space, cyber-space, airspace, and at sea within their own criminal justice systems. Legal and paralegal instruments, strongly supported by information operations, play key roles for these regimes in many theaters. Particularly notable has been their use in places as diverse as Crimea, the borders of Bhutan and India, the South China Sea, and the Senkaku Islands.

Indicators of Russian and Chinese Political Warfare Operations from the Illustrative Case Studies

In Annex B there is a list of some of the key indicators of authoritarian state political warfare operations that are being conducted in foreign countries. The brief discussion in that annex is an attempt to address the question of whether Chinese and Russian political campaigns progress through a particular sequence or order. The general conclusion reached is that Moscow and Beijing always tailor their political warfare modes and mechanisms to the specific circumstances of each theater. Nevertheless, Annex B does identify typical indicators of such political warfare campaigns, and it argues that Moscow's and Beijing's operations often progress through three phases. Phase #1 is a Commencement State, Phase #2 is a Contested State, and Phase #3 is a Client State.

Figure 1 displays those key indicators from Annex B that are observable in at least some of the eight case studies in Annex A. This summary table provides only a generalized picture of the extent of Russian and Chinese operations in each case. In particular, it does not indicate the scale and depth at which activities are being undertaken. Nevertheless, it does provide a general sense for the range of activities underway in each theater.

104 There are many examples of these operations. Some are detailed in the case studies in Annex A. An additional case, which has many of these features, is described in Babbage, *Countering China's Adventurism*, pp. 11–26.

FIGURE 1: INDICATORS OF AUTHORITARIAN STATE POLITICAL WARFARE OPERATIONS

Indicators of Authoritarian State Political Warfare Operations in Illustrative Case Studies in Annex A								
Actions by Russia or China	Estonia	Crimea	U.S. Island Territories	South Pacific States	New Zealand	Australia	Indonesia	Belt & Road
Expanded presence by State agencies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Attempts to build dependence and/or obligation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paid visits offered to community leaders			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded intelligence ops in theater	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strong growth in authoritarian state visitors and immigrants		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Offers of loans, grants, cut-price infrastructure			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Front organizations established and ops intensified	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Some local leaders publicly support Russia or China	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Funding of local political parties or candidates		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Expanded State media activity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Pressure to expand "cooperative" activities		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pressure to ease immigration controls			✓	✓				✓
Steep rise in trade and investment			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supply of telecommunication and surveillance systems		✓		✓			✓	✓
Military visits and combined training		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Offensive cyber operations detected	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Rise in espionage operations in target country(ies)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		

Box A

What are the Distinguishing Features of Russian Political Warfare when Compared to the Chinese Model?

The vision and goals of the Putin regime's political warfare operations are usually expressed in more narrow, nationalistic, and blunt terms than similar campaigns launched by Beijing. The Russians routinely express their hostility to the West, even if many of the operational modes employed are indirect and covert.

Putin and his senior colleagues have more frequently threatened the use of nuclear weapons than Xi Jinping.¹⁰⁵ The Russians have discussed concepts such as nuclear escalation in order to de-escalate, and they have also developed some new types of military systems for nuclear weapon delivery.¹⁰⁶ There appear to be many reasons for this Russian emphasis, but they include the fact that Moscow's financial resources are relatively constrained, and the country's modernized nuclear forces offer readily available means for both deterring the West and coercing neighboring states.

While Moscow does conduct operations globally, including in the United States, it accords a special priority to the "Russian world" or the near abroad on the Eurasian landmass. In consequence, the physical movements of Moscow's military and paramilitary forces are usually land-based and supported by air, space, and cyber assets as required. A notable consequence is that the Putin regime has developed strong army special forces and paramilitary capabilities that are experienced in gray-area intelligence gathering, militia, and terrorist operations. Moscow has been prepared on several occasions to deploy "little green men" to conduct offensives across international borders in circumstances that could be shrouded with ambiguity through the spreading of disinformation and propaganda.

The Putin regime has more limited capabilities to operate in distant theaters. When the regime does conduct political warfare operations in more remote theaters, such as the United States, it usually aims to achieve negative objectives—to disrupt, confuse, and distort public perceptions; to steal valuable intellectual and other property—rather than attempt to win the support of local communities. This means that in these theaters, Russia normally operates as a spoiler, political disruptor, and a spy, often using low-cost and potentially high-payoff cyber and espionage operations.

Finally, Putin has shown himself to be calculating and somewhat daring in his use of military and paramilitary forces. When convinced that he can act without triggering Western escalation, he has been prepared to take the risk and seize strategic objectives, especially in the near abroad.

105 For details see Matthew Kroenig, *The Renewed Russian Nuclear Threat and NATO Nuclear Deterrence Posture* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, February 2016).

106 Valerie Insinna, "Russia's Nuclear Underwater Drone is Real and in the Nuclear Posture Review," *Defense News*, January 12, 2018, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/space/2018/01/12/russias-nuclear-underwater-drone-is-real-and-in-the-nuclear-posture-review/>.

Box B

What are the Distinguishing Features of Chinese Political Warfare When Compared to the Russian Variant?

The declaratory approach of Beijing differs significantly from that of Moscow. In their public statements Xi Jinping and his colleagues claim not to be at war with the West and routinely work to downplay, distract, dissemble, and conceal their operations. Internal regime documentation portrays a markedly different reality.

Xi Jinping's regime is driven by a very strong determinist narrative. It highlights China's inexorable rise to the preeminent power in the Indo-Pacific, eventually overshadowing the United States; the righteousness of China's restoration as a dominant power following the so-called century of humiliation; the benign and benevolent nature of the regime that always seeks win-win outcomes; the futility of obstructing China's rise; and the danger of provoking its leadership. This China dream is a powerful story for Beijing's domestic audience and for some members of the ethnic diaspora.

China possesses a much larger diaspora than Russia, one that is dispersed to most parts of the world including within many "enemy" states. However, a significant proportion of these people have been resident in their "new" countries for generations, have gained full citizenship rights, and are fully integrated into their societies.

Like Russia, China has invested heavily in forces designed to conduct gray zone operations but in Beijing's case, the primary emphasis is on capabilities in the maritime domain. Beijing routinely uses non-military elements, such as its strong Coastguard, armed fishing boats within the Maritime Militia, dredging vessels, civilian construction teams, and civil aviation assets to probe ungoverned or weakly defended spaces and reinforce sovereignty claims.

Finally, China's very large economy and the authority of the Party within it gives Beijing extensive scope to persuade, bribe, and coerce national and regional governments to accept large infrastructure developments and other Chinese involvements within their societies. China Inc. can afford to purchase key foreign enterprises, offer funding for uneconomic infrastructure projects, and heavily subsidize the entry of Chinese corporations into strategically important markets, even within strong Western societies. This provides Beijing with strategic positioning options that Moscow cannot afford and is not well structured to undertake.

CHAPTER 6

Success of Russia's and China's Political Warfare Campaigns

Russia

The Putin regime's political warfare operations have contributed significantly to many of its political advances in recent years. They have reinforced broader efforts to rebuild Russia's international status, modernize most elements of the country's security system, and strengthen control over the Russian media and national political infrastructure. They have helped restore national cohesion, pride, morale, and a sense of destiny amongst many Russians, but they have also deepened a sense of unease in others.¹⁰⁷

Internationally, Putin has annexed or won dominant influence over parts of Georgia, Crimea, the Donbas region of the Ukraine, and Moldova. Moscow has also bolstered its presence close to the borders of Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Turkey. In addition, Russian forces have secured what appears to be an enduring presence in Syria. Putin has also built a loose strategic partnership with Xi Jinping's regime in China.

Looking ahead, the Putin regime will need to manage numerous problems, including a serious demographic decline, resulting in a reduction in the country's workforce; a relatively weak, energy-focused economy; rampant crony-capitalism; the deepening distrust of the Western world; and, most importantly, growing unease within parts of the Russian population. These and other pressures may encourage Moscow to intensify its political warfare operations to

¹⁰⁷ See the trends in Russian public opinion revealed in the time series polling for 2004–2018 by the Levada Center: "National Identity and Pride," Yuri Levada Analytical Center, January 25, 2019, available at <https://www.levada.ru/en/2019/01/25/national-identity-and-pride/>.

distract domestic attention, keep the West off-balance, and pave the way for further coercive and territorial advances.

The Putin regime believes that its highly refined and experienced political warfare capabilities are one of its few strategic assets that are clearly superior to those currently held in the West. New versions of these coercive, intimidatory and disruptive operations can be anticipated during the coming decade.

China

The Chinese regime's political warfare operations have also contributed to the achievement of some notable successes during the last decade. Beijing has emerged as the dominant economic power across most of the Indo-Pacific region, seized effective control of the South China Sea, and established a maritime presence deep into the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These advances have boosted the prestige and legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, not least with the bulk of China's domestic population.

Beijing has also made significant geostrategic progress, most notably in relations with Russia and in parts of broader Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, Central Asia, and in the Horn of Africa. Reinforcing these advances has been the Belt and Road Initiative, bringing substantial Chinese investments in transport and communications infrastructures to locations as diverse as the Panama Canal, Myanmar, Pakistan, and several countries in Africa and South America.

Furthermore, Beijing has expanded China's international influence substantially. Most nations now accord China the status of a very major power, and some view it as a superpower, albeit one with a different mix of attributes to the United States. The governments of North Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Pakistan have forged close partnerships with Beijing and may be on the way to becoming valued tributary or buffer states on China's borders. Myanmar, the Philippines, and Sudan may progress their relationships with Beijing in similar ways in the period ahead. As a part of this influence, Beijing has made further incremental progress in isolating and undermining Taiwan politically and militarily and may see its way clear to engineer the "return" of Taiwan during the coming two decades.

The Chinese Communist Party and several Chinese government agencies have also established strong networks of influence within the United States and in all major allied and partner countries. Although these networks differ in balance and strength, they provide means whereby Beijing can exert pressure on Western elites and many categories of allied decision-making. In future crises, these networks could be mobilized to weaken the coherence of allied military and other operations. Another type of success has been Beijing's stealing or otherwise securing vast quantities of Western intellectual property, which has been used to accelerate many categories of Chinese development, boosted the economy, and helped sustain China's rising prosperity.

It is clear the party has developed and refined a wide range of coercive instruments that can be applied to mislead, distract, confuse, and undermine the coherence of Western and other democratic state decision-making.

However, Beijing's political warfare operations have started to encounter serious challenges and stirred some regional counters. In particular, nearly all Indo-Pacific governments now have a clearer appreciation of China's political warfare strategy, and many have increased their levels of alert. There has been a significant stiffening of resistance, notably in the active defensive steps taken by Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Australia, Papua New Guinea, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. In most of these countries, a new level of alertness to Chinese interference, the security and financial risks of participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, and other forms of intrusion is evident not only in national governments but also in media organizations and members of the public. In some countries, controls on foreign investments have been tightened, counterespionage and related legislation has been strengthened, defense investment and operational plans have been reshaped to strengthen deterrence of major powers, and there has been increased media and public attention given to the challenges posed by the communist regime in Beijing.

There is also growing concern about Beijing's activities in more distant theaters, especially in Europe and parts of the Middle East and Africa. This is encouraging an expansion of cross-theater security consultation and cooperation particularly between the Indo-Pacific democratic states and key European members of NATO.

Beijing's aggressive cyber and related espionage operations against the United States, its allies, and its partners have contributed significantly to a deepening distrust of Beijing. Most countries have moved to strengthen their cyber defenses, and some have developed powerful capabilities to launch cyber counteroffensives.

In summary, the Chinese regime's diverse, persistent, and strategically reinforcing political warfare operations have won Beijing some substantial advances. Moreover, even where China's initiatives have been only partially successful, the impact of Beijing's political influence across the Indo-Pacific region has been strong. As things now stand, the momentum in the strategic rivalry between China and the West is with Beijing.

However, there are early signs that decision-makers in the United States and its close allies have awoken to the to the scale and nature of the strategic challenge posed by the Chinese regime's political warfare operations. There is now a widespread appreciation of the importance of developing a coherent counterstrategy across the Western alliance. There is a sense that although the Chinese regime has won the first few rounds of its strategic maneuvering against the West, the United States and its allies are beginning to appreciate the need to marshal resources for a complex and demanding struggle that may run for decades.

CHAPTER 7

The Strategic and Operational Mismatch Between the Authoritarian Regimes and the West

The authoritarian political warfare methods discussed in the first six chapters of this report reflect a way of viewing the world that is very different from that of the West. Understanding that difference is key to appreciating the nature of the threat and devising appropriate responses. The Western mindset tends to view the world as binary, with peace and war as separate and distinct states. Peace is seen as the natural state of affairs, with war a periodic and unfortunate interruption.¹⁰⁸ The Russian and Chinese regimes, by contrast, view the strategic landscape as characterized by continuous and never-ending struggle that encompasses everything from what the West calls “peace” to nuclear war. When they consider conflict along this spectrum, the primary change from one end to the other is the relative weighting that is given to non-military and military instruments. The regimes in Moscow and Beijing believe that they are already engaged in an intense form of warfare, but it is political conflict and not kinetic warfare. Their primary operational focus at present is on employing a range of mainly non-military instruments in non-traditional ways below the threshold of large-scale conventional military operations in order to win strategic gains.¹⁰⁹

108 See, for example, Thomas G. Mahnken, “U.S. Strategic and Organizational Subcultures,” in Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen, eds., *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights into Comparative National Security Policymaking* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

109 Michael Collins, deputy assistant director of the CIA’s East Asia Mission Center, described the situation as follows: “I would argue . . . that what they’re waging against us is fundamentally a cold war—a cold war not like we saw during THE Cold War (between the U.S. and the Soviet Union) but a cold war by definition.” “CIA: China Waging ‘Quiet Kind of Cold War’ Against US,” *Voice of America*, July 21, 2018, available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/cia-china-quiet-kind-of-cold-war-against-us/4492305.html>.

The Russian and Chinese regimes are conducting political warfare across a very wide bandwidth, employing a wider variety of instruments than are used, or even possessed, by the West. The United States and its allies and partners rely almost exclusively on traditional diplomacy and conventional military instruments with an occasional selective application of mild economic measures. Despite its past successes during the Cold War, the West has little recent experience of conducting political warfare, no coherent strategy or structures for waging such campaigns, and, until recently, even lacked an appreciation of the nature, scope, and scale of the Russian and Chinese political warfare challenge.

There is clearly a strategic and operational mismatch between the major authoritarian states and the West. The authoritarian states possess deep traditions and cultures of offensive political warfare, have clear political warfare strategies, are actively conducting such operations in multiple theaters, possess powerful bureaucratic structures at the core of their regimes to manage and resource such operations, have scores of tailored instruments that they are using in innovative combinations, and, in recent years, have won political warfare victories in diverse theaters, as discussed in the case studies in Annex A. The West, by contrast, has a shallow understanding of political warfare, possesses few elements of a credible political warfare arsenal, is not well organized to conduct such operations, and is thus vulnerable.

Given this mismatch, Russian and Chinese political warfare campaigns are taking place in a permissive environment. They are attacking the West and its partners where they are weakest—where they lack a coherent strategy, have little capability, and are presently incapable of conducting effective coordinated operations, even in defensive modes.

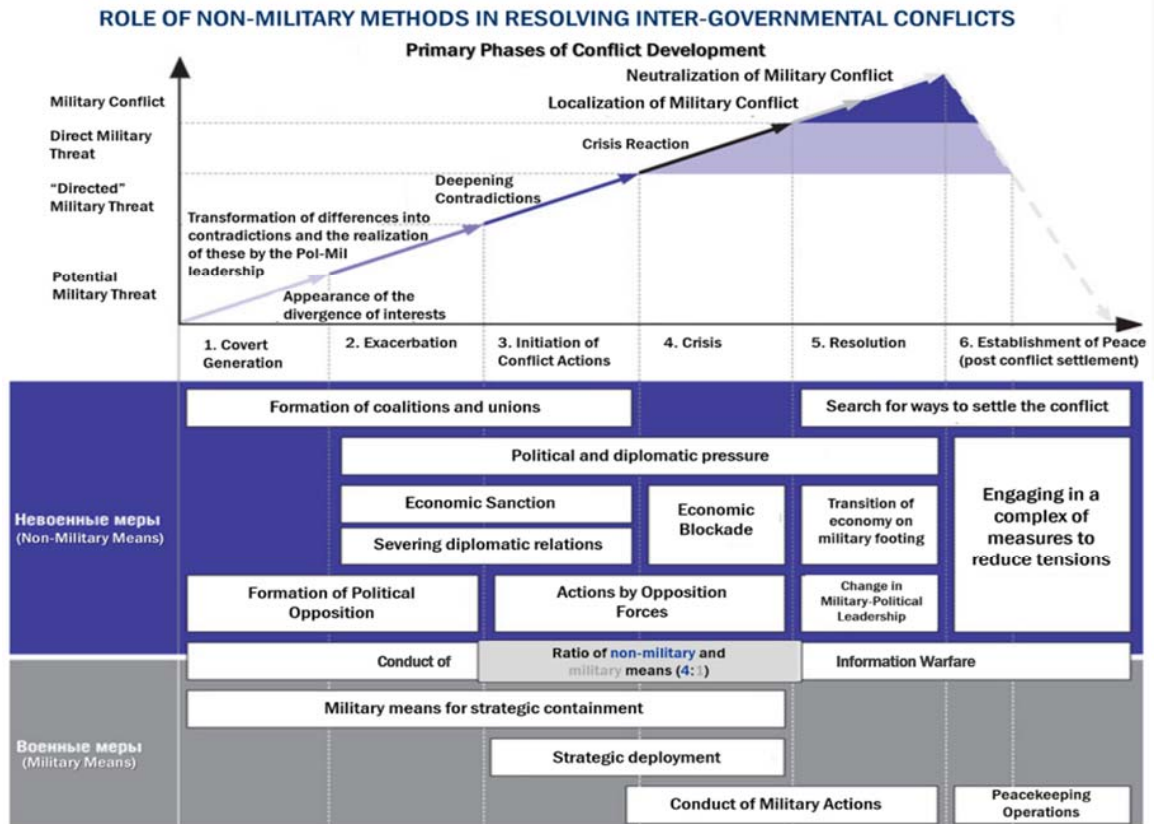
One surprising feature of Moscow and Beijing’s strategic approach to political warfare is that it aligns closely with the principles espoused by some of the West’s most eminent strategic thinkers. For instance, when Sir Basil Liddell-Hart summarized the essence of successful strategy, he listed six positive principles:

- Adjust your ends to your means.
- Keep your object always in mind.
- Choose the line (or course) of least expectation.
- Exploit the line of least resistance.
- Take a line of operation that offers alternative objectives, for you will thus put your opponent on the horns of a dilemma.
- Ensure that both plans and dispositions are flexible—adaptable to circumstances.¹¹⁰

110 B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1967), pp. 248, 249.

A strong case can be made that the authoritarian regimes in Moscow and Beijing are operating in close accord with these foundational principles of strategy, whereas the West is operating within a far more rigid, more reactive and less strategic paradigm.

FIGURE 2: GRAPHICAL SUMMARY OF THE GERASIMOV MODEL



Source: Dickey et al., *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 221.

The contrasting approaches of the two sides can be visualized in the 2013 operating framework spelt out by General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. Figure 2 is a graphical summary of the six phases of conflict in this framework. Even though Gerasimov's primary aim was to describe what he perceived to be the Western manipulation of the so-called color revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa, his ideas resonated deeply in the Russian strategic community and have arguably played an influential role in more recent Russian operations. Of particular note is that he saw conflict opening with a covert phase characterized by intensive information and political operations that continue through all subsequent phases until military operations have ceased and the post-conflict order has been established. The foundational roles of information and political operations at the very start of the first phase, which are reinforced in the second and subsequent phases by

economic and other non-kinetic measures, actually contrast markedly with normal Western practice.

In most situations, Western countries would take few, if any, serious actions during Gerasimov’s first two phases and only initiate strong diplomatic, economic, and other measures towards the end of phase three—just prior to or at the crisis point. By the time that the West was entering the fray, the Russians and the Chinese regimes would consider the war half-fought and possibly already won.

The logic of conducting intense information and political warfare operations over an extended period to undermine the opposition’s willpower and prepare the battlefield for conventional military operations is nothing new. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it plays a core role in Russian and Chinese strategic culture. Sun Tzu captured the gist of the asymmetry now facing the West when he wrote in 500 B.C., “Thus it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory.”¹¹¹

The bottom line is that the Russian and Chinese regimes have a different perception of the battlespace than the dominant paradigm in the West. For these authoritarian regimes, the battle has been underway for a considerable time, operations have reached into and beyond the West’s homelands, significant tactical victories have already been won, and the global environment is being prepared for the next phases of the conflict. By contrast, most decision-makers in the West still consider themselves to be in a state of “peace” and are not inclined to initiate actions that they fear Moscow or Beijing may consider provocative. Their political warfare arsenals are weak at best, poorly organized, and grossly under-resourced. In the event of a future crisis, the primary instruments at the disposal of the Western leaderships will be standard diplomacy and kinetic military forces. This is a recipe for being late to the battlefield that has been chosen by the adversary with an inappropriate mix of weaponry and being out-flanked and out-maneuvered upon arrival.

Although Western knowledge of Russian and Chinese political warfare operations has improved, deep understanding of these regimes’ strategies, doctrines, and operational concepts continues to be narrowly held. The meager stock of Western intellectual capital and operational expertise in this field is a critical vulnerability. Not many Western politicians, defense personnel, diplomats, and other officials have a developed comprehension of Russian and Chinese political warfare, and even fewer are trained and equipped to counter such operations.

This has many consequences. One of the most obvious is a risk that the West will misperceive and mis-categorize the essence of China’s and Russia’s political warfare strategy and campaigning. A notable case in point is the habit of many Western leaders and commentators

111 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated by Lionel Giles (Enhanced Media Publishing [Kindle edition], 2017), Chapter 4: Tactical dispositions No. 15.

to refer to the political warfare challenge as a “competition.” To many Western minds, a competition implies a sporting analogy with two sides prepared to engage with set rules, similar team uniforms, standard equipment sets, agreed boundaries, fixed timeframes, and a referee that both sides obey without serious hesitation. The reality is that none of these characteristics are features of Chinese and Russian political warfare. Moreover, the Chinese and Russians themselves rarely describe their political warfare operations as a competition.¹¹² The language they use refers to intense struggle, active measures, and warfare. Victory in this combat goes to the side that launches operations very early, employs many unconventional instruments in novel and unexpected ways, takes the enemy by surprise, attacks opposing forces away from normal battlefields in dispersed modes that outflank conventional defenses, imposes its own rules on the struggle, and is prepared to sustain such operations indefinitely.

Language is important in security policy. There is certainly rivalry between the major authoritarian states and the West and this rivalry is intensifying. There are also some aspects of both sides’ behavior that can be described as being competitive in nature. In a significant advance, the final report of the United States National Defense Strategy Commission describes the security challenges the U.S. and its allies currently face as “competition and conflict.”¹¹³ However, using this term to describe the full range of Russian and Chinese operations and Western counters is misleading. The campaigns that the regimes in Moscow and Beijing have been conducting against the Western allies and their partners are political warfare. They are being conducted to undermine the independence of targeted states, destroy the network of Western and partner alliances, and win strategic advances. A strong case can be made that these very extensive operations are no more a competition than the Cold War was a competition. There is a need for the leaders of allied and partner countries to describe these operations with care and precision.

112 The Russians and Chinese both discuss many of their recent international operations by using the descriptors “political warfare,” “active measures,” “international struggles,” and similar terms. The summary of the translated Chinese United Front Work Department documentation refers to the West being a “mortal menace.” See Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*, pp. 53, 54. Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui describe the current situation as follows: “The great fusion of technologies is impelling the domains of politics, economics, the military, culture, diplomacy and religion to overlap each other. . . . This is information warfare, financial warfare, trade warfare, and other entirely new forms of war, new areas opened up to the domain of warfare.” See Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p.162. Competition is a term that is not used widely by Chinese and Russian authors to describe their strategic operations, though it is periodically mentioned in descriptions of the Western approach.

113 National Defense Strategy (NDS) Commission, *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace [USIP], November, 2018), p. v, available at <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/providing-for-the-common-defense.pdf>.

Box C

Which States are Most Vulnerable to Authoritarian Political Warfare Operations?

The discussion in the first chapters of this report and in the case studies in Annex A makes clear that there are some features of nations and regional communities that make them more vulnerable to political warfare campaigns, interference, and coercion than others.

Nations with the following characteristics would appear to be particularly vulnerable to authoritarian political warfare operations:

- Located on the periphery of authoritarian states that are considered by them to have high political, geostrategic, or military importance.
- Possessing large diasporas and deep cultural and other ties with the authoritarian state.
- Having no strong cohesive culture drawn from religion, national identity, or shared history.
- Having a dispersed, parochial, and poorly informed population that is served by weak or compromised media organizations.
- Having weak political, economic, and social leaderships that are vulnerable to foreign blandishments, bribery, and corruption.
- Having small, relatively poor economies possessing limited prospects that are either heavily dependent on investment and trade from an authoritarian state or prepared to accept such a situation.
- Having weak systems of border control permitting significant numbers of foreigners of indeterminate backgrounds to reside in the country legally or illegally.
- Having few legal protections for individuals and organizations and a criminal justice system whose independence is compromised.
- Having weak or seriously neglected political, economic, and security ties to strong democratic states.

Drawing on these observations, it is possible to make broad-brush assessments of the current and potential vulnerability of countries and regions to authoritarian state political warfare operations. Identifying the key variables also highlights many of the issues that national leaders need to address should they wish to strengthen their capabilities to resist the political warfare campaigns of authoritarian states and strengthen their national resilience.

CHAPTER 8

Developing a Western Counterstrategy

Before identifying potential strategies to counter Russian and Chinese political warfare, it is important to conduct a net assessment of the comparative strengths and weaknesses of their campaigns, on the one hand, and the current strategies of the United States and its allies, on the other.

A well-crafted strategy for the Western allies and their partners to deter, confront, and defeat Chinese and Russian political warfare does not need to match authoritarian state capabilities with similar organizations operating in a comparable manner. This type of symmetric approach would be incompatible with Western ethics and morals, wasteful of scarce resources, likely difficult to sustain, and unlikely to achieve the West's primary goals. A basic tenet of successful strategy is to exploit the opponent's weaknesses, maneuver around his strengths, and simultaneously thwart his attacks on one's own weaknesses.¹¹⁴

Political Warfare Campaigns: Strengths and Weaknesses

Russia's and China's Strengths

- Clear strategic goals;
- Strong and centralized leadership that is prepared to act decisively and, on occasion, take relatively high strategic and operational risks;
- Tight control of domestic political environments;

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, pp. 341–350.

- Powerful narratives. Although the core strategic messages of Moscow and Beijing have most resonance at home and for their diasporas abroad, both narratives have limited attractiveness in the broader international community;
- Relatively large diasporas and other sympathetic populations in a range of strategically important locations. These communities are ready-made recruiting grounds for regime operatives;
- Extensive experience, strong culture, and refined doctrines for conducting political warfare campaigns;
- Numerous government agencies and front organizations already directing diverse political warfare operations. They are staffed by large numbers of people who are generally well-trained and organized for such campaigns;
- Strong propaganda agencies that are highly experienced and masters of fake news, myth-making, and disinformation;
- Successful maneuvering of a number of Western and partner countries to accept a degree of economic dependence and authoritarian leverage;
- Formidable military and paramilitary forces that routinely operate in or near primary strategic theaters and can be maneuvered at short notice to signal, warn, intimidate, and, on occasion, forcefully intervene to secure priority interests. Some of these forces are structured asymmetrically to Western military units, and their preemptive deployment into contested spaces can pose acute dilemmas for Western decision-makers. In many situations Chinese and Russian forces can also operate on a scale and with such speed that they possess initial escalation control in the event a crisis precipitates a much larger, conventional military conflict;
- Strong, well-trained and well-practiced command and control. Global and theater command and control is relatively tightly managed but, at the local level, it is more dispersed with concepts of directive control common. Local political warfare commanders appear to have considerable discretion concerning day-to-day operations; and
- A strategic partnership with each other under current leaderships. They have also developed cooperative programs in many strategic fields.

Together, Russia and China have the potential to dominate the Eurasian landmass.

Russia's and China's Weaknesses

- Regimes characterized not only by ambition but also by insecurity. They both need to manage political and economic fragilities that are potentially open to external exploitation;
- Economies and societies dependent to varying degrees on Western and other coalition partners to provide resources, technologies, finance, and market access in order to prosper;
- Weak soft (attraction) power. The reputations of these regimes in many parts of the world are as serial abusers of human rights and political freedoms, purveyors of corruption, and enforcers of repressive ideologies. They are widely considered to have scant regard for the rule of law both domestically and internationally. These authoritarian regimes are rarely welcomed with genuine warmth, except by other authoritarian regimes. Targeted countries rarely seek Chinese or Russian assistance other than to access finance and skills for infrastructure construction and nation building;
- The vulnerability of their international and domestic indiscretions to public exposure;
- Their tendency to over-promise and under-deliver. A notable example is the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, which has launched many projects that favor selected elites but delivers few enduring benefits to recipient societies. These poor performances, together with their geostrategic motivations, expose the Chinese and Russian regimes to charges of “new colonialism”;
- Corrupt and lopsided deals negotiated with today's leaders, which sometimes become subjects of contention when new governments are elected. The Russian and Chinese regimes are not skilled at operating in politically transparent democracies; and
- No close allies that are capable and fully trusted. They do have some international partners, but most are relatively poor, have serious domestic challenges, are costly to support, and are unreliable.

The Western Allies' Strengths

- A powerful democratic ideology and culture that has proven to be very resilient and is the basis for strong soft power that is very attractive globally;
- Robust political systems that are not fragile when placed under external pressure and have proven capable of adapting to meet altered security demands;
- High levels of political, economic, and social transparency characterized by free mass media and fully independent criminal justice systems. While they may appear messy or convoluted at times, such systems have proven to be relatively robust when confronted by shocks;

- Strong, resilient, adaptable, and interconnected economies;
- Leading technologies and operating concepts in most civilian and military fields;
- Strong institutional and personal networks between allies and partners that mostly feature high levels of trust;
- With some notable exceptions, limited economic, technological, or cultural dependence on China or Russia;
- Advanced military forces with recent experience of combined multi-national combat; and
- An alliance with exceptional scale, nature, and durability, not only because it is a product of shared democratic ideology but also because of deeply held common interests, shared values, and trusted personal networks.

The Western Allies' Weaknesses

- Few agreed-upon and clearly defined strategic goals within or between Western countries;
- No powerful strategic narrative to provide a strong focus for a counter-authoritarian political warfare campaign;
- No clearly defined strategy or game plan to drive coalition political warfare operations;
- Universally weak levels of experience, culture, and doctrine in the field of political warfare, even though some Western countries possessed substantial political warfare expertise during the Cold War;
- Organizational, structural, and equipment tool kits in the security and defense systems optimized for peacetime diplomacy and conventional warfare. Many of the capabilities required to conduct effective political warfare operations are either missing or poorly resourced;
- Communication, command, control, and intelligence systems that are not structured to conduct political warfare. With few exceptions, they are not fit for purpose. Additionally, Western and ally forces generally have very limited experience using these systems in the field; and
- Poorly informed politicians, business people, media personalities, and the general populations in regards to the political warfare challenge they now face. In consequence, few are prepared mentally or practically for the type of long and difficult struggle that may lie ahead.

It is notable that most of the West's strengths are based on firm foundations and most of the West's weaknesses concern failures of political and bureaucratic focus and structuring. These

weaknesses should be amenable to remedial action should national leaders and their societies deem this to be a priority.

The Goals of Western Political Warfare Strategy

Given the above strengths and weaknesses, the United States, its allies, and its partners should, as a next step, use them to determine the core objectives of a strategy to counter Russian and Chinese political warfare campaigns.

At the highest level, the goals of allied counterstrategy could be *to deter, defend against, and ultimately defeat authoritarian political warfare operations against allied and partner countries*. Under the umbrella of this overall objective, it would be helpful to define theater and domain goals. A possible list of goals at this level might be:

- To deter and defend against Russian and Chinese coercion through the use of political warfare and related means, especially in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region and in Europe;
- To counter Beijing's and Moscow's attempts to use political warfare and other techniques to alter the perceptions and policies of democratic countries; and
- To foster tendencies that may eventually lead to liberalizing economic and political reforms in Russia and China.

Key Determinants of Western Strategy

It is also important to develop criteria by which candidate strategy options can be assessed. First, the chosen strategy needs to offer strong prospects for achieving the core political goals. All strategic, operational, and tactical options need to be measured for their current and anticipated capacity to help meet these driving objectives.

Second, the selected strategy needs to be sufficiently flexible to deal with opposing forces that can and will adapt in ways that cannot always be foreseen. The interactive nature of strategy and campaigning places a premium on the development of deep knowledge of the opponents, incorporating high levels of flexibility and adaptability, and the importance of seizing and retaining the initiative. As the U.S. National Defense Strategy Commission argued, "The United States must begin responding more effectively to the operational challenges posed by our competitors and force those competitors to respond to challenges of *our* making."¹¹⁵

Third, the chosen strategy needs to take account of the fact that the circumstances of the Western allies and their partners differ significantly. The overall approach needs to accommodate these differences by providing individual governments with options for contributing in ways that are complementary and make the most of available assets.

¹¹⁵ NDS Commission, *Providing for the Common Defense*, p. viii.

Fourth, the chosen strategy needs to take account of the fact that both sides of this struggle possess limited resources. Choices need to be driven by priority interests, cost-benefit analyses, and assessed political and economic sustainability. The willingness of governments, bureaucracies, and national treasuries to address the requirements of countering political warfare will be critical.

Finally, although all strategies will take time to achieve their goals, some strategic choices are likely to require much longer timeframes to make progress than others. The political, economic, social, and international costs of extended operations thus need to be weighed carefully.

Primary Strategy Options

This report argues that, in theory, there are five main options for Western and partner state strategy for combating authoritarian state political warfare: Do Nothing, Denial, Cost Imposition, Attacking the Opposition’s Strategy, and Undermining the Opposing Regime.¹¹⁶ The primary advantages and disadvantages of each of these options are summarized below.

Option 1: Do Nothing of Substance

This is a strategic approach founded on the assumption that the threat posed by Chinese and Russian political warfare is grossly exaggerated and can safely be ignored.¹¹⁷ Some proponents of this case might argue that confronting and attempting to defeat authoritarian state political warfare would detract from other more pressing national and international challenges. It could also pose a risk of derailing valuable business opportunities and partnerships with Chinese and Russian enterprises. Others may argue that governance of the Western democracies is in such poor shape that the system and the freedoms it upholds are not worth fighting for. Still others may go further and accept Beijing’s and Moscow’s propaganda that the West is corrupt, inefficient, and in terminal decline, as well as that the rise of the China–Russia partnership to regional and global supremacy is inevitable and unstoppable. Some may express a sense of helplessness. It would appear that a few business people, journalists, academics, and others feel that their national economies are so heavily dependent on China or Russia that their governments have little choice but to compromise or acquiesce.¹¹⁸ Still others may express concern that working to prevent Chinese and Russian interference may lead to a

116 Please note that the last four strategy options were first discussed in a coherent but generic way by Bradford A. Lee in “Strategic Interaction: Theory and History for Practitioners,” in Thomas G. Mahnken, ed., *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies, 2012), pp. 28–46. See also Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*.

117 See for example, the reported remarks of Bob Carr, the former foreign minister of Australia reported in Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, p. 100.

118 Several categories of these people are described at length in Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, pp. 255–273.

McCarthyist over-reaction in which all members of the Chinese and Russian diasporas within their societies could be wrongly accused of espionage or subversion.¹¹⁹

All of these subsidiary arguments are periodically pressed by the Chinese and Russian media, relevant front organizations, and their agents of influence. In some Western and partner communities they have gained a degree of traction.

Disadvantages of Option 1

The above arguments can be readily refuted by simply detailing the relevant facts and especially by highlighting the true nature of the Putin and Xi regimes and their operations. There are many profound weaknesses of a do-nothing strategy. In the face of authoritarian state coercion, it embraces a notion of defeatism. It would accept that coalition states are unable to defend themselves and the authoritarian regimes in Moscow and Beijing have free rein to do what they wish with all Western and partner countries.

When properly informed about hostile foreign operations, the electorates in nearly all democratic states are likely to revolt against a strategy that countenances surrender.

Some supporters of do-nothing strategy may place little weight on the maintenance of state sovereignty and independence, or on the protection of democratic freedoms and the rule of law. Some may also place little value on the special relationships between the Western allies and the broader community of democratic states. These attitudes appear, however, to be held only by a minority in most democratic states.¹²⁰

Some supporters of passivity also fail to draw any link between Western democratic values and the rule of law on the one hand and social stability, community safety, and economic prosperity on the other.

When national leaders and relevant officials make clear the facts concerning Russian and Chinese political warfare operations and the fundamental issues at stake, the electorates of nearly all Western and partner countries can be expected to favor strong counteraction.¹²¹ The key question then is to select the strategic approach that offers the best prospect for achieving the defined national and coalition goals.

119 Ibid., pp. 280, 281.

120 In Australia, for instance, the 2018 Lowy Institute Poll concluded that “41 percent of Australians see ‘foreign interference in Australian politics’ as a critical threat to Australia’s vital interests. While 63 percent express concern about China’s influence in Australia’s political processes. . . . As in previous years, a significant minority (46 percent) say it is ‘likely that China will become a military threat to Australia in the next 20 years’.” Alex Oliver, “2018 Lowy Institute Poll,” Lowy Institute, 2018, available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2018-lowy-institute-poll>.

121 This is evident in the largely bi-partisan support in the United States for countering foreign interference, cyberattacks, attempted coercion, and similar operations, as well as in the stiffening of public opinion and political resolve in Australia following revelations of Chinese coercive operations in that society.

Option 2: Denial

A strategy of denial seeks to convince an opponent that it is impossible for him to achieve his objectives. In this case, this would involve preventing the opponent from successfully waging his political warfare campaign and realizing benefits from conducting such operations. It accomplishes this by strengthening societal defenses and building resilience.

Applying denial strategy in defense of democracies requires placing a strong emphasis on democratic and liberal values in contrast to the authoritarian, often regressive, values and practices of China and Russia. It champions the long-standing commitment of most democratic and partner states to globally defend the freedoms that are core values of the West at all cost. Television programs, films, videos, social networking, and other media could all serve as mediums to expose Chinese and Russian abuses and underline Western values and practices. These information activities would need to be extended over time and shared via a network of democratic and partner societies in mutually supporting operations.

This sustained information campaign would expose Russian and Chinese falsehoods, poor international behavior, and human rights abuses. It would build a firm moral foundation for allied and partner strategy that would be constantly reinforced by new revelations of authoritarian regime corruption, criminal behavior, manifest theft of intellectual property, subversion, and other aberrant behavior. If the primary political parties within Western democracies supported this approach, most citizens would likely become firmly committed to the cause. Leadership briefings on the challenges posed by Russian and Chinese political warfare could lift the understanding of key domestic groups. Priority audiences would include officials at all levels of government, business and labor leaders, media personnel, senior academics, and members of the general public. Special briefings and practical advice could also be provided to universities, schools, businesses, and tourist organizations hosting Chinese and Russian visitors, as well as allied nationals travelling to authoritarian states. Elevating the level of knowledge around the threat would assist these groups to make appropriate planning and operational decisions in their own environments.

A denial campaign would need to emphasize that the opponents of the West are the authoritarian regimes and their agencies, not the Chinese and Russian populations. Indeed, Chinese and Russian nationals who resist the regimes in Moscow and Beijing would be applauded, and many who are persecuted for their stands would be treated as heroes. Support for diaspora communities within democratic states that are struggling to resist pressure from Moscow and Beijing would also play an important role. A key step would be to expand Chinese and Russian language versions of mainstream Western media. This would, in turn, reduce ethnic reliance on media sources closely aligned with the regimes in Moscow and Beijing. Special programs would need to be established to, for instance, brief diaspora communities on Russian and Chinese political warfare operations and provide help lines and other practical assistance to members of the diaspora being harassed by authoritarian agents. Assistance for ethnic resisters of the regimes would also strengthen them in their own community organizations and bolster their resilience and security.

A critical piece of this campaign would be to reduce economic dependencies on the Russian and Chinese regimes. Allied and partner governments would encourage export and investment diversification into alternative markets. Gradually reducing economic interaction with China and Russia by introducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, tightening investment and technology transfer controls, introducing targeted immigration and travel restrictions, and constraining some areas of study by students from authoritarian states may also be important to consider.

Strengthening counterintelligence capabilities and associated legal and other penalties for espionage would be another element. When agents of authoritarian regimes are apprehended, the general intent should be to employ all legal avenues to bring charges against such individuals and organizations in the interests of justice, deter further illegal acts, and bring the perpetrators and their organizations into disrepute.

Defense, coast guard, border protection, domestic security, police, cyber defense, and other forces would have important roles to perform within an allied strategy of denial. These forces would need to be structured, scaled, and postured to prevent Russian and Chinese military coercion, to deter conflict escalation, and to provide escalation dominance before the initiation of conventional warfare.

A denial strategy would also require active diplomatic action by allied and partner countries. An early priority would be to forge a coalition of partner countries to cooperate in resisting authoritarian political warfare. This coalition of like-minded states would share intelligence, lessons learned from countering political warfare, technical expertise, training, and, when required, local reinforcements to assist partner countries facing extreme pressure. This counter-authoritarian coalition would also provide an organizational framework for coordinating counteractions, especially in the information and cyber domains and in some counterespionage fields.

A denial strategy would direct strong “sunlight” onto the corruption, human rights abuses, unfair business practices, and illegal international operations of Chinese and Russian agencies and business entities. It would foster strong local information warfare capabilities that are tailored to the specific language and cultures of vulnerable communities. It would also aim to ensure that all targeted countries have attractive alternative trade, investment, and infrastructure options that compare favorably with those that Beijing and Moscow can offer. In short, denial strategy would be designed to prevent the authoritarian regimes in Moscow and Beijing from winning any political, economic, strategic or other benefits from their political warfare operations.

Disadvantages of Option 2

A strategy based solely upon denial may prevent damage to the fabric of targeted societies but will likely be insufficient. It would probably not generate much pressure on the regimes in Moscow and Beijing to refrain from conducting political warfare or seriously weaken the effects of their ongoing operations, except possibly in the very long term. Hence, denial

strategy may have a great deal to contribute in protecting the Western democracies and their partners, but, when employed on its own, it may condemn the coalition to a very long, indecisive, and costly struggle.

Option 3: Cost Imposition

Cost-imposing strategies aim to raise the political, economic, military, reputational, and other costs to the opponent to such a level that its leadership modifies its political objectives. High costs can be imposed in an asymmetric manner by challenging the opponent in an unexpected domain where they are more exposed.¹²² A case in point was the Soviet response to the United States new generation strategic bomber and cruise missile programs epitomized by the XB70, B1, ALCM, and Tomahawk programs in the 1960s and 1970s. When confronted by these developments, Moscow dramatically expanded its air defense capabilities and accorded the organization the status and budget of a completely new military service called PVO Strany. This diverted substantial military and budgetary resources away from Soviet offensive capabilities and also increased the financial burden on the Soviet economy. A second example was the West's passive facilitation of the Soviet Union's costly adventure into Afghanistan from 1979 till 1989. This failed operation undermined the credibility of the Soviet leadership at home and internationally and hastened the demise of the regime.

Many cost-imposition measures take a long time to manifest themselves. This is generally the case, for instance, with expanded diplomatic and information operations that do serious damage to the reputations of the regimes both internationally and, over time, within the authoritarian states themselves. Regime representatives could be banished from international organizations; travel restrictions could be imposed on relevant Party and government agencies, diplomats, and sporting teams; and other national delegations could be either banned or restricted in various ways. Many economic measures would also have gradual effects, such as the introduction of restrictions on business and other dealings with key individuals and organizations, tightened technology export controls, and programs that highlight the risks of doing business with Russian and Chinese enterprises. More substantial measures could include heavy tariffs on goods known to have been manufactured using stolen technology, more general import and export bans, and restrictions on authoritarian state access to international finance, banking, and other facilities.

Yet another category of cost imposition is that achieved by applying geostrategic pressure, as could be the case were the West and its partners to expand significantly public and covert support to Ukraine, Georgia, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other countries. The costs for Russia and China in responding effectively to such measures are likely to be disproportionate and, over time, could be crippling.

¹²² See Lee, "Strategic Interaction"; and Thomas G. Mahnken, *Cost-Imposing Strategies: A Brief Primer* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2014).

Disadvantages of Option 3

To be effective, most cost-imposing strategies require high levels of international cooperation and coordination, which adds complexity and lead time. Furthermore, some features of cost imposition strategies are likely to need legislative and bureaucratic changes in many jurisdictions, and these may require extensive debates and legislative and administrative action. This may be the case, for instance, with economic sanctions, altered immigration controls, or tightened technology transfer policies that are likely to have negative side effects for some allied businesses. Transition measures and other compensatory arrangements may be required. And although all of the measures likely to be considered under a cost imposition strategy would be aimed at generating disproportionate difficulties for the authoritarian regimes, partner countries would be unable to avoid some costs.

Option 4: Attack the Opponent's Strategy

This approach seeks to cause the opponent to question the assumptions underlying his existing strategy. It may, for example, seek to prompt the opponent to realize that a central operational concept and focus for investment is no longer viable and has been effectively thwarted. When such a strategy undermines the opponent repeatedly, it can reveal to the opposition both the full costs and low returns from sustaining the effort. Over time, this can induce exhaustion, undermine the credibility of the opposing regime, and lead to economic and political collapse.

A notable example during the Cold War was the American Assault Breaker program that combined advanced air- and space-borne surveillance systems with precision-guided missiles and terminally guided anti-tank munitions to demonstrate a capability to destroy large armored formations, even deep behind the front line, within a few minutes of detection. The Soviet high command quickly concluded that their vast investments in armor- and artillery-heavy Operational Maneuver Groups were no longer viable.¹²³ Similar results were achieved when President Ronald Reagan unveiled the High Frontier (or so-called Star Wars) program to intercept and destroy Soviet ballistic missiles before they could reach their targets in the United States. After the United States appeared to successfully test key components of such a system, the Soviet political leadership concluded that their strategic nuclear deterrent was at risk and they did not possess either the technological or financial resources to keep pace.¹²⁴

Defeating the opposition's political warfare strategy would aim in a similar manner to render ineffective and wasteful the diverse armory of political warfare instruments. In contrast to the

¹²³ For an overview of the impact of the Assault Breaker program see Robert Tomes, "The Cold War Offset Strategy: Assault Breaker and the Beginning of the RSTA Revolution," *War on the Rocks*, November 20, 2014.

¹²⁴ See this discussed in Ken Adelman, "The Phantom Menace: How an Unproven, Widely Mocked Technology Scared the Soviets into Ending the Cold War," *Politico Magazine*, May 11, 2014, available at <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/the-phantom-menace-106551>; and Paul Shillito, "Did Reagan's Real Star Wars Bankrupt the Soviet Union?" *Curious Droid*, June 20, 2017, available at <https://curious-droid.com/258/reagans-real-star-wars-bankrupt-soviet-union/>.

previous strategy options, attacking the opposition's strategy aims to do more than simply defend against and deflect authoritarian regime operations. This is a strategically active concept that seeks to exploit areas of weakness that the leaderships of authoritarian regimes cannot ignore and readily overcome. It may also seek to divert the opposition into areas that are less threatening to allied and partner interests, impose disproportionate costs, and distract the opposing leadership from the primary theaters and domains of the struggle.

Mounting very strong information operations to expose and discredit the regime's poor investments and waste should accompany any attempt to attack the opponent's strategy. It would supplement efforts to highlight the regime's corruption, human rights abuses, and police state activities. When done well, the effect would be to portray the authoritarian regime as a grossly incompetent pariah state with which the international community should limit contact.

Disadvantages of Option 4

Although operations to undermine the opposition's strategy are certainly feasible, they require certain demanding preconditions to be met. First, and most importantly, they need high-quality strategic leadership in Western ally and partner states to appropriately assess the situation, perceive strategic opportunities, repeatedly place enemy leaderships on the horns of dilemmas, and then execute the strategy with sufficient resources over an appropriate period.

Second, in order to achieve the desired effects, these operations require a high level of international cooperation or, at a minimum, a level of political acquiescence from a wide range of countries. While feasible, this would require a sustained diplomatic effort. Other requirements might include some re-arrangement of investment priorities within national security communities; an expansion of allied and partner intelligence and special operations forces, together with mechanisms for international cooperation in those fields; and strong growth in both public and private sector information warfare capabilities. Whereas these initiatives are not likely to be excessively costly for most coalition partners, the need to expand holdings of key skills and strengthen some organizations means it may be several years before they can deliver the desired political, economic, military, and other effects.

Option 5: Undermine the Opposing Regime

The primary aim of this strategy is to create and exploit divisions and insecurities within opposing regimes and encourage fundamental change in the regime's behavior or, alternatively, the regime's replacement.

A strategy aimed at undermining the opposing regime is an activist approach. It entails much more than defending against, deflecting and distracting authoritarian regime operations. It is designed to employ a range of direct, indirect, and asymmetric instruments to seize the initiative, force the opposition onto the back foot, and make the political warfare operations of targeted authoritarian regimes untenable. If conducted with skill, it has the potential to

change the course of the conflict and force major concessions or even regime change in a relatively short timeframe.

One element of this strategy would seek to expose leaders' personal indiscretions, incompetence, and corruption. Once powerful information operations of this nature have been conducted for some time, the preconditions could be established to impose more pain and fear by stressing the opposition's domestic economy; reducing the international travel, trade, and financial access of the decision-making elite; and placing at risk the personal futures of key members and supporters of the regime. Specific measures might include the imposition of restrictions on international travel and migration, reduced access to international finance and banking, tighter controls on foreign investments, and the confiscation of property and other assets owned by regime leaders and members of key agencies and front organizations.

As part of this strategy, Chinese and Russian nationals who are permitted to visit the West and partner countries would be greeted by carefully tailored information warfare programs designed to undermine their trust in and respect for the leadership of their governing regimes, as well as deepen their admiration for the freedoms and achievements of the West.

In current circumstances, the use of such a strategy against the Chinese regime might aim at ensuring that the Made in China 2025 program and the Belt and Road Initiative fail in spectacular fashion and in ways that rebound strongly on the regime's leadership.

Another element of a strategy of undermining the opposition regime could be to encourage the business communities of Western and partner countries to give much higher priority to investment and trade opportunities in countries other than Russia and China. Over time, many businesses would be encouraged to stage a phased withdrawal of their foreign investments and other economic links with authoritarian states. While such a campaign might not be explicitly designed to contain China and Russia, it would likely reduce the regimes' international influence, weaken their authority, and, over time, generate powerful forces for change.

Disadvantages of Option 5

A strategy that attacks an authoritarian regime directly or indirectly is likely to trigger fear and deep unease on the opposing side, and, if not well implemented, strong responses could be anticipated. Some Russian and Chinese counteroffensives would likely attack the weaknesses of the Western allies and their partners. Some of the regimes' actions will likely be escalatory, may move into new operational domains, and would probably be asymmetric. However, if the allied and partner campaign is well planned and organized, implemented in a phased manner, and periodically reviewed, the costs of many of the opponent's countermeasures are likely to impose far higher political, economic, social, and other burdens on the authoritarian societies than those of the Western allies and their partners. Nevertheless, because the level of unpredictability entailed in this type of campaign is relatively high, a strategy of undermining one or more authoritarian regimes would best be accompanied by a number of supplementary measures.

First, it would be important for the publics of allied and partner countries to be prepared psychologically and organizationally for the prospect of intensified operations. A key feature in this preparatory work would be to underline to domestic publics the fundamental ideological, political, economic, and strategic case for protecting Western and partner societies from the threat of rampant authoritarianism. Second, it would be important for the Western allies and their partners to strive to achieve escalation dominance in every domain of importance. Hence, were the opposing regime's leadership to attempt to gain the upper hand by opening another front in the struggle, say in space operations or dramatically expanded cyber activities, it could be thwarted both directly and indirectly from the outset. Third, although Western and partner attacks on regime leadership may produce almost immediate effects and possibly some progress in regime concessions, the struggle may still be prolonged. The Western and partner coalition would need to be prepared to sustain operations of this kind for an extended period.

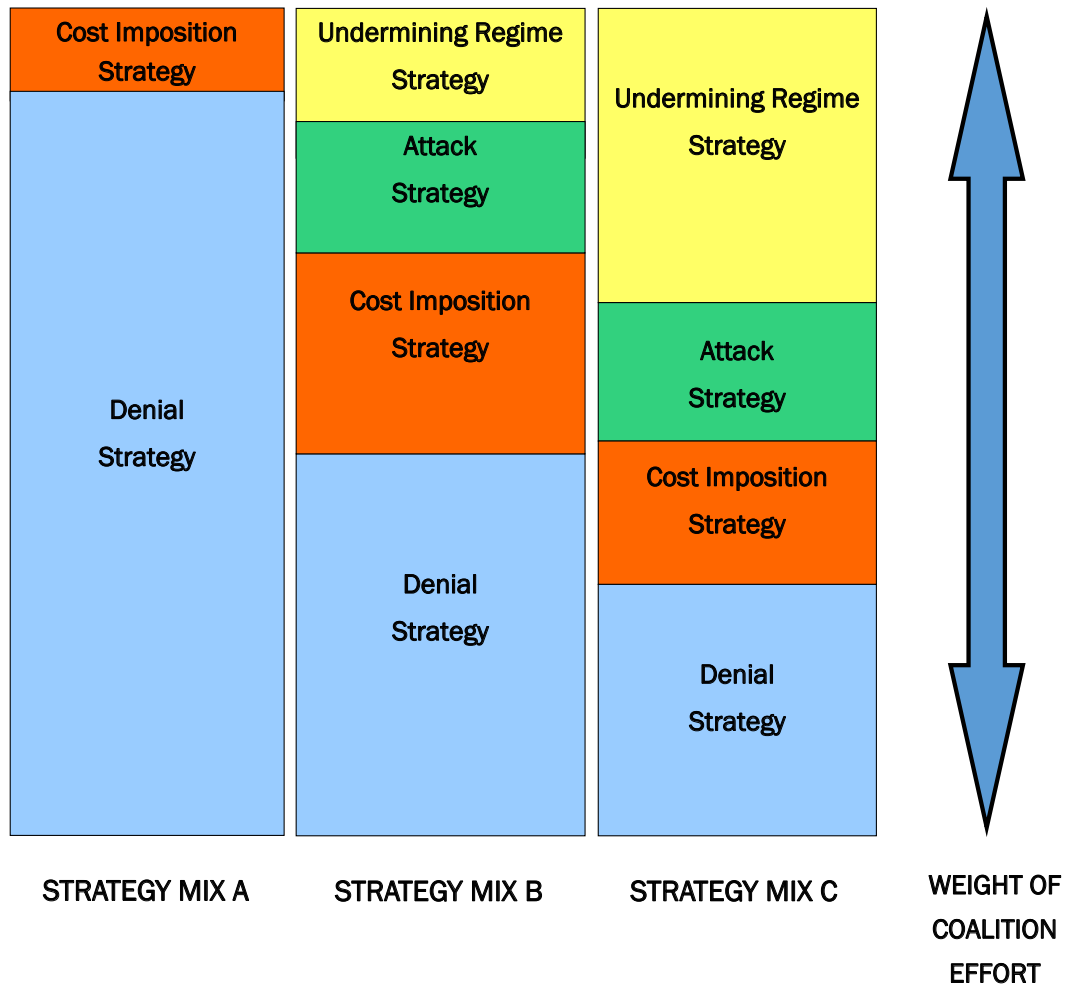
Toward an Integrated Allied and Partner Strategy

How, then, should allied and partner decision-makers weigh these strategy options? Some recent discussions of strategy to deal with the behavior of the Russian and Chinese regimes have focused on the scope for applying each of the above strategies in isolation.¹²⁵ Such thinking is too rigid; while there is a tendency to see these as alternatives, the boundaries between these different strategy options are more blurred than is often appreciated. For instance, well-developed denial operations implemented by the major allies and their partners would likely deliver more than a strategic denial effect. Strong denial could, in addition, impose significant costs on an opponent and, over time, even defeat the opposition's strategy. It could also potentially have the effect of applying some pressure on the opposing leadership. This is not to say that a campaign of denial on its own would be the best choice to counter Russian and Chinese political warfare operations; however, it is a necessary component of an effective strategy.

Rather than viewing the above strategy options as stand-alone candidates, it would be more productive to consider them as ingredients that could be employed in various mixes to produce more effective results and end states.

125 See, for example, Babbage, *Countering China's Adventurism in the South China Sea*, pp. 48–61.

FIGURE 3: ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY MIXES FOR THE WESTERN ALLIES



This concept of combined strategy is illustrated in Figure 3. In Strategy Mix A, the balance of strategy elements emphasizes denial with lower priority accorded to cost imposition. This fundamentally defensive approach might be particularly appropriate for small and strategically exposed states, which have few security resources but need to take immediate steps to strengthen their defenses. The dominant priorities in this mix are the strengthening of national resilience to reduce the impact of Russian and Chinese political warfare operations, publicizing the nature and extent of foreign interference in their communities, and taking low strategic risks.

Strategy Mix B illustrates a different approach. By giving some emphasis not only to denial and cost imposition but also to attacking the opponent’s strategy and undermining the regime, this approach aims to seize the initiative, forcing the authoritarian regime onto the back foot and placing severe pressure on its decision-makers to negotiate an early compromise or escalate; it could even possibly cause the regime to lose power. This approach may be more

appropriate for the United States or possibly a coalition of close allies to attempt in the middle phases of a countercampaign.

Strategy Mix C gives much greater prominence to undermining and defeating the opposing regime. This approach might be appropriate for the later stages of a political warfare struggle when the Western coalition is reaching its full strength and the opposing regime may be in serious retreat. At this stage, many small and exposed states would still be heavily focused on denial strategy and maintaining high levels of national resilience. Nevertheless, the balance of the overall coalition strategy would have shifted significantly, and many of the operational dynamics would have changed.

It would be difficult for small or medium states to attempt this type of strategic shift to Mix B or C on their own. For a start, the counter-regime and counterstrategy operations of modestly sized states would be unlikely to have sufficient impact on China or Russia to force the opposing leaders to change. Moreover, in the event that they attempted such operations independently, they would likely prompt aggressive responses by Beijing or Moscow. In most democratic states, it would be difficult for governments to justify such assertive strategy mixes to their own populations unless such a campaign were reinforced by the active participation of major allies and partners.

A key conclusion is that the strategy mixes for most small- and medium-sized countries are likely to be significantly different from those of the United States and other major power democracies. It is also likely that the optimal strategy mix for some countries will change over time. For middle-sized countries like Australia and Canada, the optimal strategy mix might approximate Strategy Mix A in the early stages of an allied countercampaign. However, as allied operations progress in both scale and effectiveness, and as the weight of United States and other major powers is brought to bear, some medium-sized democracies may feel comfortable in shifting their strategy emphasis closer to Strategy Mix B. As the coalition's operations gather strength, the United States and possibly a small number of other strong allies might choose to move the focus of their operations to something more like Strategy Mix C. This would place further pressure on the opposition's weaknesses and raise the prospects of forcing significant change within the targeted authoritarian regime.

This discussion underlines two further conclusions. The first is the importance of negotiating a strong coalition of like-minded states at an early stage to work together to counter authoritarian imperialism through a combined campaign. The stronger the coalition and the more numerous the like-minded coalition participants, the better.

Second, this coalition of like-minded states could grow to be very large. At the core of this teaming is likely to be the Five-Eyes Western allies, the NATO member states, and their close partners who have deep experience in conducting combined operations of great complexity and operate routinely with high levels of trust. They may be prepared to operate together in relatively assertive ways from the early stages of a campaign; however, beyond those countries, many members of an anti-authoritarian coalition are likely to be hesitant about the level

and nature of their involvement. For those countries, options could be provided that commit them to certain foundational principles and provide them with access to mechanisms and resources that would strengthen their national resilience and denial capabilities. While some countries would be unable to contribute much more to the coalition effort during the course of the struggle, effective operations to deny their territories and strategic resources to authoritarian states would still represent a very valuable contribution to the coalition campaign. The strategic effect would be to greatly reduce those parts of the globe offering Moscow and Beijing permissive environments for their political warfare operations.

This diversity of coalition members has many other implications. Most notably, the high-level political consultation and coordination mechanisms that would be required to manage an anti-authoritarian campaign across such a large and diverse coalition do not currently exist. They would need to be established at an early stage. The requirements for the operational command and control of such a complex campaign would require the extension and adaptation of existing arrangements and the creation of new ones. At the core are likely to be tried and tested military, paramilitary, and civilian skills, but the range of deployed instruments, the complexity of diverse theaters, and the scale of the operations would require special efforts that would not just be whole-of-government but whole-of-nation and, in some cases, whole-of-coalition. These operations would be a major challenge for coalition members to plan, organize, command, and effectively control and would bring new meaning to the concept of combined operations.

Box D

Options for the Close Allies to Assist Regional Partners and Friends

Allied and partner strategies to counter authoritarian state political warfare operations will be most effective if they engage and involve as many regional partners as possible. All candidate countries should be invited to join an anti-authoritarian coalition that would be specifically designed to assist members to defend themselves from foreign interference, strengthen their national resilience, and bolster their sovereignty and independence—assuming that they can meet three pre-conditions. First, they should agree to a set of principles to include a commitment to work to preserve the freedoms of member states from foreign interference, uphold the international rule of law, take active steps to bolster their nation's resilience to deter and defeat authoritarian political warfare, and participate in periodic coalition meetings to discuss progress in strengthening national resilience, share experiences, and consider a range of strategy and operational issues. Second, they would agree to share intelligence and open-source reporting on authoritarian state political warfare operations. Third, they would agree to assist other coalition members where feasible in strengthening their national defenses against foreign interference through sharing information, conducting training, and loaning skilled personnel.

The larger and better-resourced members of the coalition could consider offering smaller and less well-placed members many types of additional assistance to build their national resilience. When requested, options worthy of consideration include:

- Periodic deep briefings on Russian and Chinese political warfare strategies, doctrines, and operations.
- Training and education programs to help build local expertise in combating foreign political warfare and related operations.
- Assistance in strengthening local human skills and technical capacities to conduct information, mass media, and related communication programs.
- Technical support to reinforce local cyber defenses.
- Assistance in developing narratives to explain to local populations in their own languages the challenges posed by foreign political warfare operations.
- The provision of intelligence, policing, military, and policy-development expertise to reinforce local security operations.
- Advice and technical assistance to improve immigration and other border control systems.
- Assistance to review and strengthen the legal frameworks for local national security operations.
- Advisory and training assistance to help manage the local diaspora communities of foreign powers.
- Short training programs to provide practical advice to local government officials, business people, educators, and others on how to identify and respond to foreign attempts to undermine national independence and sovereignty.
- Assistance in strengthening the capacities of local think tanks and other non-government organizations that are capable of reinforcing national resilience.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions

This report makes clear that Russian and Chinese political warfare operations pose a serious challenge to the Western allies and their partners. The regimes in Moscow and Beijing believe that they are waging an intense conflict with the West and that over time their political warfare operations can seriously damage the United States and its allies without triggering a kinetic war.

Moscow and Beijing are driven by deep ideological commitments and powerful strategic narratives. They have undertaken political warfare campaigns to bolster the security of their regimes, dominate their regional approaches, expand their global influence, foster partnerships or alliances with other authoritarian states, and seize the upper hand over the United States and its allies. Within these strategies, they have tailored campaigns to the specific circumstances of each theater and combined instruments flexibly to suit local situations.

The political warfare arsenals they have developed are large, diverse, and usually capably and creatively orchestrated in each theater, making extensive use of unconventional modes. Operations are commencing in new theaters every year, and fresh instruments and operational concepts are appearing with some frequency. The planning and command and control systems established by each regime to drive these operations are large, experienced, and driven personally by Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. Political warfare operations are clearly one of the highest priorities of these regimes.

By contrast, the United States and its allies have drawn down and neglected nearly all of their political warfare capabilities since the end of the Cold War. Moscow and Beijing have been exploiting this Western weakness over the last two decades, and, as a result, they have been winning significant strategic advances. If this situation is to be reversed, there is a need for Western leaders to address the authoritarian political warfare challenge coherently and soon. Twelve key steps are required.

1. Recognize, Understand, and Discuss the Challenge. Western leaders need to develop a detailed understanding of the scale and nature of the challenge, accurately diagnose Chinese and Russian political warfare operations, describe this struggle accurately to their electorates, and encourage serious debates on how their societies can best deter, defend against, and defeat such operations.

Although the national security officials of Western countries are mostly well informed about Russian and Chinese political warfare operations, many are hesitant to make too much of a fuss for fear of triggering the types of reprisals that Beijing and Moscow have launched in recent years against Estonia, Ukraine, South Korea, and Japan. In order to avoid single state victimization, allied and partner countries need to proceed in non-standard ways. First, they should seek to coordinate their public statements on Chinese and Russian operations more closely than in the recent past. They will also need to develop an array of mechanisms to inform their publics and encourage serious debates about counteractions. These could include Congressional and Parliamentary inquiries, sponsorship of think tank and academic reports, and encouragement of well-sourced media reporting. Reinforcing these activities with firm statements of principle by allied political leaders would raise public consciousness of the political warfare challenge, encourage debate on key issues, and create the environment for politically bipartisan discussions to strengthen the defenses of Western and partner countries.

2. Develop a Powerful Narrative. A second challenge for the Western allies and their partners is to generate a compelling strategic narrative that resonates more strongly across the globe than the storylines generated by the regimes in Beijing and Moscow. Key parts of this narrative would likely emphasize the importance of protecting national sovereignty, maintaining individual freedoms, and sustaining democratic systems and processes. In some developing countries, the cause might be labelled “defeating the new colonialism.” In developed countries, a more common description might be “defeating authoritarian subversion”; “Liberty, Security, and Fraternity”; or simply “Defending Freedom.”

3. Define a Highly Effective and Inclusive Strategy. A third step is to devise, test, and agree upon a strategic concept for deterring, defending against, and defeating Russian and Chinese political warfare. The chosen strategic concept should be operationally potent, scalable, and flexible enough to provide meaningful roles for the United States, its close allies, and a wide range of developing countries, to include very small states such as the communities on remote island territories. It should be adaptable enough to meet changing circumstances over time and counter new Russian and Chinese initiatives. It should not aim to replicate Russian and Chinese political warfare operations but rather asymmetrically foster operations, capabilities, and systems that exploit the weaknesses of the authoritarian regimes, seize the initiative, and inflict successive tactical and theater defeats.

4. Build a Formidable Arsenal of Political Warfare Instruments. A fourth step for the Western allies and their partners will be to rebuild their previously formidable sets of political warfare instruments. Arguably the most important part of the West’s rebuilt toolkit

will be advanced information, media, diplomatic, cyber, and related capabilities. These operations will be critical not only for informing domestic publics but also for exposing to international audiences the indiscretions of authoritarian regimes; these include, among others, corrupt practices, abuses of human rights, bribery, espionage, acts of sabotage, and fake news operations. The aim would be for the Western allies and their partners to shine intense “sunlight” on every indiscretion and authoritarian threat to inflict serious damage on the reputations and trustworthiness of the regimes. A tactical goal would be to win every argument and, in so doing, inoculate allied, partner, and neutral populations to Moscow’s and Beijing’s false narratives.

Another key part of the rebuilt Western political warfare toolkit should be economic measures designed to counter Chinese and Russian economic coercion, the theft of Western intellectual property, and their future domination of strategically vital industries. Other economic measures could be designed to reduce international dependencies on Chinese and Russian trade, investment, technology, and finance.

Many types of measures are feasible beyond the tariffs, financial sanctions, and technology control measures that have been employed by U.S. administrations in recent years. Corporations should be encouraged to develop plans to significantly reduce their exposure to the Chinese and Russian economies over time and to shift their market and investment focus to other nations.

Another part of the rebuilt political warfare toolkit will be capabilities to cause difficulties for Moscow and Beijing in theaters that these regimes might not expect but cannot ignore. Innovative geostrategic initiatives have the potential to distract these regimes, drain their resources, and foster dissent and resistance at home.

Advanced military and paramilitary capabilities also have important roles to play within a revived Western and partner political warfare toolkit. These forces are essential to counterbalance growing Chinese and Russian military capabilities; ensure that the Western allies retain escalation control in future crises and, in so doing, deter overt military attacks; and rebuild international confidence in Western power.

A final part of the rebuilt Western and partner political warfare toolkit is the more extensive use of legal and paralegal instruments to highlight the illegitimacy of many Chinese and Russian political warfare operations. From Russian assassinations in the West to China’s seizure and militarization of the South China Sea, exposing these operations would further undermine their international reputations, and reduce their power to win further victories.

5. Assemble a Powerful Coalition. One strategic advantage of the West that China and Russia cannot match is the powerful set of alliances and partnerships that the United States and its allies have developed during the last century. These special relationships now need to

be mobilized to strengthen both national and region-wide defensive power against authoritarian political warfare.

Building a security coalition of like-minded states would be a major diplomatic task for the United States and its allies. The proposed coalition should ideally include not only developed nations but also developing states and many micro communities. The precise form of such a coalition and its primary operational modes would best be determined following extensive consultations between interested governments. However, key elements might include a set of agreed principles, protocols for intelligence and information exchanges, a baseline commitment to participate in operations to thwart authoritarian regime political warfare operations, and an agreement to participate in periodic discussions to coordinate coalition operations.

6. Make Denial an Early Priority. A common goal of all members of the proposed coalition is likely to be to maintain national sovereignty and defend against foreign interference, manipulation, and coercion. This suggests that an early priority for the coalition should be practical measures to enhance understanding of the political warfare challenge, share experiences on countering authoritarian state operations, strengthen national and community resilience, train and equip local personnel in priority skills, and coordinate deterrence and defensive activities. Advances in these basic denial operations across the coalition would enhance the security of all member states and markedly strengthen the headwinds that confront authoritarian state political warfare operations.

7. Assist the Vulnerable. The case studies in Annex A highlight several categories of community that are exposed to Russian and Chinese political warfare offensives and need special protection. The Russian and Chinese diasporas in many countries deserve particular attention and assistance. Many, if not most, of these people would prefer to live their lives without having to confront interference and coercion by authoritarian agencies. Hence, coalition countries should institute programs to reassure diaspora communities, support them with independent media and other information flows, and provide protective mechanisms that can be activated when these people receive unwanted advances or are pressured or coerced by foreign agents or organizations.

Small nation states and other isolated communities are another category that is particularly vulnerable to Russian and Chinese political warfare operations. These modest societies are often ill-equipped to resist well-funded political warfare offensives. They should have a special place within the anti-authoritarian coalition. Many types of assistance could be made available by the larger and wealthier states to help them build their resilience and reinforce their sovereignty and independence.

8. Tailored Organizational Development. Most allied and partner countries will need to restructure elements of their security and related agencies in order to optimize their effectiveness in countering Russian and Chinese political warfare operations. This will likely require a refinement and expansion of some government agencies, the development of new planning

and command and control staffs, and the creation of tailored coordination mechanisms across government, many non-government entities, and beyond national boundaries to other coalition partners.

9. Build Human Capital for Political Warfare. Many of the skills required to counter authoritarian political warfare operations are in short supply. This suggests a need for special education and training programs as well as new arrangements for harnessing key skills in business and the broader community through innovative contracting or special reserve force arrangements. One of the essential products of these efforts should be short courses and advisory services tailored to the specific circumstances of relevant professions from government administrators to business leaders, teachers, journalists, lawyers, and other professionals.

10. Prepare for the Long Haul. Countering and then defeating authoritarian political warfare operations would unlikely be achieved quickly. It may require a sustained coalition effort over several decades. In consequence, it would make good sense to invest in staffs, organizational structures, legal frameworks, strategic and operational centers of excellence, and other key capabilities that will add value well beyond the short term.

11. Recalibrate the Management of Risk. At the end of the Cold War it wasn't just the physical and organizational capabilities to conduct political warfare that atrophied in the West. It was also the appetite amongst officials and the general public to take strategic risks. The prevailing attitude within many government agencies and also within the citizenry of many Western states was that with the fading of obvious existential threats, the need to take risks to protect key interests also receded.

This deep culture of risk aversion is a serious constraint on effective coalition counters to Russian and Chinese political warfare. As things currently stand, the publication of a threatening article in a Russian and Chinese publication or media channel is sometimes sufficient to stop a Western state in its tracks and deter it from contemplating serious counteraction. Given the nature of political warfare, these instinctive behaviors need to be reviewed and recalibrated.

12. Be Prepared to Pay a Price. One of the reasons authoritarian states conduct political warfare operations is that they can afford to do so with modest budgets. It is often overlooked that Western allies and their partners could deploy a powerful set of relatively inexpensive countermeasures. The key information, media, cyber, economic defense, immigration control, and other measures required to conduct effective denial operations would require reasonable budgets, but, based on the U.S. and allied experience from the Cold War, they would be relatively modest.

The more prominent obstacles to effective Western and partner political warfare defenses are not financial. They are the difficulties of implementing appropriate bureaucratic changes and the willingness of national leaderships and civilian communities to stand firm in the face of foreign interference, coercion, and reprisals. These challenges can be expected to test the will

of Western and partner countries to take a firm stand and defend core values, freedoms, and national independence.

The Western allies and their partners face a clear strategic choice. If they retain their current habit of reactive and mostly weak and largely uncoordinated responses to political warfare incidents, they will continue to be outmaneuvered and potentially face other serious problems. Most notably, it would increase the risk that when future Chinese or Russian political warfare operations challenge a vital Western interest, the United States, its allies, and its partners will have few practical options other than to escalate. The imperatives to respond by launching major conventional operations could be powerful and, in some circumstances, irresistible.

The leaderships of Western and partner countries do, however, have another option. They can choose to address the realities of Russian and Chinese political warfare directly; they can develop a clear strategic concept for deterring, defending against, and defeating such operations; and they can build and start to operate the suite of instruments that are likely to prevail.

Strong movement in this direction would be a strategic turning point. It would substantially increase the headwinds for Moscow's and Beijing's political warfare offensives, strengthen the coherence of Western and partner defenses, and markedly boost the morale of the democratic and partner states. It would signal "game on" in the political warfare struggle. And, very importantly, it would deliver to the United States, its allies, and its partner states the real prospect of being able to win without fighting.

CHAPTER 10

Recommendations

Diagnosing the Challenge

1. National leaders should speak frequently about the core principles that underpin the Western democracies and their international partners. They should champion democratic choice; free elections; the freedoms of speech, association, assembly, and religion; and the rule of law. The goal should be to draw a stark contrast between these foundational principles and those of the powerful authoritarian states, as well as to strengthen national and international understanding of the principles that Western and partner countries are prepared to fight to defend.

2. Western and partner governments need to explain to their citizenry and to the broader international community the threat posed by authoritarian state political warfare and make the case for taking serious countermeasures. Among the direct and indirect measures worth consideration are:

- Major Congressional or Parliamentary speeches.
- Congressional or Parliamentary committee investigations or independent commission reports.
- Annual departmental or agency reports to Congress or Parliament on foreign political warfare and related operations.
- Presentations and briefings by career government officials on authoritarian state political warfare operations.
- The direct or indirect funding of think tank and academic reports on foreign political warfare and related topics.
- Detailed government or agency reporting on specific foreign political warfare operations and illegal acts.

- The periodic background briefing of accredited national security journalists and media managers.
- The encouragement of professional conferences and university courses that detail the nature of authoritarian political warfare and the practical options for Western and partner country countermeasures.
- The encouragement of media organizations to strengthen their expertise in the field of authoritarian state political warfare and increase their reporting of relevant matters.

The overall objective would be substantially improved transparency. These and related steps in the information domain would be designed to direct intense “sunshine” on foreign political warfare operations, markedly improve official and public knowledge and understanding, and engage all Western and partner citizens in discussions and debates about how best to respond.

3. Western and partner governments should strengthen intelligence collection, assessment, and reporting of authoritarian political warfare strategy, doctrine, operations, and tactics. One aspect deserving attention is the further development of political warfare indicators that can provide early warning of authoritarian state operations not only within coalition states but also within other democratic states and elsewhere.¹²⁶

Developing Effective Strategy

1. Clarify the goals of the Western allies and their partners in combating authoritarian state political warfare and develop a theory of victory. There is a need to spell out the characteristics of a Western and partner victory, the pre-conditions for winning, and the necessary sequence of events. Importantly, the strategy should clarify whether the central coalition goal is to force a cessation of authoritarian state political warfare and instill greater caution in Moscow and Beijing or, alternatively, to facilitate the demise of these regimes and their replacement by liberal democratic alternatives.
2. Develop a compelling narrative (or more likely a family of allied and partner narratives) that will drive public and international support for the political warfare counteroffensive.
3. Develop a tailored strategic concept that promises powerful effects but is also sufficiently flexible to provide meaningful roles for both large and small participating states. Many things would flow from the selected strategy:
 - Operational and tactical concepts.
 - Campaign priorities.
 - Many aspects of organizational and human resource development.

¹²⁶ See annex B for more initial thoughts on this recommendation.

- The most appropriate mechanisms for international consultation and coordination.
- The content and frequency of briefing and training required for key groups in participating societies, including politicians, national and regional government officials, business leaders, journalists, financial managers, and academics.

Assemble an Anti-Authoritarian Coalition

1. Forge a coalition of partner countries to cooperate in resisting authoritarian political warfare. This coalition of like-minded states would share intelligence (at varying levels of security), lessons learned, technical expertise, and training. When required, the coalition could deploy reinforcements to assist partner countries facing unusual challenges or extreme pressure. This coalition would also provide an organizational framework for coordinating counteractions, especially in the rapidly paced information and cyber domains and in some counterespionage fields.

2. Address key sub-issues of relevance, such as:

- Determining the key criteria for coalition membership.
- Defining the driving principles of the coalition and its counter-authoritarian strategy.
- Settling arrangements for both political and operational consultation and coordination.
- Agreeing appropriate protocols for intelligence exchanges, operational planning, staff training and development, and resource sharing.

3. Establish national and coalition structures to plan, develop, and conduct sophisticated multi-domain political warfare campaigns.

Develop a Formidable Political Warfare Arsenal

1. Build a diverse coalition toolkit for conducting and winning complex political warfare campaigns. This will likely require participating states to undertake initiatives in some or all of the following primary areas:

- Information operations including diplomacy, media activities, and cyber operations.
- Geostrategic operations in diverse domains and theaters.
- The development of special instruments for the international management of economic, finance, technology, and related domains.
- Military and paramilitary activities, including those to strengthen maritime, airspace, and border controls.
- Lawfare, or the use of legal and paralegal instruments.

2. Build the human capital base: the stock of people trained and equipped with the skills required to plan and conduct complex political warfare operations. This will be a demanding task for many reasons, including the fact that many political warfare operations will need to be conducted not on a whole-of-government or even a whole-of-nation basis but as whole-of-coalition activities. There will be many parallels with multi-national military operations. Individual training will need to be followed by small group tactical training, then larger group tactical training, and eventually complex multinational exercises and operations conducted in multiple theaters.

3. Special assistance will need to be provided to vulnerable domestic and international communities. Within most coalition states there will be a need to provide special support to diaspora communities that are being harassed or intimidated. Measures could include:

- Providing easy access to ethnic language media that is completely independent from authoritarian state ownership or influence.
- Providing special briefings on how to respond to unwelcome approaches by agents of the authoritarian regime.
- Providing “help lines” and generous legal assistance (possibly through an independent agency) to assist relevant ethnic residents deal with agents of authoritarian regimes.

Some ethnic residents may be recruited to play key roles in undermining and defeating authoritarian state influence, coercion, and subversive operations.

Some smaller nations and territories will have difficulty managing the diverse requirements of participating in information warfare operations. Those communities might be encouraged to focus on basic defensive or denial operations and be assisted in these efforts by training, equipment, and financial support contributed in part by larger members of the coalition. The coalition could also consider developing political warfare task groups that could be deployed to assist small communities and states when they are confronted by serious political warfare threats.

4. Early attention will need to be paid to the financial and logistic requirements of priority political warfare operations. These requirements will be modest compared to those of conventional military operations. Nevertheless, the specific priorities will need to be identified and costed at an early stage in order to provide clarity for national and coalition decision-making. These assessments will also need to take account of the fact that some categories of political warfare operation will probably need to be sustained for extended periods.

Exercising Political Warfare Leadership

1. There will be a need for the coalition countries to develop one or more centers of excellence in political warfare. The coalition will require access to the most innovative strategic, operational, and tactical minds and the most highly skilled political warfare operators and commanders to formulate, test, and exercise high-leverage capabilities. The best model for this is likely to be unconventional. It will need people with diverse professional backgrounds. This type of initiative will deserve early attention in any serious allied and partner countercampaign.

2. Finally, the senior political and administrative leaderships that play central roles in planning and conducting political warfare operations will need many types of support if coalition political warfare is to be very high quality, smooth-running, and operationally successful. This special assistance is likely to include:

- Intelligence reporting that is tailored not only in content and style but also in frequency and other characteristics.
- Professional staffs who are highly skilled in the field.
- Unusual levels and modes of access to political warfare commanders.
- Well-tuned mechanisms for consultation at several levels between coalition states.
- Special arrangements to facilitate personal networking between relevant staffs and both government and non-government participants. These arrangements will be critical at the national level but also important internationally across the coalition.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRP	Asian Conference of Religions for Peace
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organization
ASPERTINA	Chinese-Indonesian Natives Association
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
C4ISR	Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
CCECC	China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNMI	Commonwealth of Northern Marianas
COFA	Compacts of Free Association
CPAFFC	Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries
CPSU	Communist Part of the Soviet Union
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CRI	China Radio International
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ETG	Exhibition and Travel Group
ETV+	Estonian Television
FPCI	Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia
FSM	Federation of Micronesia
IPTI	Chinese-Indonesian Youth Association
IXP	Internet Exchange Point
LIPI	Indonesian Institute of Sciences
MP	Member of Parliament
NSDD	National Security Decision Directive
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OSRN	Oceania Silk Road Network
PIF	Pacific Island Forum
PNG	Papa New Guinea
PRCANZ	Peaceful Reunification of China Association of New Zealand
RAPI	Russian Association for Baltic Studies
RMI	Republic of Marshall Islands
RT	Russian Television
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
USIA	United States Information Agency

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