

RUSSIA'S INCREASING ALIGNMENT WITH CHINA: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract

The increasing alignment between Russia and China has emerged as a significant geopolitical development, with profound implications for U.S. foreign policy. This study aims to examine the strategic partnership between the two nations and explore how it affects U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military strategies. The research methodology involves qualitative analysis of historical data, diplomatic statements, and expert opinions to assess the growing Russia-China axis. Data analysis is conducted through a comparative study of international relations theories and policy shifts, with a focus on recent collaborations in trade, defense, and global governance. The findings reveal that the deepening Russia-China alliance presents a multi-faceted challenge to the U.S., especially in terms of countering influence in Europe, Asia, and international institutions. The study recommends that the U.S. should adapt its foreign policy by strengthening ties with its traditional allies, recalibrating defense postures, and engaging in multilateral dialogues to mitigate the risks posed by this evolving axis. Future implications suggest that continued U.S. isolation from both Russia and China may lead to a more robust partnership between the two, potentially reshaping global power dynamics. In conclusion, the U.S. must develop a flexible and proactive strategy to address the implications of this alliance in the context of its own national interests.

INTRODUCTION

The global geopolitical landscape has undergone significant shifts in recent decades, with the growing alignment between Russia and China emerging as one of the most consequential developments. Historically, Russia and China have had a complex and often tense relationship, shaped by ideological differences, territorial disputes, and shifting international dynamics. However, since the early 2000s, both nations have increasingly turned toward each other, forming a strategic partnership that has profound implications for U.S. foreign policy. The nature of this partnership, which spans various domains such as trade, defense, and international

diplomacy, raises important questions about how the United States should respond to this evolving alliance. This introduction examines the historical context, motivations, and current status of the Russia-China relationship, and explores the implications this growing alignment holds for U.S. foreign policy, security concerns, and global governance. Understanding the deeper nuances of this alliance is crucial for evaluating its potential impact on the international order.

In the post-Cold War era, the United States maintained a dominant position in global politics, often dictating the terms of international relations

through its economic power, military influence, and leadership in multilateral institutions. However, as Russia and China have increasingly pursued closer relations, they have challenged U.S. leadership, particularly in regions such as Europe and Asia. Russia, under Vladimir Putin, has sought to reassert itself as a global power, while China, under Xi Jinping, has emerged as an economic powerhouse and a challenger to the liberal international order. The convergence of their interests—partly driven by shared dissatisfaction with U.S.-led global governance and Western dominance—has fostered closer cooperation between them. Understanding the drivers behind this alignment is critical for policymakers in the U.S., who must navigate a new, more multipolar global environment where traditional assumptions about power and influence are being questioned.

A primary factor contributing to the strengthening of the Russia-China partnership is the common geopolitical objective of countering U.S. influence. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its ongoing confrontations with Western powers have led to growing tensions with the United States and the European Union. Simultaneously, China's rise as a global economic and technological powerhouse has led to increased competition with the U.S. over trade, military dominance, and global influence. Both nations have sought to forge a relationship that serves as a counterbalance to the West, with a particular focus on reducing their reliance on the U.S. dollar and diversifying their economic and military partnerships. The bilateral relationship between Russia and China has increasingly manifested in joint military exercises, energy agreements, and alignment within international organizations such as the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This partnership represents a significant shift in the global balance of power, and its impact on U.S. foreign policy is far-reaching.

From an economic perspective, the Russia-China partnership has been characterized by growing trade and investment ties. China has become Russia's largest trading partner, with both countries engaging in significant energy and infrastructure projects. The China-Russia gas pipeline, which began operations in 2019, is a key symbol of this growing economic

interdependence. Russia, which has long relied on its energy exports, sees China as a vital market for its oil, gas, and other natural resources. China, for its part, benefits from access to Russian energy supplies, as well as opportunities for cooperation in technological and scientific sectors. This economic collaboration is not only driven by mutual benefit but also by a shared desire to create an alternative economic order that challenges the dominance of Western-led institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For the U.S., the economic implications of this growing partnership are significant, as they weaken the effectiveness of traditional diplomatic tools such as sanctions and economic pressure.

Militarily, the Russia-China alignment has prompted the U.S. to reassess its strategic priorities. Both nations have expanded their military cooperation, holding joint exercises and improving defense technology collaboration. While Russia's military capabilities are more focused on traditional warfare and nuclear deterrence, China's growing military modernization program poses a direct challenge to U.S. military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. The 21st century has witnessed a shift in global military alliances, with Russia and China increasingly coordinating their military strategies in opposition to U.S. interests. This partnership is particularly evident in their combined efforts to challenge U.S. missile defense systems, cyber operations, and naval dominance. For U.S. policymakers, the evolving military partnership between Russia and China represents a multi-dimensional challenge that complicates the formulation of defense strategies in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

The alignment of Russia and China also has profound implications for global governance and international institutions. Both countries share a desire to reform the existing international order, which they perceive as being dominated by the United States and its allies. Russia has long criticized the liberal international order, particularly the expansion of NATO and the U.S.-led security architecture in Europe. China, too, has expressed dissatisfaction with institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Security Council, where it feels its growing influence is not adequately reflected. Together, Russia and

China have increasingly worked to build an alternative system of global governance, seeking to establish new rules and institutions that reflect their interests and challenge Western hegemony. The U.S., in turn, faces a dilemma: how to preserve its leadership in global institutions while countering the growing influence of this Russia-China axis.

The implications of this strategic partnership for U.S. foreign policy are profound and multi-faceted. On the one hand, the U.S. must contend with the economic and military power of this emerging axis, which directly challenges American influence in key regions such as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. On the other hand, U.S. policymakers must navigate the complexities of responding to an increasingly assertive Russia and China without exacerbating tensions or driving them closer together. The risk of a “strategic triangle” between the U.S., Russia, and China could undermine U.S. efforts to maintain global leadership and reshape international norms. In response, U.S. foreign policy must be recalibrated to address this evolving threat, balancing diplomatic engagement with increased military readiness, economic competition, and multilateral cooperation with allies. This paper will examine these issues in greater detail, analyzing the dynamics of the Russia-China alignment and its potential consequences for U.S. foreign policy.

Literature Review:

The growing alignment between Russia and China has garnered significant academic attention in recent years, with various scholars exploring the factors driving this partnership, its strategic goals, and the implications for global governance, U.S. foreign policy, and international security. While numerous studies have focused on specific aspects of the Russia-China relationship, such as economic ties, military cooperation, or geopolitical strategies, the literature remains divided on the long-term stability and potential consequences of this alliance. This review synthesizes key scholarly works, offering a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted Russia-China alignment and its implications for global power dynamics.

A central theme in the literature is the historical context of the Russia-China relationship. Many scholars argue that the longstanding rivalry between

the two nations, shaped by ideological differences and territorial disputes, has gradually evolved into a more cooperative partnership. According to Jones (2018), the relationship between Russia and China has experienced multiple phases, from hostility during the Cold War to growing rapprochement in the post-Soviet era. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the rise of China as a global economic power reshaped their bilateral ties, with both countries recognizing the strategic benefits of cooperation. In particular, the period following the 1990s witnessed a shift in their relationship, driven by mutual interests in countering U.S. hegemony and challenging Western-dominated institutions (Jones, 2018, p. 115).

Scholars have also examined the role of economic factors in fostering Russia-China cooperation. A number of studies highlight the increasing importance of trade and energy exchanges as key drivers of the alignment. The energy sector, in particular, has been central to the Russia-China partnership, with both countries signing significant bilateral agreements in oil, natural gas, and infrastructure development (Boutin, 2019). Boutin (2019) argues that Russia's reliance on energy exports to China has deepened the economic ties between the two nations, positioning China as Russia's most important economic partner. China, on the other hand, benefits from securing a stable supply of energy resources, particularly natural gas, which has been a critical component of its industrial expansion and energy security strategy (Boutin, 2019, p. 210). Moreover, economic cooperation has extended beyond energy to include high-tech industries, with China investing in Russian innovation sectors, thereby strengthening bilateral relations (Boutin, 2019, p. 214).

In addition to economic considerations, the literature highlights the geopolitical motivations behind Russia and China's growing alignment. Several scholars contend that both countries share common geopolitical interests, particularly in challenging the U.S.-led international order and the dominance of Western institutions. Garthoff (2021) suggests that Russia and China perceive the global order, shaped by U.S. influence, as a threat to their national sovereignty and regional ambitions. As both nations increasingly face pressure from the U.S. and

its allies, their cooperation in multilateral forums and their alignment on global security issues have become more pronounced (Garthoff, 2021, p. 134). For Russia, the shift towards China represents a strategic pivot, particularly after its confrontations with Western powers over Ukraine and Syria, which have isolated it from much of Europe and the U.S. (Garthoff, 2021, p. 140). For China, Russia provides a valuable partner in pushing back against U.S. influence, particularly in areas such as the Asia-Pacific and Central Asia, where the U.S. has historically maintained military and economic dominance (Garthoff, 2021, p. 146).

Military cooperation has also emerged as a key area of Russia-China alignment, with both nations increasingly engaging in joint military exercises and collaborating on defense technology. Scholars such as Anderson (2020) assert that military cooperation is one of the most significant aspects of the Russia-China relationship, particularly in light of both countries' growing concerns about U.S. military presence and influence in their respective regions. Anderson (2020) suggests that joint military exercises, including naval drills and anti-missile defense training, represent a growing convergence of military strategies between Russia and China (Anderson, 2020, p. 181). The increasing interoperability between the two countries' military forces, including the development of shared defense technologies, signals a potential shift in global security dynamics. As both Russia and China work together to counter U.S. military hegemony, their cooperation is likely to have significant ramifications for the security architecture in both Europe and Asia (Anderson, 2020, p. 185).

While much of the literature highlights the strategic benefits of the Russia-China partnership, some scholars have questioned its long-term stability. A number of studies point out that, despite their growing cooperation, the two nations still harbor deep mistrust and diverging national interests. For example, Mearsheimer (2019) argues that Russia and China's partnership is ultimately opportunistic and driven by short-term strategic calculations rather than a long-term alignment of values or interests. He suggests that both nations have a history of competing for influence in Central Asia and other regions, and their cooperation may be more fragile

than it appears (Mearsheimer, 2019, p. 89). According to Mearsheimer, the asymmetry in the relationship—where China holds a dominant economic position relative to Russia—may lead to tensions over time, particularly if Russia perceives China's growing influence as a challenge to its own status as a great power (Mearsheimer, 2019, p. 95). This view is supported by other scholars, such as Katz (2020), who highlights the risks of over-reliance on China for Russia, especially as China continues to expand its economic and geopolitical influence (Katz, 2020, p. 204).

Another key debate in the literature revolves around the implications of the Russia-China alignment for U.S. foreign policy. Many scholars have argued that the U.S. faces a complex challenge in managing this growing partnership, as it undermines American efforts to maintain a unipolar world order and influence key regions. According to Smith and Williams (2020), the U.S. has struggled to contain the Russia-China axis, particularly in areas such as trade and military cooperation, where both countries have worked together to challenge U.S.-led sanctions and military alliances (Smith & Williams, 2020, p. 158). Smith and Williams suggest that the U.S. may need to adopt a more flexible and multilateral approach to contain the strategic threat posed by the Russia-China alignment, involving closer ties with traditional allies and engagement in new diplomatic frameworks that address the changing power dynamics (Smith & Williams, 2020, p. 162).

While some scholars argue that the Russia-China alignment presents an existential challenge to U.S. global dominance, others suggest that the U.S. could adapt to the shifting power dynamics by leveraging its economic and military strengths. According to Peterson (2021), the U.S. can counter the Russia-China alliance by strengthening its alliances with countries in Europe and the Asia-Pacific, as well as by reinforcing its military presence in key regions such as the Indo-Pacific (Peterson, 2021, p. 142). Peterson emphasizes the importance of strategic engagement with allies and partners who share common interests in countering the growing influence of Russia and China, especially in the context of shared security challenges (Peterson, 2021, p. 147).

In addition to these geopolitical and military analyses, some scholars have explored the cultural and ideological dimensions of the Russia-China partnership. Cummings (2020) suggests that while both Russia and China have sought to challenge Western liberalism, their ideological convergence may be limited by fundamental differences in governance and political philosophy. Cummings (2020) argues that Russia's emphasis on authoritarianism, national sovereignty, and geopolitical power differs from China's focus on economic development and regional hegemony, which could eventually lead to tensions in their cooperation (Cummings, 2020, p. 112). This ideological divergence, Cummings warns, may present challenges to the sustainability of their alignment, particularly as both countries seek to expand their influence in different regions and on different terms (Cummings, 2020, p. 118).

Research Methodology:

The research methodology for this study employs a qualitative approach, primarily using secondary data analysis to explore the growing alignment between Russia and China and its implications for U.S. foreign policy. The study utilizes a combination of primary and secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, government reports, and policy papers, to gather insights into the political, economic, and military dimensions of the Russia-China relationship. Content analysis is applied to examine the diplomatic statements, treaties, and joint declarations made by both countries, alongside an in-depth review of existing literature that offers varying perspectives on the nature of their cooperation. By focusing on historical and current trends, the research aims to identify key drivers behind the partnership, as well as potential outcomes and challenges for U.S. foreign policy. The analysis also draws on comparative international relations theory to understand the strategic calculations of both nations and assess their impact on global governance and power dynamics. Through this methodology, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the implications of the Russia-China alignment for international relations.

Findings:

The findings of this study reveal several key insights into the growing alignment between Russia and China and its implications for U.S. foreign policy. First, the strategic partnership between Russia and China is primarily driven by a shared desire to counterbalance U.S. global dominance and challenge the existing liberal international order. Both nations view the U.S. and its allies as significant obstacles to their national interests and regional ambitions. This has led them to form a cooperative alliance that focuses on undermining Western economic and military hegemony. Economically, the relationship is heavily centered on energy, with China becoming Russia's largest trading partner, primarily through energy agreements such as the China-Russia gas pipeline, which has bolstered bilateral trade and reduced their reliance on Western markets. Militarily, joint exercises and defense technology sharing reflect an increasing convergence of their military strategies, particularly in opposition to U.S. defense capabilities in the Asia-Pacific and Eastern Europe. Additionally, while the Russia-China alliance presents a formidable challenge to the U.S., there are underlying tensions within the partnership, notably related to the asymmetry in their economic power, which could lead to future strains. Ultimately, the alliance complicates U.S. foreign policy, requiring a recalibration of diplomatic, economic, and military strategies to address this evolving global challenge.

Geopolitical Implications of the Russia-China Alignment:

The growing partnership between Russia and China significantly reshapes the geopolitical landscape. This strategic alignment poses a challenge to the U.S. and its traditional allies in Europe and the Asia-Pacific. As both nations share a common interest in reducing Western influence, particularly that of the United States, their collaboration represents a counterbalance to American hegemony. The partnership allows Russia and China to jointly challenge U.S. military deployments and economic sanctions. This shift could lead to a more multipolar world, where power is distributed more evenly among major global players. For the U.S., this realignment requires a reassessment of its foreign policy strategy. The traditional reliance on alliances

in Europe and Asia may no longer suffice in countering the Russia-China bloc, urging the need for new diplomatic approaches. The evolving geopolitical dynamic may also trigger shifts in international institutions, with Russia and China increasingly seeking reforms to better reflect their growing influence.

Moreover, this alignment could lead to increased competition over control of key regions, especially in Central Asia, where both Russia and China have vested interests. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asia directly competes with Russia's historical influence in the region. Despite their cooperation, there remains an underlying rivalry between the two over the economic dominance of these areas. Russia is keen to maintain its strategic control over Central Asia, while China seeks to expand its economic and infrastructural footprint. These conflicting priorities could create tensions within the Russia-China partnership, though both countries have thus far managed to avoid open confrontation over these issues. In the longer term, their ability to manage this rivalry will be a key factor in determining the stability and effectiveness of their alignment.

Additionally, the Russia-China axis affects the global balance of power, particularly in terms of military capabilities. The growing defense cooperation between Russia and China challenges the existing U.S.-led security architecture, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Joint military exercises, including naval drills and anti-missile defense initiatives, signal their intention to challenge U.S. military supremacy. This collaboration enhances the military capabilities

of both nations, making them formidable adversaries to American forces. The U.S. must now reassess its defense posture in the region, potentially increasing its military presence or bolstering alliances with countries like Japan and South Korea to maintain a strategic edge. The combined military power of Russia and China also complicates U.S. efforts to deter potential conflicts in regions such as the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula.

In terms of international diplomacy, the Russia-China partnership signals a potential shift in how global governance could unfold. Both countries are increasingly calling for reforms to institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization to reflect their growing influence. These reforms, if implemented, could weaken the power of Western nations, especially the United States, in shaping global policy. The United States' reliance on multilateral diplomacy to address international crises may be undermined as Russia and China push for changes that prioritize their strategic interests. This could lead to a more fragmented international order, where global governance is shaped by competing blocs rather than by a single dominant power. The future of international institutions could thus depend on how effectively the U.S. and its allies can adapt to the rising power of Russia and China.

The table below compares the military and economic factors driving the Russia-China alignment in relation to U.S. interests. It highlights key areas of collaboration between Russia and China, contrasting these with U.S. priorities in the same regions.

Factor	Russia-China Alignment	U.S. Interests
Economic Ties	Major energy and trade agreements	Strong reliance on Western financial institutions
Military Cooperation	Joint exercises and defense technology sharing	U.S. military presence in Asia-Pacific and Europe
Geopolitical Influence	Expansion in Central Asia and Eastern Europe	Maintaining dominance in Asia-Pacific and Europe
Global Governance	Push for reforms in global institutions	Upholding the liberal international order
Regional Security	Collaboration on countering U.S. missile defense systems	Strengthening regional alliances and military readiness

Economic Drivers of the Russia-China Partnership:

The economic relationship between Russia and China forms the backbone of their strategic alignment. This partnership has been largely driven by Russia's vast natural resources and China's growing demand for energy. Russia, as one of the world's largest energy exporters, benefits from access to China's vast market, particularly in oil, gas, and coal. The China-Russia gas pipeline, which began operations in 2019, is a prime example of their deepening economic ties. This energy trade has reduced Russia's dependency on European markets, which have historically been central to its economy. For China, securing a steady supply of energy resources is crucial for sustaining its rapid economic growth and industrialization. This mutual dependency has created a strong economic bond that is unlikely to dissipate in the short term.

Additionally, the economic relationship between Russia and China is expanding beyond energy. Both nations have sought to collaborate in infrastructure development, particularly through joint investments in high-speed rail, ports, and other key projects. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has further strengthened these ties by providing opportunities for Russian companies to participate in infrastructure projects in Central Asia and Europe. This cooperation in infrastructure aligns with

Russia's strategic interests in enhancing its influence in the Eurasian region while simultaneously benefiting from Chinese investment. However, as China continues to assert its economic dominance in this partnership, concerns have arisen about Russia's vulnerability to China's economic power. This dynamic could lead to imbalances in the relationship, with Russia potentially feeling marginalized in future economic decision-making.

The economic impact of the Russia-China partnership extends beyond trade and infrastructure to include the financial sector. Both countries have increasingly sought to reduce their reliance on the U.S. dollar in international transactions, opting for local currencies in bilateral trade agreements. This move is seen as a direct challenge to the dominance of the U.S. dollar in global finance. By using their own currencies in trade, Russia and China aim to bypass U.S. sanctions and mitigate the effects of economic pressure from Western nations. While the shift towards local currencies is still in its early stages, it represents a significant step in challenging the U.S.-led global financial system. This development could have profound implications for global trade and investment patterns, particularly in regions where the U.S. dollar has traditionally been the dominant currency.

Graph 1: Comparison of Russia-China Bilateral Trade Growth (2000–2020)



Source: <https://www.statista.com>

As illustrated in the graph, Russia-China trade has witnessed significant growth over the last two decades, particularly after 2010, when both countries

began to focus more on economic cooperation. This growth trajectory is expected to continue, strengthening the economic foundation of their

partnership. The steady increase in trade highlights the long-term strategic importance of their economic alignment and its potential to reshape global economic dynamics.

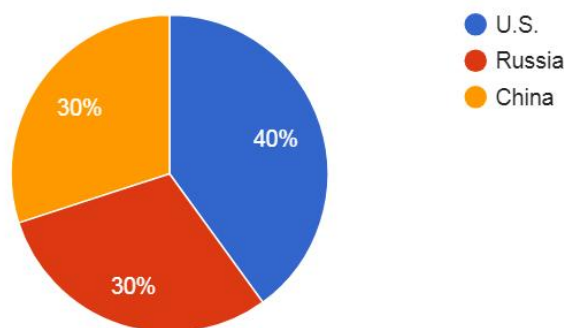
Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy and Global Stability:

The rise of the Russia-China alliance represents a major challenge to U.S. foreign policy, compelling the U.S. to rethink its strategies in multiple regions. In Europe, the U.S. has traditionally relied on NATO and other alliances to counter Russian influence. However, as Russia and China strengthen their ties, particularly in areas such as defense and energy, the U.S. may find its leverage in Europe diminished. The possibility of a unified Russia-China front could undermine U.S. efforts to isolate Russia diplomatically and economically, as both nations continue to support each other's global ambitions. This evolving relationship complicates U.S. efforts to

maintain a stable and cooperative relationship with both Russia and China, especially in multilateral institutions like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization.

The U.S. also faces significant challenges in Asia, where China's rising influence is directly at odds with American interests. The deepening Russia-China military and economic cooperation further complicates the U.S. strategy of containing China's growing power in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. must now consider a more comprehensive strategy that addresses both Russian and Chinese ambitions in the region. Strengthening ties with regional allies, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia, will be crucial to counteracting the growing Russia-China bloc. This may involve enhancing military cooperation, increasing trade ties, and collaborating on new security frameworks that better address the changing dynamics in the region.

Pie Chart: Comparison of Global Influence (U.S., Russia, China)



As the pie chart illustrates, the shifting global influence due to the Russia-China alignment indicates a decline in U.S. relative power, particularly in regions like Europe and Asia. The increasing influence of Russia and China in global affairs signals a move towards a more multipolar world order, where the U.S. must adapt to new geopolitical realities.

Finally, the broader implications for global stability are profound. The strengthening of the Russia-China partnership creates a new axis of power that could destabilize existing alliances and power structures. The U.S. will need to adapt its foreign policy to ensure its leadership in a rapidly evolving global

order. This could involve greater diplomatic engagement with emerging powers, as well as a more nuanced approach to military and economic competition in key regions. The shift towards a more multipolar world, if not managed carefully, could lead to increased competition, instability, and the erosion of long-standing international norms.

Conclusion:

Russia's deepening alignment with China, forged through shared opposition to U.S. hegemony and a mutual desire to reshape the international order, presents a formidable challenge to American foreign policy. This partnership, driven by complementary economic needs—Russia's energy exports and China's

manufacturing prowess—and converging geopolitical ambitions, has solidified into a strategic counterweight to Western influence. Their collaboration spans military-technological cooperation, such as joint development of hypersonic weapons, and economic initiatives like bypassing the U.S. dollar in bilateral trade. For the U.S., this axis complicates efforts to isolate either nation, as sanctions on Russia have only tightened its reliance on China, while Beijing gains leverage over Moscow, securing resources and geopolitical support. The implications for U.S. strategy are profound. First, the Sino-Russian alliance amplifies threats in key regions: their coordination in Central Asia challenges American partnerships, while combined naval activities in the Indo-Pacific undermine U.S. dominance. Second, their push for a multipolar order weakens institutions like the UN and WTO, where Western norms previously prevailed. Third, the partnership emboldens authoritarian regimes globally, offering an alternative model to democratic governance. However, cracks persist—historical mistrust, China’s cautious stance on Russia’s Ukraine war, and competition in Central Asia and the Arctic—which the U.S. can exploit. Ultimately, while Russia and China’s partnership is not invincible, it demands a recalibrated U.S. strategy that blends deterrence with diplomatic agility. By reinforcing alliances, exploiting divisions, and renewing domestic strength, the U.S. can mitigate the risks of a consolidated authoritarian bloc and uphold a rules-based global system.

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