



United States House Armed Services Committee

Hearing on “The Department of Defense’s Role in Long-Term Major State Competition”

February 11, 2020

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

It is an honor and privilege to address you today on this critical issue for United States national security. Thank you for inviting me to speak.

Great-power competition has already shaped our world. Now its outcome will define our future. US leadership, our allies’ security and the stability of the international order face increasing geopolitical contestation. As the 2017 US National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy correctly assessed, Russia and China are undermining US power, influence, and interests. Since 2017, these activities have become even more pervasive. Our resolve to respond must be commensurate. Most notably, Russian-Chinese military, economic, and political cooperation has grown, intensifying challenges to the United States. Both countries have increased investment in and development of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), with potentially dramatic effects on our national security and the nature of geostrategic contestation.

While both Russia and China seek to position themselves as long-term competitors to the United States and our allies, the nature of the threat presented by each differs. In this testimony, I will focus on the medium and long-term threats emanating from Russia and how the US should respond.

In brief, Russia presents a unique challenge to the United States. It is simultaneously a country in decline and a global power with proven ability and determination to undermine US interests in multiple military and non-military arenas. Russia has been particularly adept in using asymmetric tools of political warfare – information operations and cyber attacks – to project power, undermine democratic institutions, and

influence public opinion. Russia faces a set of serious security challenges and domestic constraints that limit its ability to act on its great power ambitions. In particular, Russia will never be able to outmatch the United States and NATO in conventional military competition. For this reason, Moscow will continue to seek out, develop, and coopt low-cost but high-impact tools of asymmetric warfare – digital technologies, information warfare, and cyber operations – to challenge the United States and our allies.

The United States, in large part due to the work of this Committee, has renewed American commitment to our European allies, particularly in NATO’s eastern flank. In deterring Russian political warfare, however, the United States lags. As new digital technologies advance at an increasingly rapid pace, the gap between the threats they present and our ability to respond will only widen. Digital authoritarianism — the use of digital information technology by authoritarian regimes to surveil, repress, and manipulate domestic and foreign populations — is reshaping the power balance between democracies and autocracies.<sup>1</sup> Russia and China are both engaged in developing and exporting their own models of digital authoritarianism, challenging US national security interests in various parts of the world. For this reason, among others, it is critical that the United States government continue to invest not only in conventional but also non-conventional deterrence capabilities.

This testimony proceeds in four parts:

1. **Domestic reality and implications for foreign policy:** Russia’s economics and politics both fuel and constrain the Kremlin’s foreign policy.
2. **Global activities:** Since Russia’s illegal annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea and invasion of the Donbas in 2014, the Kremlin has stepped up its global interventions (both military and non-kinetic). Today, Russia seeks to contest US interests not just in Ukraine, but also in Syria, where its 2015 intervention and operations since then have decisively shifted the trajectory of the conflict in Bashar al Assad’s favor, and in parts of Africa and South America, where Russian proxy military forces such as the Wagner Group, are increasing operations.
3. **The US response:** Since 2017, the United States has invested in both military and non-military deterrence and containment measures with a renewed commitment to the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), support for counter-disinformation efforts via the US Department of State, and an assertive cyber strategy. The 2020 NDAA, in particular, took important steps to counter Russian malign activities in the non-kinetic domain.
4. **Where the US should continue to do more:** The US should support Europe’s efforts to do more for its defense, such as the UK-led Combined Joint Expeditionary Force and French-led European Intervention Initiative. At the same time, the US should continue uninterrupted funding for EDI. Most notably, the US should continue to strengthen its efforts to deal with Russian political warfare while developing a comprehensive strategy to counter digital authoritarianism and respond to new threats emanating from emerging technologies.

## 1. Russia’s domestic reality

### Economic overview

Russia, the largest country in the world by land area, has disproportionately low economic performance: Russia’s \$1.7 trillion GDP is roughly equivalent to that of Spain and it contributes less than 2 percent to the global economy. In 2008, Russia’s economy entered a period of stagnation, which continues today,

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<sup>1</sup> Polyakova, Alina and Chris Meserole. “Exporting Digital Authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese Models.” The Brookings Institution, August 2019. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP\\_20190827\\_digital\\_authoritarianism\\_polyakova\\_meserole.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP_20190827_digital_authoritarianism_polyakova_meserole.pdf)

with growth projected at 1-2 percent in 2020 and for the foreseeable future. A central reason has been the failure to diversify away from Soviet-era dependence on natural resource exports, most notably hydrocarbons. Gas and oil exports make up approximately 50 percent of the Russian federal budget, making the economy vulnerable to energy-price fluctuations. Small businesses make up merely a fifth of the economy; that share is shrinking.<sup>2</sup>

Almost every aspect of the Russian economy is in urgent need of reform. But the government's pension and tax reforms, implemented in 2018, led to nationwide protests.<sup>3</sup> Fears of further political unrest coupled with endemic corruption have meant that the regime has preferred stability at the cost of faster growth or deregulation. US and European sanctions on Russian financial and energy business sectors have only exacerbated the sluggish growth trajectory.

However, Russia's economic picture is more complex than a narrative of stagnation would suggest. The government maintains a sovereign wealth fund of more than \$125 billion, a government budget surplus that hit almost 3 percent of GDP in 2018 and a low net public debt of 15 percent.<sup>4</sup> Russia also has a stable and relatively low inflation, a sustainable banking sector and a free-floating exchange rate that leaves the ruble less dependent on oil prices than before.<sup>5</sup> These measures provide a short-term cushion for weathering price shocks in oil and gas markets. In the face of US and European sanctions, the Russian economy has proven remarkably resilient even if its long-term economic trajectory remains bleak.

### **Political situation**

In his annual state-of-the-nation speech on January 15, Vladimir Putin called for constitutional changes that led to a government reshuffling, including the resignation of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who was replaced by the politically unknown head of Russia's Tax Service, Mikhail Mishustin. Putin named Medvedev to a newly created post: Deputy Chairman of the Security Council. The changes, still ongoing, will likely solidify Putin's position as the leader of Russia for the foreseeable future while shielding him from the (small) risk associated with presidential elections. The proposed changes weaken the presidency by upgrading the status of the State Council and giving the State Duma a greater role in appointing cabinet ministers. It is likely that once the changes are fully implemented, the State Council would become the country's primary executive authority. Putin would then be named the head of the council, effectively turning him into Russia's supreme ruler for life. The recent changes do little to change the fundamental reality that Putin is in charge. Moreover, "Putinism" – the system of personal power, corruption, authoritarianism, nationalism, and anti-Western (especially anti-US) policies are likely to continue.

Putin's popularity remains high – about 68 percent in the most recent Levada poll.<sup>6</sup> But it has declined from the astronomical level it reached after the invasion of Ukraine in 2014. 52 percent of Russians think

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<sup>2</sup>"Russia's Small Businesses Contribute Just 20 percent of Economy." The Moscow Times, January 28, 2020.

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/01/28/russias-small-businesses-contribute-20-percent-russia-economy-a69063>

<sup>3</sup> Kuzmin, Andrey. "Russian Police Detain Hundreds Protesting Against Pension Reform." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, September 10, 2018.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-politics/russian-police-detain-hundreds-protesting-against-pension-reform-idUSKCN1LP05A>

<sup>4</sup> Aris, Ben. "Russia's Net Public Debt Falls to Zero." The Moscow Times. The Moscow Times, September 11, 2019.

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/09/11/russias-net-public-debt-falls-to-zero-a67238>

<sup>5</sup> Cordell, Jake. "Russian Banks More Stable and Transparent Than Ever, Central Bank Chief Says." The Moscow Times. The Moscow Times, February 9, 2020. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/08/russian-banks-stable-transparent-central-bank-a68103>

<sup>6</sup> "Indicators." Levada Center, January 1, 2020. <https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>

the country is moving in the right direction, according to the same poll. However, they are more interested today in preserving their eroding standard of living and fighting elite corruption than in foreign adventures. At the same time, political and social tensions are rising. Protest over economic and ecological grievances are common. Mass protests over the lack of the lack of political freedom took place in many cities last summer and were met with repression. It is not clear that Putin would win a free and fair election in Moscow, where dissatisfaction is high. In the regions, where Moscow's grip is weaker, dissatisfaction is rising, though appear controllable. All these tensions are likely to grow, but they do not pose any threat to the regime.

## **Military and nuclear posture**

Experts usually estimate that Russia spends approximately \$60 billion per year on its military.<sup>7</sup> A recent analysis, however, finds that Russia's effective military expenditure ranged between \$150 billion and \$180 billion annually over the last five years.<sup>8</sup> That figure is conservative: taking into account hidden or obfuscated military expenditure, Russia may well be spending \$200 billion a year.

In addition, Russia undertook an ambitious military modernization plan in 2009, which has resulted in targeted investments in key capabilities and weapons systems: hypersonic weapons such as Tsirkon<sup>9</sup> and Avangard,<sup>10</sup> along with next-generation air defense systems such as the S-500.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Russia has made significant investments in electronic warfare systems to disrupt NATO communications.<sup>12</sup> It has also made improvements in its precision strike capabilities, which it has tested extensively in Syria.<sup>13</sup>

The disruption of trade in military parts with Ukraine and Western sanctions on specific technical components has made the Russian military industrial complex more self-sufficient and less dependent on imports than it was before sanctions.<sup>14</sup>

Despite these recent improvements, Russia's military cannot compete with that of the United States and our allies. The US alone spends more than three times as much on defense as Russia does. Russia's real advantage is not military might, but its ability to act ruthlessly and decisively across a wide spectrum of kinetic and non-kinetic warfare, and to absorb economic pain as a consequence of its actions. Russia faces serious long-term security challenges, but unlike the United States, Russia does not have an

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<sup>7</sup> "World Military Expenditure Grows to \$1.8 Trillion in 2018." SIPRI, April 29, 2019. <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2019/world-military-expenditure-grows-18-trillion-2018>

<sup>8</sup> Kofman, Michael, and Richard Connolly. "Why Russian Military Expenditure Is Much Higher Than Commonly Understood (As Is China's)." War on the Rocks, December 15, 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/why-russian-military-expenditure-is-much-higher-than-commonly-understood-as-is-chinas/>

<sup>9</sup> Rei, David. "Putin Confirms Development of Russia's Hypersonic Cruise Missile Called Tsirkon." CNBC, February 20, 2019. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/20/putin-confirms-tsirkon-russian-hypersonic-cruise-missile.html>

<sup>10</sup> "Avangard." Missile Threat. Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 27, 2019. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/avangard/>

<sup>11</sup> "S-500 Prometheus." Missile Threat. Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 15, 2018. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/defsys/s-500-prometheus/>

<sup>12</sup> Watling, Jack. "The Future of Fires: Maximising the UK's Tactical and Operational Firepower." Royal United Services Institute, November 27, 2019. <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/future-fires-maximising-uks-tactical-and-operational-firepower>

<sup>13</sup> Watling, 27

<sup>14</sup> Connolly, Richard. Russia's Response to Sanctions: How Western Economic Statecraft Is Reshaping Political Economy in Russia. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

alliance structure to mitigate those challenges. As my Brookings colleague Frank Rose, former Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, noted in his testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in June 2018, these factors mean that Russia will have to rely on its nuclear arsenal to guarantee its long-term security. Indeed, Russia has been modernizing its strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces for over a decade. “The most important element of its modernization program has been the development of new land-based intercontinental missiles (ICBMs) armed with multiple independent re-entry vehicles (MIRVs).”<sup>15</sup> The US, however, has been on an opposite trajectory to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in US security strategy.<sup>16</sup>

## Russian investment in AI and related technologies

Speaking to Russian students on the first day of the school year in September 2017, Putin squarely positioned Russia in the technological arms race for artificial intelligence (AI). Putin’s comment— whoever leads on AI will rule the world<sup>17</sup>—signaled that, like China and the United States, Russia sees itself engaged in direct geopolitical competition with the world’s great powers. AI is the currency that Russia is betting on.<sup>18</sup> In October 2019, Russia released its AI strategy, which sets out an ambitious ten-year vision for stepping up research and development, improving data quality and access, and training and recruiting talent.<sup>19</sup> The strategy does not specify goals and a budget, and Russia’s resource limitations mean that it will never be an industry leader in the AI space. The country trails the United States and China in terms of private investment, scientific research, and the number of AI start-ups.<sup>20</sup> In 2018, no Russian city entered the top 20 global regional hubs for the AI sector.

While Russia will not be the driver or innovator of these new technologies, it will continue to co-opt existing commercially available technologies to serve as weapons of asymmetric warfare. AI has the potential to hyperpower Russia’s use of disinformation—the intentional spread of false and misleading information to influence politics and societies. And unlike in the conventional military space, where the US and NATO are no match for Russia, the United States and Europe are ill-equipped to respond to AI-driven asymmetric warfare (ADAW) in the information space.

## How domestic forces shape Russian foreign policy

First, Russia’s mixed economic picture and recent political changes signal that absent Black Swan events, the Kremlin will be able to muddle through for the medium term by maintaining a stable but sluggish economy, repressing domestic unrest, and ensuring Putin’s continued grip on power. In terms of foreign

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<sup>15</sup> Rose, Frank A. “Russian and Chinese Nuclear Arsenals: Posture, Proliferation, and the Future of Arms Control.” The Brookings Institution, June 26, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/russian-and-chinese-nuclear-arsenals-posture-proliferation-and-the-future-of-arms-control/>

<sup>16</sup> “US Nuclear Posture Review.” 2018. <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>

<sup>17</sup> Exact quote was: “Artificial intelligence is the future, not only for Russia, but for all humankind. It comes with colossal opportunities, but also threats that are difficult to predict. Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world.” In: “Whoever leads in AI will rule the world’: Putin to Russian children on Knowledge Day,” RT, September 1, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/401731-ai-rule-world-putin/>

<sup>18</sup> Polyakova, Alina. “Weapons of the Weak: Russia and AI-Driven Asymmetric Warfare.” The Brookings Institution, October 25, 2019. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/weapons-of-the-weak-russia-and-ai-driven-asymmetric-warfare/>

<sup>19</sup> “On the Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Russian Federation.” Decree of the President of the Russian Federation. Translated October 28, 2019. [https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/t0060\\_Russia\\_AI\\_strategy\\_EN-1.pdf](https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/t0060_Russia_AI_strategy_EN-1.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Asgard and Roland Berger, “The Global Artificial Intelligence Landscape,” Asgard, May 14, 2018, <https://asgard.vc/global-ai/>

policy, this means that we should expect Putin to continue to drive Russian foreign policy on a course that will contest to US interests, seek out power vacuums to exploit, and intensify non-kinetic measures.

Second, the domestic prognosis means that Russia will continue to be a constrained foreign policy actor. Russians, according to surveys, are becoming far less interested in foreign adventures. The invasion of Crimea, which gave Putin approval ratings of 88 percent, is unlikely to be repeated: Russian citizens want their government to focus on domestic issues. Public opinion is also averse to casualties: during the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2015, the Kremlin went to extreme efforts to conceal that Russian soldiers were fighting and dying in the Donbas. Moscow also has limited resources to invest in foreign interventions, and the economic outlook suggests that this is unlikely to change any time soon. Putin has shown himself willing to take risks in his foreign policy decisions, but those risks were calculated to be of a limited nature in terms of blood and treasure due to Russian public opinion and a lack of resources. Third, while improved, the Russian military will not be able to directly contest that of the United States and our NATO allies in conventional warfare. It will, however, increasingly be able to carry out limited operations, and Moscow will seek opportunities to do so to test its capacities in specific theaters.

*The military inequities, economic and political constraints, and Russia's assessment of our vulnerabilities clearly suggest that Russia will continue to invest in tools of asymmetric warfare as a low-cost high-impact option for contesting US interests across the world.*<sup>21</sup>

## **2. Russia's global activities**

### **Russia's power projection in the Black Sea**

Although Russia increasingly expands its activity into the global arena, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has remained its key area of influence. The Kremlin seeks to halt Ukraine's rapprochement with the West and return it to the Russian sphere of influence. Russia is trying to realize this strategic goal by putting pressure on Ukraine to give special status to the de facto Russia-occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, negotiate directly with representatives of the so-called "republics" and thereby legitimize them. A near-term breakthrough in the settlement of the Donbas conflict is unlikely. There are no indications that Moscow would be ready to withdraw its troops, stand down its proxies, and hand over border control to Ukraine.

Russia has de facto turned Ukraine's Crimea into a military base, stationing at least five known S-400 air defense systems there, adding troops and other weapons to fortify its position. This build-up has intensified over the last two years, allowing Russia to establish dominance over the Black Sea."<sup>22</sup> Russian activities in Moldova, where it remains an active participant in the domestic political process, and in Georgia, where Russian armed forces sustain constant tension, support Russia's broader strategic goal of securing the Black Sea and threatening NATO allies in the region.

As my CEPA colleague, LTG Ben Hodges noted in a recent CEPA report, "the Black Sea is Russia's 'launching pad' for its destabilizing operations in Syria (which have contributed to hundreds of

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<sup>21</sup> Polyakova, Alina. "Weapons of the Weak: Russia and AI-Driven Asymmetric Warfare." The Brookings Institution, October 25, 2019. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/weapons-of-the-weak-russia-and-ai-driven-asymmetric-warfare/>

<sup>22</sup> Tucker, Patrick. "EXCLUSIVE: US Intelligence Officials and Satellite Photos Detail Russian Military Buildup on Crimea." Defense One, June 12, 2019. <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2019/06/exclusive-satellite-photos-detail-russian-military-buildup-crimea/157642/>

thousands of casualties in the Syrian civil war), its naval operations in the Eastern Mediterranean, and its continued occupation of approximately 20 percent of the Republic of Georgia. In many respects, the wider Black Sea region is of even greater strategic value to Moscow than the Baltic region because the Kremlin has shown willingness to use force more readily there than anywhere else along NATO's eastern flank."<sup>23</sup> The culmination of these activities has produced a new iron curtain across the Black Sea.

### **Russian activities further afield – intensifying proxy warfare**

In the Middle East, North Africa, and Latin America, Russia pursues a low-cost strategy, seizing every opportunity to expand its influence. Where the US disengages, the Kremlin sees the opportunity to fill a power vacuum and it has shown itself able to do so with relatively low resources. Syria has become the text-book example of this strategy. The 2015 Russian air campaign turned the trajectory of the conflict in favor of Bashar al-Assad. The Syria intervention also allowed Russia to retain access to the strategic Tartus naval base. Russia then took advantage of the withdrawal of US forces from the Kurdish territories and signed an agreement with Turkey on control of the Syrian border area. Using Ankara's disagreement with the US, Russia began supplying S-400 air defense systems to NATO member Turkey.

Russia has especially stepped up its proxy activities in Africa. Russia exploits unrest in Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, the Central African Republic, and other countries and offers to "export" the Syrian model – protection and support to authoritarian leaders in power. Russia is not only the largest supplier of arms to this continent but is also deepening political cooperation. This gives Moscow access to the natural resources of the countries in the region and provides an opportunity to create the image of Russia as a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism and a "security provider."

Part of that protection includes the deployment of Russian private military contractors (PMCs), of which the Wagner Group is the best known but not only such group active in Africa.<sup>24</sup> Wagner is another project of Putin's confidant Yevgeny Prigozhin, who is also the face behind the now infamous Internet Research Agency (IRA). Wagner mercenaries have been pouring into Africa in recent months.<sup>25</sup> In Libya, some estimate that up to 2,000 Russian fighters have been deployed to support Khalifa Hifter in the country's civil war.<sup>26</sup> In Mozambique, an estimated 200 Russian mercenaries are thought to be active.<sup>27</sup> As in Syria, Russia is developing a military port that would provide it with a permanent military presence in Somaliland in the Horn of Africa. Russian PMCs and advisers have also been active in the Central African Republic, where approximately 250 Russian mercenaries are training recruits.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hodges, Ben, Janusz Bugajski, and Peter Doran. "Strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank: A Strategy for Black Sea Coherence." Center for European Policy Analysis, 2019. [https://1f3d3593-8810-425c-bc7f8988c808b72b.filesusr.com/ugd/644196\\_8754c3428d9d4da0adb29bef6df2f5b4.pdf](https://1f3d3593-8810-425c-bc7f8988c808b72b.filesusr.com/ugd/644196_8754c3428d9d4da0adb29bef6df2f5b4.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Rondeaux, Candace. "Decoding the Wagner Group: Analyzing the Role of Private Military Security Contractors in Russian Proxy Warfare." New America, 2019. <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/decoding-wagner-group-analyzing-role-private-military-security-contractors-russian-proxy-warfare/>

<sup>25</sup> Sukhankin, Sergey. "Russian Mercenaries Pour into Africa and Suffer More Losses (Part One)." The Jamestown Foundation, January 21, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-mercenaries-pour-into-africa-and-suffer-more-losses-part-one/>

<sup>26</sup> Sukhankin, Sergey. "Russian Mercenaries Pour into Africa and Suffer More Losses (Part One)." The Jamestown Foundation, January 21, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-mercenaries-pour-into-africa-and-suffer-more-losses-part-one/>

<sup>27</sup> Schmitt, Eric, and Thomas Gibbons-neff. "Russia Exerts Growing Influence in Africa, Worrying Many in the West." The New York Times, January 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/28/world/africa/russia-africa-troops.html>

<sup>28</sup> Lister, Tim, and Clarissa Ward. "Putin's Private Army Is Trying to Increase Russia's Influence in Africa." CNN. Cable News Network. Accessed 2019. <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/08/africa/putins-private-army-car-intl/>

Prigozhin's two projects – Wagner and the IRA – came together in Africa as well. In October 2019, Facebook took down several disinformation networks that affected Madagascar, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Congo, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Sudan, and Libya. The broad disinformation campaign was linked to the Wagner Group, whose members were involved in setting up proxy media groups and contracting disinformation campaigns to local entities to obfuscate the link to Russia.<sup>29</sup>

*The lesson we should take from Syria, where Russia has now established itself as the key power broker for the region, is that where the US disengages, Moscow steps in to fill the void. In Africa, the Kremlin is positioning itself to do the same.*

### **3. The US response to date**

Since 2017, the United States has invested in both military and non-military deterrence and containment measures with a renewed commitment to the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), support for counter-disinformation efforts via the US Department of State, and an assertive cyber strategy.

#### **Support for European allies**

**ERI/EDI funding:** since 2016, the US Congress has significantly increased funding for EDI with the highest authorizations in the 2019 NDAA of \$6.5 billion. The funding for 2020 was reduced by \$624 million to \$5.9 billion. EDI is a critical part of our forward defense in Europe and sign of commitment to our allies. This commitment, along with strong US leadership in NATO, sends a strong signal to Russia that the United States is committed to European security.

- Congress should continue to provide uninterrupted support for EDI, which goes to support the US rotational forces on the ground in Europe.

**Baltic security:** In the 2020 NDAA, the US Congress allocated \$175 million in military aid to Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, including \$50 million to boost air defense capabilities. The Baltic Reassurance Act, introduced in the House of Representatives in June 2019, is also a strong signal of US commitment to the most vulnerable European allies.

- Congress should continue to renew the 2020 support to Baltic security.

**US-led NATO exercises:** US-led and NATO exercises are taking place at significantly increased tempo and scale. The DEFENDER-Europe 20 exercise will feature the largest US military deployment to Europe in 25 years.<sup>30</sup> These exercises play an important role not only in military readiness but in ensuring cohesion of the NATO alliance. The exercises will test Allies' interoperability in a variety of domains.

- It is vitally important that short-term political considerations do not lead to the cancellation, postponement or reduction of these exercises.

**US rotational presence in Poland:** During his visit to Poland in 2019, President Trump announced that a

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<sup>29</sup> Timberg, Craig. "Putin's Chef, Architect of Interference in 2016 U.S. Election, Is Now Meddling in African Politics, Facebook Says." The Washington Post. WP Company, October 30, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/10/30/putins-chef-architect-us-election-interference-now-meddling-politics-across-africa-facebook-says/>

<sup>30</sup> The majority of the drills will be in May and June; some 36,000 will take part, including more than 20,000 US troops, more than half of them based outside Europe. Locations include Germany, Poland and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. <https://www.eur.army.mil/DefenderEurope/>

further 1,000 US troops would be deployed in that country, adding to the 4,500 strong rotational force. The United States and Poland signed the Joint Declaration on Advancing Defense Cooperation in September 2019.

- The increased US military footprint in Poland has significant implications not only for that country's security but for neighboring states such as Lithuania.

### **Countering Russian political warfare**

Since 2017, the US Congress, and the defense committees of both Houses, have taken important steps to ramp up US efforts to expose, assess, and counter Russian asymmetric threats.

**Social Media Data and Threat Analysis Center:** The 2020 NDAA took important steps to counter foreign malign activities by recognizing that the Russian playbook is being adapted and deployed by other state actors by establishing the Social Media Data and Threat Analysis Center within the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). The Center, once operational, will enable better information sharing between social media companies to “institutionalize ongoing robust, independent, and vigorous analysis of data related to foreign threat networks within and across social media platforms will help counter ongoing information warfare operations against the United States, its allies, and its partners.”

**Responding to AI-driven threats:** The 2020 NDAA requires the DNI to report on the national security implications of “deepfake” video and audio manipulation technologies and any potential or actual use of such content as a tool of malign influence, including an analysis of Russian and Chinese state efforts to develop these tools.

**Support for counter-disinformation activities:** Since 2017, the US Congress via the NDAA has increased funding for the US State Department's efforts to counter state-sponsored disinformation campaigns. The Global Engagement Center (GEC) has taken important steps to provide critical funding to researchers, independent civil society groups, and independent media in frontline European states and elsewhere.

**An assertive cyber strategy:** The 2019 NDAA provided an important change to US cyber posture by opening up CYBERCOM to explore and develop offensive capabilities. It also established the Cyberspace Solarium Commission – a bipartisan, intergovernmental, and multisector body charged with charting a road map for defending the US and developing a comprehensive cyber strategy.

**Nord Stream 2 sanctions:** The 2020 NDAA introduced long-overdue sanctions on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The sanctions have already caused delays in the construction of the pipeline.<sup>31</sup>

The above efforts are critical steps in the right direction that will begin to posture the United States to effectively compete with Russia and China in the digital domain.

## **4. Where the US should do more**

**The US should support European allies' efforts to do more for their own defense.** In particular, it should continue to support efforts such as the UK-led Combined Joint Expeditionary Force and French-led European Intervention Initiative. It should also engage with the European Union's Common Security

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<sup>31</sup>Kantchev, Georgi. “Russian Gas Pipeline to Europe Faces Delay Due to U.S. Sanctions.” The Wall Street Journal, January 11, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-gas-pipeline-to-europe-faces-delay-due-to-u-s-sanctions-11578778710>

and Defense Policy (CSDP), particularly the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). It is vitally important that these new structures should complement US efforts, rather than replace, sideline or displace them. They can usefully contribute, for example, to improving the bureaucratic and physical environment for military mobility.

**The US should continue to invest in EDI and NATO while prompting allies to do more.** The US should recognize the achievements of those countries that have met NATO's 2 percent of GDP target while continuing to pressure those that do not. NATO is not "obsolete:" it is the most successful military alliance in history. Nor is it "brain dead." But US leadership and commitment is critical to sustaining US national security interests.

**The US Congress should require the DNI to regularly assess Russian malign activities around the world,** including an assessment of US interests and vulnerabilities. This assessment should be closely coordinated with the Department of Defense and Department of State. There should also be a publicly available report to raise awareness among the American public and the broader transatlantic policy community.

**The US should continue to strengthen its efforts to deal with Russian political warfare.** Information operations are only part of the Russian toolbox. While continuing efforts to monitor and rebut information attacks aimed at the US and its allies, the Administration should broaden its efforts to encompass the full spectrum of Russian "active measures." These include the exercise of political influence through organized crime, bribery, establishing economic bridgeheads, cyber-attacks, subversion, psychological operations ("psy-ops"), abuse of the legal system ("lawfare"), subversion, physical and mental intimidation of groups and individuals, and fostering ethnic, geographical, linguistic, political, religious, social and other divisions.

**The US should develop a comprehensive strategy for countering digital authoritarianism.** The digital space, including the information ecosystem, is in large part a battleground still fought on territory owned and controlled by the US. But Russia and China are intruding on that space and exporting their own models of digital authoritarianism across the world. Digital authoritarianism — the use of digital information technology by authoritarian regimes to surveil, repress, and manipulate domestic and foreign populations — is reshaping the power balance between democracies and autocracies. To respond to the threat, the US should:<sup>32</sup>

- **Designate regimes as "digital authoritarian"** if they routinely and purposefully employ mass surveillance without adequate safeguards and protections. Firms that supply digital authoritarian regimes should be sanctioned heavily—not just those in Russia and the US, but also companies based in the United States and Europe.
- **Tighten export controls.** Although China can match the U.S. in software quality, it has yet to master semiconductor manufacturing. Some of the equipment that China relies on for mass surveillance systems incorporate advanced processors and sensors that are only produced in the west. The U.S. and Europe have already begun restricting the export of such technologies to China and should consider expanding the use of export controls.
- **Work with Europe to produce a digital governance code of conduct.** The U.S. and Europe should work to develop common practices, rules, and systems of digital governance. A coalition

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<sup>32</sup> Polyakova, Alina and Chris Meserole. "Exporting Digital Authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese Models." The Brookings Institution, August 2019. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP\\_20190827\\_digital\\_authoritarianism\\_polyakova\\_meserole.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP_20190827_digital_authoritarianism_polyakova_meserole.pdf)

of democratic governments, tech companies, and civil society should develop a code of conduct which should include an articulation of operating procedures for addressing social media manipulation, common terms of use across platforms, and shared rules on personal data use. Where the export of digital authoritarianism is concerned, sanctions alone will not be enough to check its spread. Ultimately, the West will need to develop a democratic model of digital governance that can outcompete authoritarian ones. To do this, the technology sector and policymaking community in the United States and Europe will need to offer compelling models of digital surveillance that enhance security while still protecting civil liberties and human rights.