



PERSPECTIVES

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A 3-Pillar Strategy to Deflate China

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The West is facing an increasing challenge from China. There are several ways to meet that challenge: expanding, restoring, and deepening relations across different regions of the world; taking a revolutionary approach toward Russia; and, most drastically, acting like the Chinese.

In recent years, an “imperialist” economic shift toward China has been crystallizing in parallel with an ideological quake in the West’s vision of itself and role in the world. With Beijing penetrating African markets along with its steady expansion into Asia, its influence over the American and European economies has reached an unprecedented level. The Chinese are seizing the opportunity presented by the American retrogression and the preoccupation of major European powers with the challenges of terrorism and illegal immigration, as well as the COVID-19 crisis. The last of these was spawned by a virus that originated in China but that caused greater destruction, disruption, and distress abroad than at home.

The China of today is perhaps the greatest threat to the hegemony of Western liberalism to arise since the collapse of the Soviet Union three decades ago. The West is facing a double dilemma: how to deal with the Chinese menace on one hand, and how to manage increasingly tense relations with another global power— Russia—on the other. Both countries distrust the West.

The solution may lie in the dilemma itself: inoculate Moscow against Beijing. It is no secret that the countries do not enjoy warm relations. They were both ruled by communist regimes when the Americans successfully converged with the Chinese to repel the Soviets. This time, the equation can be inverted.

Given the situation, the West’s aggressive rhetoric toward Moscow is difficult to understand, as that approach is a gift to Beijing. Russia does not seem to

pose a direct and imminent threat to the West, as China does. It lacks the soft power resources its neighbor enjoys. Unlike the Chinese, the Russians are not manufacturing electric cars that can take over the German auto industry or dethrone Tesla, the American pioneer. The Russians are not the ones seeding language and cultural institutes internationally, as the Chinese are doing through their Confucius Institutes. Nor is Russia the country that has become one of the most important sources of AI technology. It is Beijing, not Moscow, that is investing heavily in ports around the world and putting entire economies at its mercy as it barrels toward becoming the world's number one economy in a few years. The demographic gap between the two countries is enormous, too: Russia's population of 144 million is one-tenth that of China.

The contrast is also considerable on a less visible level. Where Russia is slow and even inert, China is expansionary, active, and voracious. Thus, the same shoe does not fit on either foot. The West may want to reshape its policy and favor a settlement approach with Moscow based on common interests, paving the way toward devoting joint efforts to confronting China.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), or the Asian NATO, can play a multi-front role in this regard in the Asia-Pacific region. This strategic forum, which is comprised of the US, Australia, Japan, and India, serves as a suitable platform from which New Delhi can become the new face of neo-Western imperialism. It is qualified to do so as a major political, economic, and military power.

There are several reasons why India should take center stage. It has historically volatile relations with China, for one thing—their border dispute has claimed thousands of lives—and New Delhi supports Tibetan independence. India is also a traditional ally of Russia that can play a rapprochement role between Moscow and the West.

Furthermore, India has an industrial capacity that can, with more development, rival that of China. India has the necessary infrastructure to be the West's technological ally, which can help the latter reduce its technological dependency on China. New Delhi can also play a major role in the manufacturing and supply of vaccines and medicines in the post-COVID-19 era.

All of this would entail consolidating the Indian Ocean into the Pacific and bringing New Delhi into a league of allies. The current right-wing Indian government is steadily moving in this direction. It has deepened relations with the US, Australia, and the EU, has inaugurated a maritime partnership in the Pacific Ocean with France, and is laying the foundations for a strong strategic partnership with the UK.

The Quad's other member, Japan, is gradually changing its military doctrine and engaging actively in Asian affairs. Within this framework, Tokyo, and possibly Seoul, are eligible for a comprehensive engagement on the Taiwan issue in the western Pacific. And while Beijing is expanding in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia and investing in ports in Australia's sphere of influence, Canberra, along with New Delhi and the Philippines (the other US ally), can halt China. The Australians are on good terms with Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, and Vietnam (the latter two are former French colonies, so Paris can lend a hand), and will be keeping a close eye on the evolving situation in Myanmar, where the Chinese are intervening.

Post-Brexit Britain now has a wider margin in which to design its foreign policy, as can be seen in the British government's renewed talk about the doctrine of a "global Britain" and the need to continue its "historic mission" all over the world. India, Australia, and Canada have the advantage of special relations with London, their former colonial power, which should assist them as they share a trench against China.

The predicament in which the West may find itself is that China is turning into a refuge and source of the foundations upon which capitalism and consumerism live today. The West should look for more alternatives, in addition to India, so Beijing is not in a position to tighten its grip to the extent that abandoning it would amount to financial suicide. Reviving the economies of South American states, mainly Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela, is an essential step in this regard. These countries have great potential but were left on their own to face the repercussions of financial crises, the plummeting of oil prices, and COVID-19.

In Europe, the Nordic countries are key to promoting the centrality of Western civilization as a global cultural and civilizational hub. The European right wing, which is traditionally unfriendly toward the Chinese and more inclined toward the Russians, is gradually gaining ground—especially in Sweden, where right-wing parties are demanding alignment with the US and an end to neutrality.

Here, too, it is possible to capitalize on mutual suspicion, in this instance between Moscow and the Scandinavians. Giving the green light to the Nordstream 2 pipeline between Russia and Germany, which passes near the Nordic countries, would be a valuable prize for Moscow, and would help convince a reluctant Germany to join the cause against Beijing. American assurances to Scandinavians and Russians in this context would defuse tensions and transform the Baltic region into a common ground that launches broader future understandings on matters such as the rights of Russian

minorities in Eastern Europe and the Baltic, the issue of the US missile shield, and Moscow's military build-up in the Kaliningrad exclave.

Apart from this, there is a fundamental strategic gain to be had from a Western-Russian rapprochement that includes the Nordic countries and Canada: shipping routes, specifically the Northern Sea Route and the Transpolar Sea Route. The first, which lies within Russia's exclusive economic zone, could become a reliable new transport route from European to Pacific ports. Helping the Russians promote this corridor would have benefits for the West. The only hurdle is that Beijing hopes to benefit from this route as well by linking it with the Maritime Silk Road. With the Canadian-Russian row to defend sovereignty over the Northern Sea Route, the West and the Russians could reach a *modus vivendi* to share influence in both routes, with mutual guarantees that secure both sides' long-term strategy and ensure that they achieve their goals.

The compromise could be to enable Moscow to maintain a constant freight rate for the Northern Sea Route, which would provide it with significant income, in exchange for a binding Russian pledge to secure the West commercially from excessive Chinese exploitation of the route. Both sides can eventually profit from the Transpolar Sea Route, as melting Arctic ice caps are likely to increase traffic in both routes and boost their commercial gains.

In order to rein in Beijing, one has to act like the Chinese. This means the West will have to make a profound change in its mentality and ideology. Western political liberalism has to find new definitions that may include ceasing to raise the issue of democracy with non-democratic states, or, to put it another way, to combat Beijing by using a Chinese weapon.

The only way the West will be able to thwart harmony between China and non-democratic, non-Western-style regimes is to overlook their human rights records to a large extent. Both history and current events have shown that the more such regimes are pressed on this issue, the faster they run toward China. The spread of democracy, which has been pivotal to the West's foreign policy, must be deprioritized for the time being.

No doubt the West has enough shortfalls to fill the Pacific and Indian Oceans, but its global leadership is still, by and large, the "least bad" option when the alternative is handing the reins to a paranoid republic.

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