# Russian Natural Gas Affirmative

## File Explanation

This affirmative advocates to increase US efforts to assist Russia in developing natural gas from the Russian Arctic. It is similar to the science diplomacy affirmative, but has very different advantages. The central claim is that US sanctions (as a result of the invasion of Ukraine) on Russian Arctic natural development are harming Russia’s economy and Putin’s domestic legitimacy, risking the collapse of Russia. The affirmative claims to restore Putin’s legitimacy and increase US-Russian relations.

This affirmative is a very bad idea in the real world because it appeases Russia, but the advantages in this file are strong enough that it should be able to win debates. It also has a very strong impact turn to the appeasement disadvantage, where it claims that Russia losing in Ukraine will itself be the trigger point for escalating the Russian aggression.

#### What does the plan do?

While the plan is vague, think of it as doing two things:

1. It must lift sanctions on Russian natural gas production in the Arctic. While the plan does not say this directly, it’s a prerequisite for the plan to be able to function. US investment can’t increase if sanctions are intact.
2. It negotiates with Russia to offer US technology and economic investment in the drilling and production of liquified natural gas (LNG) in the Arctic. This means US companies like ExxonMobile would probably start more gas exploration and drilling as a result.

#### Russian Natural Gas Advantage

This is the strongest advantage to the affirmative. It makes two major claims:

1. Sanctions on LNG production in the Russian Arctic are strangling Russia’s economy.
2. They are also harming Putin’s domestic legitimacy, because they serve to deny Putin’s ability to project **great power status** to the Russian population.

The implication of both is that Putin’s regime could collapse. This could cause a violent transition to a new leader, or cause Putin to lash out with nuclear weapons out of desperation.

The plan claims to solve by giving Putin what he wants. US investment would greatly accelerate Russian natural gas production, and, most importantly, would be seen as a domestic win for Putin that would preserve his legitimacy.

#### Relations Advantage

This advantage claims that the plan’s offer of cooperation creates a lasting basis for cooperation with Russia on other issues, most notably arms control. It claims that arms control with Russia is important to create a set of agreements regulating emerging technology, all of which could have catastrophic risks.

This advantage is far weaker than the first advantage, and in most cases you should prioritize the first advantage. It’s unlikely that Putin will genuinely cooperate with the United States, and while the affirmative has some evidence, the negative evidence is of much higher quality.

However, the first advantage does not depend on genuine cooperation with the United States. So even if Putin ends up playing the United States, the first advantage still gives him what he wants.

#### Lift Sanctions Counterplan

This argument is a **plan inclusive counterplan (PIC)** that does the first part of the plan (lifting sanctions) but does not do the cooperation part of the plan. The net benefit is the China disadvantage, premised on the argument that a formal offer of economic cooperation on Arctic development will draw Putin away from cooperating with China on Arctic natural gas.

The best affirmative argument against this counterplan is that it does not solve Putin’s **status** concerns about great power, and the 1AC says that respecting Putin’s status – giving him a big win on the Arctic – is necessary for his legitimacy. The strength of this argument based on the claim that China treats Russia like a “junior partner” and that as long as Russia is forced to work with China, it will never truly achieve great power status.

## 1AC

### 1AC — Plan

#### The United States federal government should increase its development of the Russian Arctic by offering to invest in the natural gas projects, including offering technology for sub-zero drilling and joint ventures for liquid natural gas production.

### 1AC — Russian Natural Gas Advantage

#### Contention 1 is Russian Natural Gas.

#### US sanctions are killing Russia’s Arctic natural gas production. It’s the cornerstone of its entire energy strategy

Stephen Stapczynski, 2024 – reporter, Bloomberg “How Western sanctions are strangling Vladimir Putin’s Arctic gas ambitions” Economic Times, 5/5, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/how-western-sanctions-are-strangling-vladimir-putins-arctic-gas-ambitions/articleshow/109853247.cms> //DH

Russia’s fortress economy has proved remarkably resilient to an onslaught of Western sanctions. Two years after the Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine, it continues to fund a costly war and to prop up President Vladimir Putin.

But there’s at least one spot where the pain is very real.

The Novatek PJSC-led Arctic LNG 2 facility, on the icy Kara Sea, is a key part of Moscow’s plans to boost exports and replenish coffers. For months now, it has been ready to ship liquefied natural gas to new markets, alternatives to the once-lucrative European pipeline trade.

And yet, the vast new $25 billion operation is sitting virtually idle, the first piece of Russia’s energy production complex to be effectively curbed by US restrictions.

Russia has long sought to increase its share of the global LNG market, but the war and the subsequent sharp drop in overland exports to Europe have reinforced the importance of these ambitions. Moscow wants to expand LNG output three-fold by 2030, adding at least $35 billion in annual revenue.

Thanks to older operations, Russia is currently the fourth-largest LNG exporter globally, but restrictions on the flagship Arctic LNG 2 are crimping its aspirations to go further. More worrying for Moscow, they’ve provided a blueprint for any future Western efforts to rein in the Kremlin’s gas income by targeting operations like Yamal or Sakhalin II in the Far East — still delivering to customers in Europe and Asia.

“US sanctions are working surprisingly well,” said Malte Humpert, founder of the Arctic Institute, who has been monitoring Russia’s expansion in the region for over a decade. “Here, they’re really ahead of the curve. They blocked Arctic LNG 2 before it even started production, blocked the vessels before they could be delivered. With everything else, like oil or the shadow fleet, it’s always reactive.”

Since the Biden administration imposed sanctions on the Arctic LNG 2 facility last year, buyers in China and India — places that have bought and traded Russian oil, working around existing constraints — have refused to buy even discounted LNG. Lawyers in Singapore and London, meanwhile, have recused themselves from involvement in the project.

Even shipbuilders have been tangled in the curbs, with vessels worth hundreds of millions of dollars currently stuck at dry docks in South Korea. No one can buy or lease them. The gas, meanwhile, remains trapped at the facility.

Unlike oil exports, which have continued to flow despite a price cap and other limitations with help from a vast "shadow fleet", LNG is trickier to keep moving, in large part because of the more complex technology required to load and ship the super-cooled fuel.

Now the European Union, which still leans on Russian LNG and has been reluctant to restrict imports, is preparing to roll out some measures of its own. Europe isn't outright prohibiting the fuel, but the bloc's discussions signal that gas is no longer off limits as the war enters a third year.

Up for debate is a plan to ban the use of EU ports to re-export Russian supplies destined for third countries. That matters because Russian LNG plants in the Arctic region are exceptionally remote, so the fuel is usually first delivered to Belgium or France for re-export to Asia or another European port. Restricting this practice will stretch Russia's shipping fleet to breaking point.

The White House's National Security Council began turning its attention to crippling Russia's LNG expansion plans in 2023, about a year into the war, according to people with knowledge of the strategy. Officials there teamed up with the US State Department and Department of Defense to pick a target, eventually homing in on the Arctic LNG 2 project. They then brought it to the Treasury.

Now, as part of a wider plan to stop Russia from developing any new energy projects that might contribute significant revenue, the US wants to ensure the Arctic venture is "dead in the water," as Geoffrey Pyatt, Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources, told a conference last month.

There are good reasons for White House officials to target the facility, co- owned by the Japanese government, Chinese state-owned oil companies and France's TotalEnergies. While it certainly irks important allies, freezing Arctic LNG 2 has the benefit of hurting Moscow while causing only limited ripples in global natural gas markets. No less important for the Biden administration as an election nears, the fallout for US consumers is contained.

There are other advantages for Washington. LNG trade requires expensive specialized ships that can be tracked with satellite data, making the creation of an alternative fleet nearly impossible. While there are roughly 7,500 oil tankers today of varying sizes, the entire LNG industry is closer to 700.

Then there's the fact that Arctic LNG 2 requires a unique type of ship that can glide through thick ice. There were 21 ice-class tankers ordered for the operation, including vessels owned by South Korea's Hanwha Ocean Co. and Mitsui OSK. These are now struggling to find new owners. Of course, Russia can bring in its own capacity and LNG carriers are being built at the Zvezda shipyard—but even those have been delayed by sanctions.

"The biggest single constraint on the development of Arctic LNG 2 is the availability of tankers. That's the weak spot in the Russian overall strategy," said Thane Gustafson, a professor at Georgetown University who has monitored Russia's fossil fuel expansion for decades.

"The longer term outlook is clouded by the fact that the primary mission, which was to develop LNG for East Asia across the Northern Sea Route, is at this moment not possible."

Russia holds the world's largest share of natural gas, with about 20% of proven reserves, but it still needs to turn that into revenue. New pipelines are simply not being built fast enough to reroute sales, leaving only LNG—which Putin himself has identified as the future of the fuel.

#### This destabilizes Putin’s regime, for two reasons:

#### First is the Russian economy. It’s heavily dependent on Arctic natural gas, and sanctions and technology limitations are perceived as an existential insecurity threat

Mikhail Komin and Joanna Hosa, 2025 - Mikhail Komin was a visiting fellow at ECFR’s Wider Europe programme. He regularly provides analytical comments for media outlets such as TVRain, Forbes, Carnegie, Novaya Gazeta, and Radio Liberty. Joanna Hosa was a policy fellow at ECFR’s Wider Europe programme. She has held a range of positions at the European Commission, the European Union Institute for Security Studies, the Open Society European Policy Institute, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, and the International Federation on Human Rights. “The bear beneath the ice: Russia’s ambitions in the Arctic” European Council on Foreign Relations, 5/27, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-bear-beneath-the-ice-russias-ambitions-in-the-arctic/> //DH

Economic insecurity

The second insecurity shaping Russia’s Arctic policy is over the perceived threat to its ability to safely and effectively extract oil and gas. Russian officials frequently cite that around 80% of the country’s natural gas and 17% of its oil reserves are located within the Russian Arctic zone. The Kremlin has even dubbed the Arctic as its “resource base of the 21st century”. However, over two-thirds of these reserves—particularly those located offshore—are hard-to-cover and inaccessible due to technological limitations. At the same time, fields with more accessible extraction—mostly located in other regions of Russia—are gradually being depleted.

For a country that relies on oil and gas for 20% of its GDP, this is an existential issue. In response, Russian state companies actively sought partnerships with international firms to develop Arctic projects—fully aware of their dependence on foreign technology and despite tightening regulations on foreign investment in the Arctic. One frequently highlighted success story was the cooperation between Rosneft and ExxonMobil in the Kara Sea, which gave Russia access to technologies for deepwater drilling. This collaboration was widely publicised in Russia, along with Putin’s personal involvement, as a major strategic win.

That trajectory changed dramatically in 2014 when the US and the EU imposed sanctions on Russia after its illegal annexation of Crimea. These included restrictions on the export of technologies and equipment critical for Arctic resource development, effectively stopping or delaying parts of Russian Arctic projects and shutting down joint ventures like the one with ExxonMobil. The sanctions were a targeted blow to Russia’s ability to develop energy reserves, a move which the Kremlin saw as “clearly aggressive”. In the aftermath, a sense of strategic vulnerability and paranoia intensified among Russian officials, built on the idea that the West is pursuing a policy of taking Russia’s natural resources.

Having a meltdown

The Kremlin’s growing insecurities about Russia’s military and resource capabilities have deepened significantly since the invasion of Ukraine. The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO has left Russia effectively “encircled” by the alliance’s members in the Arctic. This intensified its feelings of vulnerability, as did the 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines. Although Russia had already halted gas deliveries through the pipelines, the attack exposed its inability to secure critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. In 2024, a successful Ukrainian drone strike on the Olenya airbase—located above the Arctic Circle and home to Russia’s strategic bomber aircraft—dealt another blow to Kremlin confidence.

In parallel, Western sanctions targeting Russia’s Arctic projects have intensified since 2022, with the 17th EU package adopted in May 2025. They have largely focused on a deep insecurity for Russia: liquefied natural gas (LNG). But the Kremlin has little room for manoeuvre against these measures. It has promoted projects like Arctic LNG 2 as replacements for lost pipeline gas exports to Europe. But Western countries have imposed successive sanctions aimed at undermining the project’s viability including blacklisting the operating company, restricting access to LNG ice-class tankers and targeting tanker operators. As a result, despite reported efforts by Russia to circumvent some of these restrictions on Western equipment, the timeline for Arctic LNG 2 has repeatedly been delayed.

These events have hastened the security dilemma in the Arctic. Russian officials now interpret nearly all NATO activity in the region as threatening and a “potential prelude to direct confrontation” while they widely perceive America’s Arctic strategy as overtly “confrontational” and Western sanctions as a targeted offensive.

By early 2024, Putin had announced plans to strengthen its “military grouping” in Russia’s north-west.

#### Second is status denial. Arctic natural gas production is vital to the perception of Russian great power status.

Medha Bhardwaj, 2025 – PhD research scholar in Russian and central Asian studies, JNU. “The Arctic Imperative: Russian National Identity, Resource Politics, and Geostrategic Power” Modern Diplomacy, 5/11, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/05/11/the-arctic-imperative-russian-national-identity-resource-politics-and-geostrategic-power/> //DH

For the Russian Federation, the Arctic constitutes a region of profound geopolitical and strategic significance. Alexandr Dugin referred to the Siberian North as Russia’s “geopolitical reserve.” Moreover, the Russian state has reinterpreted the perceived isolation and underdevelopment of its Arctic territories (Murmansk, Yamal-Nenets region, etc.) as a form of “spiritual plus”—a metaphysical advantage that, when combined with cutting-edge technologies, is envisioned as the foundation for establishing Eurasian dominance over what is portrayed as the moral and spiritual vacuity of the West. This synthesis of traditionalism and technological modernity reflects a broader narrative of Russian exceptionalism within the Arctic discourse.

In a highly symbolic act intended to assert its sovereignty and geopolitical presence in the Arctic, Russia planted a national flag on the seabed beneath the North Pole in 2007, utilizing the MIR-1 submersible to carry out the operation. This gesture, while largely ceremonial, underscores the strategic importance the Arctic holds in the Kremlin’s broader pursuit of derzhavnost—the aspiration to re-establish Russia as a formidable global power. The restoration of great power status remains a cornerstone of Russia’s foreign policy doctrine, and the Arctic has emerged as a critical arena through which Moscow seeks to project this vision.

The Arctic is significant for the internal legitimization of Vladimir Putin’s leadership, as it provides a platform for the consolidation of national identity and the revival of patriotic sentiment, both of which contribute to the. Thus, the Arctic is being instrumentalized as a geopolitical and ideological frontier, where domestic narratives of pride and sovereignty intersect with Russia’s global ambitions. Contemporary Russian Arctic policy is characterized by a dual rhetorical approach. Domestically, the Kremlin adopts a more assertive and nationalistic discourse, emphasizing sovereignty and great power status. Conversely, in international forums, Russia often presents itself as a cooperative actor committed to multilateral engagement and peaceful regional governance. This bifurcated communication strategy enables Moscow to advance its national interests while simultaneously cultivating an image of responsible stewardship in the Arctic.

Resource Distribution in the Russian Arctic

Critical Energy Assets

Among the most critical energy assets is the Yamal Peninsula, which contains some of the world’s largest reserves of naturals (20%). Liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Yamal is exported to international markets through the Sabetta port on the Kara Sea, supported by a fleet of ice-class tankers capable of year-round navigation. Beyond its strategic economic role, the development of infrastructure such as the Sabetta LNG plant has increased the demographic growth from approximately 300 to 30,000 during the project’s construction and operation.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the imposition of wide-ranging international sanctions resulted in the dwindling of energy exports from 1000 million euros in January 2022 to 750 million euros in January 2025. European Union member states, particularly economic powerhouses such as Germany, have historically been heavily dependent on Russian energy supplies. In recent years, Russian oil and gas accounted for approximately 25% of Germany’s total oil imports and 40% of its natural gas imports. Russia’s hydrocarbon wealth is concentrated in major basins such as Caspian-Volga, Yenisey-Khatanga, Western Siberia, Pechora, Vilyuy-Angara-Lena (Eastern Siberia), and Anadyr-Shakhlain (Far East), which have long supported its role as a major global energy supplier.

These resources are distributed via an extensive network of Soviet-era pipelines, including the Yamal-Europe pipeline—transiting through Belarus and Poland to Germany—and the Nord Stream 1 pipeline (Vyborg to Germany), which runs under the Baltic Sea. However, the imposition of sanctions has prompted EU member states to urgently seek alternative sources of hydrocarbons. Projects such as the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), which connects Azerbaijani gas fields to Turkey, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, which facilitates gas imports from African suppliers via the Netherlands’ Groningen fields, exemplify this strategic pivot. Given this reconfiguration of global energy flows, the European Union’s dependency on Russian hydrocarbons is projected to diminish significantly by 2030. In this context, Russia is increasingly redirecting its energy strategy toward the emerging economic centers of East Asia. Major consumers such as India and China—both facing growing energy demands—are poised to become key markets. Their geographical proximity to the Russian Arctic makes them strategically advantageous partners, particularly for Arctic-sourced energy exports. Russian energy giants, including Gazprom and Novatek, are actively expanding exploration and extraction operations in the Arctic, positioning themselves to meet this anticipated shift in demand.

#### Status denial in the Arctic could collapse Putin’s regime.

Elmore 21, MA in Security Studies, Captain, United States Air Force (Jeffrey, “RUSSIA’S CONTRADICTORY ARCTIC STRATEGIES: COOPERATION, CONFLICT, AND EVERYTHING IN-BETWEEN,” https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/trecms/pdf/AD1164907.pdf)//BB

Moscow’s use of Arctic competition as a tool of domestic politics is certainly not a new Russia strategy, as it has historically used the Arctic as an object of nationalistic legitimation an and a propagandistic distraction. Laruelle writes that in the early 20th century:

Stalin himself considered Arctic literature as a central propaganda tool. The Arctic came to be presented as the forepost of Soviet civilization, an authentic tabula rasa on which to build socialism. This made it possible to celebrate the Stalinist values of patriotism,…heroism, human and technological prowess, and to underscore the extraordinary industrial capacities of socialism, as it conquered one of the world’s most extreme natural environments.212

In much the same vein, Nicole Bayat Grajewski translates public statements from Putin in 2017, attesting to the “symbolic importance” of the Arctic region to Russia, and suggesting that “mastering of the Arctic (osvoenie Arktiki) can become one of the locomotives of the country’s economic growth.”213 In May 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov echoed the same sentiment, though in a more categorical tone: “It has been absolutely clear for everyone for a long time that this our territory, this is our land…and our waters.”214

Why has Moscow chosen in the 21st century to reinstate the Arctic as a national symbol? One potential explanation is that in attempting to counter the weakening in the domestic support for the authoritarianism established by Vladimir Putin, the ruling regime is inciting nationalist fervor in the face of perceived external threats to the state, and perhaps more importantly, in the presence of perceived internal threats to the regime. Oscar Jonsson asserts that Moscow considers an internal uprising against the ruling Russian regime to be one of the greatest threats to the nation’s security.215 He writes that “the threat from Western nonmilitary means—sanctions, political and economic support to democracy promotion in Russia, and diplomatic measures—are ongoing threats to the legitimacy of Russian leaders.”216

Because of this imperative, some scholars claim that Russia’s revisionary actions in various theaters serve no strategic purpose apart from exploiting issues with nationalist mobilization potential, like the Arctic, to bolster its authoritarian regime. They argue that Moscow’s aggressive strategies in Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine, and elsewhere only serve as a means by which the political regime in Russia can distract its populace from domestic issues—turning attention to foreign threats posed by U.S. and NATO influence. In presenting one of the most highly visible and extreme examples, Hale points to the annexation of Crimea—a favorite area of Russian “romantic” nationalism—to illustrate this mechanism: “The surge in Vladimir Putin’s popularity following his country’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in 2014 is an excellent example of a single event having a game-changing impact on authoritarian public opinion and, arguably, regime behavior.”217 Jacquelyn Chorush argues that competition in the Arctic also serves as a source of regime propaganda and Putin attempts to maintain control in Russia. She writes:

In order for Putin to stay in power, the Russian people must believe that the Kremlin can maintain control and that Russia can successfully compete with the West. The narrative of the Arctic as a sacred space endowed with the power to revive Russian greatness has become central to upholding this belief.218

#### Putin’s regime is on the brink of collapse

Evgenii Savostianov, 2025 - held a number of senior positions in the first postSoviet government of Russia. During the country’s August 1991 coup attempt, Savostianov played a leading role in defeating the pro-communist putsch, before personally shutting down the headquarters of the Communist Party of the USSR. “IS PUTIN’S COLLAPSE POSSIBLE?” American Foreign Policy Council, January, <https://www.afpc.org/uploads/documents/AFPC8176_Special_Report-Is_Putins_Collapse_Possible_-web.pdf> //DH

The stability of Vladimir Putin’s Russia in the face of mounting Western pressure over its military adventurism in Ukraine has both perplexed and stymied policymakers and scholars. Yet the regime erected by Russia’s strongman over the past quarter-century is far more fragile than it appears. Today, the Russian government is buffeted by both internal and external pressures that could ultimately lead to its downfall. Putin’s early popularity, rooted in economic growth and pseudo-patriotic fervor, has steadily eroded. The ongoing war in Ukraine has failed to rally lasting public support, and its prolonged nature has inflicted immense human, material, and reputational losses. These failures have exposed significant weaknesses within Russian society and its governance structures.

Key challenges facing the regime today include:

1. Divisions within the country’s elite. The once-loyal “old elites,” who amassed vast wealth under Putin, have turned resentful due to significant losses as a result of the war and Western sanctions. In response, Putin has sought to cultivate a new, and presumably more loyal, elite drawn from the ranks of military veterans and other loyalists. In the process, he has generated both tension and competition within the upper echelons of Russian leadership.

2. Conflict between the military and the security apparatus. The Russian Ministry of Defense and the FSB, which is central to Putin’s power, are increasingly at odds. Each blames the other for failures in Ukraine, with tensions exacerbated by events like the abortive mutiny carried out by Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin in the summer of 2023, which revealed key fractures in loyalty among the ranks of the country’s military.

3. Economic struggles. The current war with Ukraine has fundamentally impacted Russia’s economy, creating inflation, generating labor shortages, and reducing investment. Industrialists and financiers, while competing for influence, are united in their desire to end the conflict. However, this goal remains unattainable as long as Putin remains in power.

4. Regional dissent. The Kremlin’s weakening grip on power is evident in regions like Chechnya and Siberia, where local leaders and populations show increasing dissatisfaction with Moscow’s authority. Economic shifts and mounting losses in the war have further strained the relationship between the center and the periphery.

Nevertheless, Putin’s regime remains buoyed by elite loyalty, pervasive repression, and his own personal security apparatus. However, these sources of support are under increasing strain. Mounting military and economic pressures, coupled with the potential for further mobilization or elite defections, could fundamentally destabilize the regime. And historical precedent suggests that the collapse of such a system, if it occurs, will be both sudden and dramatic.

#### Deepening economic crisis makes it likely

Jamestown Foundation, 2025 - a Washington, D.C.–based non-partisan defense policy think tank“Strategic Snapshot: Russia’s Fracturing Economy” 5/8, <https://jamestown.org/program/strategic-snapshot-russias-fracturing-economy/> //DH

One of the weakest points in the survivability of President Vladimir Putin’s regime is the Russian economy. On April 24, Putin assured Russian business leaders that the country’s economic challenges are part of a planned “soft-landing” to curb inflation. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Russia has skyrocketed, up to 9.65 percent year on year in March. Putin admits that inflation, now at over 10 percent, is too high. This comes as Russia’s 1.9 percent annual GDP growth for January to February of this year is down from 4.3 percent last year. Moreover, non-seasonally adjusted GDP may have declined for the first time since the second quarter of 2022, after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia’s wartime economy is undergoing reverse industrialization. High-tech sectors are giving way to labor-intensive, low-productivity industries as civilian parts of the economy are stagnating, and defense-related production is prioritized. Russia is experiencing persistent labor shortages, especially for skilled workers in technical fields. The Kremlin’s reforms of the education system to fill defense-sector vacancies have caused public concern over fairness and quality. Meanwhile, dependence on energy exports has become a liability as Western sanctions and infrastructural shortcomings have severely reduced revenues from oil and gas.

Russia’s war against Ukraine currently serves as a justification and a diversion for Putin in explaining the poor economic situation. Putin claims that the West is “seeking to fight us on the economic front” and “shutter [the Russian] economy.” In December last year, Putin claimed that the Russian economy was “growing despite everything, despite external threats and attempts to influence us.” Conversely, Putin has stated that Russia’s national defense should be top priority without “destroy[ing] our own economy” and that the “Russian economy has prevailed over the risks it faced” as “we had to respond literally on the fly, dealing with issues as they emerged.”

A true and sustainable peace settlement threatens Moscow’s ability to sustain domestic pressure and repel dissent against the Kremlin’s economic policies. Russia faces a narrowing set of options for sustainable growth. A genuine and durable peace agreement with Ukraine would not only reduce Russian military expenditures but also risk exposing Moscow’s economic mismanagement, potentially fueling dissent and undermining the political foundations of Putin’s war economy.

#### Intensifying regime instability leads to nuclear war via civil war, supply chain disruption and separatism.

Yap 25, Singapore-based independent research analyst and venture architect specializing in market development and business strategy for early-stage ventures and SMEs (Shiwen, “Power at the Brink: Looming Leadership Crises in China and Russia,” *Modern Diplomacy*, https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/04/07/power-at-the-brink-looming-leadership-crises-in-china-and-russia/)//BB

Russia’s Personalized Regime & Succession Uncertainty

Similarly, Vladimir Putin’s Russia has long been characterized by a highly personalized regime sustained by the myth of autocratic competence, where power is maintained through the loyalty of a small inner circle rather than through robust institutional checks.

Over his more than two-decade tenure, Putin has systematically eliminated potential rivals and has relied on a network of close allies—often family members or long-time confidants—to secure his hold on power.

Putin’s approach has its roots in the turbulent post-Soviet era, a reflection of him being a product of the old Soviet empire. Although his early rule promised a degree of stability, concentration of power has created a system with weak formal institutions for leadership transition.

Unlike the more diversified bureaucracy of the Chinese party-state, Russia’s political structure has few mechanisms to absorb a sudden departure of a leader whose authority is heavily personalized. However, the invasion of Ukraine has changed the configurations of power under Putin.

Should Putin suddenly step down, die, or be forced out, the lack of a clearly institutionalized succession process could lead to a scramble among factions, potentially igniting a crisis or even a civil conflict.

Moreover, Putin’s dependence on personal networks has led to an environment of mistrust even within the elite. Purges and arrests of high-ranking officials, often on corruption or fraud charges, further erode the stability of the regime.

In a scenario where Putin’s authority is abruptly removed, these fractures could intensify into open power struggles, destabilizing Russia both politically and economically. Experts have noted that without a transparent and pre-arranged line of succession, Russia risks an internal conflict that could undermine its strategic posture internationally.

Comparative Dynamics & Implications for International Stability

While the domestic structures of China and Russia differ, both share the common risk of a leadership crisis. This is due to the over-concentration of power and the sidelining of succession planning.

In China, the elimination of institutionalized collective leadership means that Xi’s prolonged tenure may eventually result in a lack of experienced, high-ranking leaders capable of taking over. In Russia, the personalization of power and reliance on loyalty over competence have created a brittle system vulnerable to factionalism if the central figure disappears.

An unstable transition in either country would have significant international repercussions. For China, a leadership crisis could lead to policy uncertainty at a time when it is asserting itself on the global stage through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and a more assertive stance in regional territorial disputes.

Instability could affect global markets, supply chains, and international security, especially given China’s role as the world’s second-largest economy and a key player in global governance.

There is even a risk of the CCP starting a war along many of its flashpoints to redirect and channel public discontent. Renewed hostilities with India (i.e., the 1962 Sino-Indian War), an outright war to reclaim Taiwan, or any number of aggressive actions along its periphery are not out of the question.

In Russia, the potential for an abrupt or contested transition poses risks not only domestically but also in its relations with Europe and NATO. A power struggle in Moscow may embolden separatist movements in places such as Chechnya.

Given Russia’s significant nuclear arsenal and its strategic influence over Eastern Europe, any internal collapse or prolonged instability could trigger regional security crises, with spillover effects in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and other parts of Russia’s periphery that would concern the broader international community.

#### Putin will gamble for resurrection by using nuclear weapons to attack NATO

Erik Sand and Suzanne Freeman, 2022 - \*assistant professor in the Strategic and Operational Research Department at the U.S. Naval War College. AND \*\*Ph.D. candidate in the MIT Political Science Department. “The Russian Sanctions Regime and the Risk of Catastrophic Success” 3/8, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/the-russian-sanctions-regime-and-the-risk-of-catastrophic-success/> //DH

What if the sanctions work — that is, they make life in Russia intolerable or undermine Russia’s ability to continue the war? That could force Russia to the negotiating table. But it could also have the opposite effect. Western policymakers are right to be concerned about an escalation with Russia leading to a general European war, but they seem focused almost exclusively on avoiding escalatory military options and managing the close proximity of NATO and Russian forces. Sanctions too can lead to war, or at least to riskier Russian strategies that court war. A desperate Vladimir Putin could escalate the war in a gamble for resurrection.

Sanctions Thus Far

Though the war and the sanctions are still in their opening days, they have had an immediate effect. The ruble has lost almost 30 percent its value against the dollar and is worth less than a cent. In Russia, the Central Bank has more than doubled interest rates, the stock market has closed, the government has imposed capital controls, and civilians are queuing to withdraw savings from banks. Despite these immediate results, it could take weeks, months, or even years for sanctions to produce their full effects. Russia may have time to mitigate the worst consequences of the sanctions. When the West imposed sanctions on individuals and on the oil, defense, and financial sectors after the 2014 invasion of Crimea, Russia responded by “Russification” and diversification, pursuing import substitution, and shifting imports to Asian countries like China. While these adaptations were mostly successful, they took eight years to achieve fully. Today, Russia is already seeking ways to mitigate the new sanctions, but these sanctions are far more severe, and the success of Russian mitigation measures remains uncertain. The sanctions could bring Russia to its knees.

Economic Isolation Can Lead to Risky Strategies

Scholars who study the effects of economic isolation on states — whether through sanctions, wartime blockades, or other mechanisms — find that economic isolation rarely causes its targets to capitulate outright. Rather, economic pressure can lead states at war to adopt riskier strategies, often involving escalation. Call it economic inadvertent escalation.

Because economic pressure takes time to work, targets can anticipate their worsening situation before it reaches a crisis point. Once a future crisis seems inevitable, leaders face a closing window in which to try to avert the disaster they see coming. In such situations, they may decide they have little to lose if escalation provides even a small chance of improving their situation. Such calculations have not just affected the Japanese. Allied economic warfare drove Germany to adopt risky, war-expanding strategies in both World War I and World War II.

Such gambles are even more likely if a state’s leaders are unusually willing to accept risk. Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine, especially in light of the Russian military’s failure to perform as expected, and his increasingly shrill rhetoric suggest Putin may be at least as risk-accepting as were Japanese leaders 80 years ago. If so, the likelihood he would choose to double down is higher.

Paths to Escalation

Economic isolation can encourage leaders to escalate their wars in two ways. First, sanctions can directly undermine Russia’s military capability. Russia relies on the West for many high-tech imports required for advanced weapons systems, including components like microchips. Western sanctions explicitly target these items. If Russian losses mount, their production facilities may be unable to provide replacements because of import shortages. If the war drags on, shortages of precision-guided munitions may lead Russian forces to use more “dumb bombs” and engage in even more violence against civilians that characterized Russian strategies in Chechnya and Syria. As the shelling of Kharkiv and other cities, shows, Russia does not lack the will to kill Ukrainian civilians. Eventually, Putin may face a choice: use his remaining military capability before attrition depletes it or abandon the fight.

Second, sanctions may affect Putin’s domestic political calculus. Putin’s grip on control since 2003, increased tools to suppress protest, and swift crackdown on current protests help insulate him from general political discontent. But if sanctions produce severe losses, especially among the oligarchs or the security services, Putin may come to believe he needs to offer them greater potential rewards from the war to compensate them for their hardship. Escalating the war in the face of a worsening situation might provide this possibility. Such logic shaped the fatal 1917 German decision to resume unrestricted submarine warfare in the face of British economic warfare, even though German leaders knew their decision would bring the United States into the war against them.

Potential Russian Moves

Russia could potentially escalate in several different ways. First, Russia might shift its objectives to reduce the impact of sanctions. Because of the Soviet legacy, prior to 2014, Russia sourced vital military equipment including aircraft engines, transport aircraft, air-to-air missiles, electronics, and components of inter-continental ballistic missiles from Ukraine. The Russian military has painstakingly sought to mitigate the resulting engine and aircraft shortages resulting from its 2014 annexation of Crimea by purchasing some items from other sources, but Western sanctions will hamper remaining imports from the West. Seizing Ukrainian defense factories could become a priority. While perhaps less likely if the target were a NATO member, Russia could even expand the war beyond Ukraine if it thought doing so might provide control of areas that would help alleviate the economic pressure.

Second, Russia could also try to give the West a taste of its own medicine. Ukraine is a major food exporter and a plant in Odessa purifies 60 percent of the world’s supply of neon, which is used in microchip production. Russian forces could target these economic objectives.

Third, a desperate Russia might risk striking Western military aid before or after it crosses the Ukrainian border. As Aaron Stein notes, a potential for accidental clashes will grow as flows of military aid increase across the Ukrainian-Polish border. Russia has already threatened that it would target aid convoys carrying weapons and ammunition for Ukrainian forces once they enter Ukraine. The region’s congested airspace furthers the risk of inadvertent NATO-Russia engagements. If Russia faces a sanctions-driven closing window for military success, Putin might deliberately choose to take more risks to intercept convoys or even attempt to push back supporting NATO forces.

Finally, even nuclear escalation could be possible. Russia has already increased the alert status of its nuclear forces. Its 2020 nuclear doctrine specifically states Russia would consider first use of nuclear weapons in situations where “conventional aggression” threatens “the very existence of the state.” Putin has declared the sanctions “akin to a declaration of war.” No nuclear armed power has ever faced the possibility of regime collapse due to economic pressure. It is conceivable that the Russia regime might consider nuclear use if economic pressure were significant enough to threaten its existence.

#### The plan solves. US-Russian joint development of Arctic LNG provides crucial technology for sub-zero drilling and economic revenue to Russia

John Zadeh, 2025 - founder and CEO of Discovery Alert, a leading platform that provides real-time alerts on ASX-listed mineral discoveries “US-Russia Joint Ventures in Energy and Metals: 2025 Outlook” 4/26, <https://discoveryalert.com.au/news/us-russia-business-cooperation-energy-minerals-2025/> //DH

How Would US-Russia Energy Cooperation Affect Global Markets?

The strategic implications of potential US-Russia energy cooperation extend far beyond bilateral relations, potentially reshaping global commodity markets and regional power dynamics.

Strategic Implications

A potential US role in controlling the flow of gas, oil, and electricity from Russia and Ukraine to Europe would represent an unprecedented shift in energy geopolitics. This arrangement parallels Trump's push for a comprehensive investment agreement with Ukraine for mineral exploitation, creating an American-brokered energy corridor spanning Eastern Europe and Russia.

The possibility of US companies gaining access to Russian energy or transport assets carries significant geostrategic value. By establishing operational control over key infrastructure, American firms could gain leverage over European energy security while simultaneously providing Russia with needed technical expertise and capital.

For Russia, selling stakes to Americans with connections to the Trump administration offers both economic and diplomatic benefits. Beyond direct investment, such arrangements could facilitate easing of cross-border payment processes and potentially create advocates for sanctions relief within the US business community.

The Arctic holds 13% of global undiscovered oil and 30% of natural gas, valued at approximately $35 trillion at current prices. Joint US-Russia development of these resources would have profound implications for global energy markets, potentially increasing supply and moderating price volatility.

Control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant represents another dimension of this cooperation. Modernizing the facility's Soviet-era reactors would require an estimated $4 billion investment over a 10-year timeline, but would secure a significant electricity source for the region.

Specific Project Opportunities

The development of the Tomtor rare earth deposit stands as a flagship opportunity for US-Russia cooperation in the metals sector. Putin's November order to ensure its development signals high-level interest in attracting American technical expertise to this project. The deposit's niobium and other rare earth elements are critical components for technologies ranging from electric vehicles to military applications.

Joint Arctic energy exploration projects represent another potential area for collaboration. Russian firms like Rosneft currently lack access to specialized ice-breaking tankers and subzero drilling technologies due to sanctions, creating an entry point for American technical expertise.

The restoration of halted natural gas deliveries to Europe through Ukraine would require significant investment in pipeline infrastructure and security arrangements. American participation could provide both financing and diplomatic assurances needed to restore these energy flows.

Rosatom's VVER-1200 reactors, currently used in Turkey's Akkuyu plant, could provide a technical foundation for US-Russian nuclear joint ventures. Such cooperation would allow American firms to gain experience with Russian nuclear technology while providing Rosatom with access to Western financing and component technology.

China's substantial stake in Russian Arctic LNG projects, including Novatek's 20% Chinese ownership in Yamal LNG, creates competitive pressure for American firms to establish positions in this strategic resource area before Chinese dominance becomes entrenched.

#### The plan restores Putin’s domestic legitimacy and Russia’s global status

Tatiana Mitrova, 2025 – Research Fellow at Columbia University’s Center on Global Energy Policy and Director of the New Energy Advancement Hub. She specializes in Russian, FSU and global energy markets, including production, transportation, demand, energy policy, pricing and market restructuring. “Examining the Geopolitics of Gas in U.S.-Russia Negotiations” National Interest, 4/11, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/energy-world/examining-the-geopolitics-of-gas-in-u-s-russia-negotiations> //DH

It is worth noting that gas sanctions are less critical for the Russian budget than oil or financial sanctions. But symbolically, they matter enormously to Putin. Nord Stream is not just a pipeline—it is a legacy project tied to Putin’s vision of Russia as a dominant energy power in Europe, pursued in defiance of strong opposition from many Western politicians. Its revival would be seen domestically as clear evidence of Russia’s triumph in an existential confrontation with Western liberalism.

Likewise, the LNG projects in Yamal are more than commercial ventures. They symbolize Russia’s global ambitions in a sector where it is a relative newcomer, showcasing its ability to deliver extraordinarily complex Arctic infrastructure—built from scratch, on time, and within budget. More broadly, the projects reflect Russia’s aspiration for dominance in the Arctic and, specifically, control over the Northern Sea Route. Reviving them would signal not only economic re-engagement but also international recognition of Russia’s energy and geopolitical ambitions.

Despite both the United States and Russia, as the leading gas-exporting countries, having an interest in a tight gas market, their commercial interests clash. U.S. LNG players benefit from reduced Russian presence in Europe, so keeping or increasing sanctions would be an acceptable policy for the United States. For Putin, increasing gas exports is important for geopolitical leverage.

Trump’s Options on LNG Sanctions:

Strengthen sanctions on Russian LNG. This would be the worst-case scenario for Russia and could quickly remove up to 47 billion cubic meters (bcm) of LNG exports—a boost for U.S. LNG exporters but a move that would infuriate Putin.

Lift sanctions on Russian LNG (or at least ease enforcement). This would allow more Russian LNG to enter the market, which would hurt U.S. LNG producers, who would face more competition just as the next wave of new LNG capacity and price reductions are expected. The negative impact on U.S. producers could potentially be offset by their participation in Russian LNG projects—though this is unlikely due to political and legal risks—and Chinese shareholders of these projects might object.

Maintain current sanctions. The status quo preserves the U.S. advantage but won’t satisfy the Kremlin.

### 1AC — Relations Advantage

#### Contention 2 is Relations.

#### US-Russia relations are strained and collapsing

Reuters, 2025 – “Russia says US has cancelled next round of talks on easing tensions” 6/16,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-us-has-cancelled-next-round-talks-easing-tensions-2025-06-16/> //DH

Russia said on Monday that the United States had cancelled the next round of talks between the two countries, an apparent setback in a process launched by presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump to improve bilateral ties.

In a statement, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova did not say if Washington had given any reason for the break in the talks, which began after Trump returned to the White House in January.

Russia had described relations as "below zero" under the previous administration of President Joe Biden, which provided advanced U.S. weapons to Ukraine and imposed multiple rounds of sanctions on Moscow over the war.

"As of today, the next meeting within the framework of bilateral consultations on eliminating 'irritants' in order to normalize the activities of diplomatic missions of both countries has been cancelled at the initiative of the American negotiators," Zakharova said.

"We hope that the pause they have taken will not last too long."

Russia had said only last week that the U.S.-Russia talks - which have been proceeding on a separate track from discussions about ending the war in Ukraine - would soon move to Moscow from Istanbul.

However, the Kremlin - while denying that dialogue had stalled - also said last week that there were "a lot of blockages in bilateral relations" and talks on improving them were not expected to yield quick results.

Both sides say there is huge potential for business and investment deals if relations improve. But Trump, despite holding five phone calls with President Vladimir Putin - most recently on Saturday - has voiced frustration about Russia's war actions in Ukraine and the lack of any visible progress towards a peace deal.

#### The plan is testing ground to rebuild overall US-Russian relations through greater investment. Russia wants US economic cooperation to boost its great power status

Mary Ilyushina, 2025 – reporter on the Foreign Desk of The Washington Post, covers Russia and the region. She began her career in independent Russian media before joining CNN’s Moscow bureau “Lure of the north: What Russia’s Arctic can offer Trump” Washington Post, 3/31, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/03/31/russia-arctic-gas-minerals-trump-putin/> //DH

The vast, desolate Arctic frontier, rich in untapped energy and mineral resources, has long been dominated by Russia with its massive icebreaking fleet and extensive infrastructure inherited from the Soviet era.

But as the Trump administration’s own Arctic ambitions and rapport with President Vladimir Putin grow, Moscow is seeking to leverage its Arctic riches and America’s interest to lobby for much-anticipated sanctions relief and use the icy region as a testing ground for rebuilding ties with the United States.

Speaking to reporters on March 13, President Donald Trump signaled the Arctic is on top of America’s priority list and reiterated his wish to get Greenland, a Danish territory. In remarks Thursday from Murmansk, in Russia’s Arctic, Putin spoke favorably of those plans, calling it a “profound mistake to treat it as some preposterous talk.”

Steve Witkoff, Trump’s special envoy who has been ferrying messages from Washington to Moscow, suggested in an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson that the United States and Russia are “thinking about how to integrate their energy policies in the Arctic” and “share sea lanes, maybe send LNG gas into Europe together,” referring to liquefied natural gas.

Russia, which saw an opening in Trump’s business-first approach, swooped into renewed talks with U.S. delegations with business proposals, offering access to the country’s mineral reserves and joint ventures in the Arctic.

“The Arctic is too important for Cold War-style politics. Russia & the U.S. must find common ground to ensure stability, resource development & environmental protection,” Putin’s business envoy in U.S. negotiations, Kirill Dmitriev, recently said on X.

At the Arctic Forum in Murmansk last week, Dmitriev announced that Russia would set up a special investment fund for Arctic development by year’s end that would attract funds from partners in the Persian Gulf as well as “a number of Western countries.” Dmitriev also said the United States showed “interest” in investing in the Russian Arctic region, including in LNG projects.

For Trump, expansion in the Arctic can be a way to resell cheap energy or buy minerals and rare earth metals from Russia, experts said. Cooperation with Russia would also be a way to stave off the growing interest of China, which has declared itself “a near-Arctic state,” and is building its own icebreaking fleet to explore the emerging trade routes.

For Russia, this presents an opportunity to access the LNG technologies it lacks and revive some of its key revenue makers, which have been hindered by sanctions since the invasion of Ukraine.

“When it comes to Arctic, Russia has a lot to offer,” said Russian economist and Arctic expert Vladislav Inozemtsev. “It is also something Russia cannot fully develop on its own.”

All about the gas

A warming climate has unlocked economic opportunities along the Northern Sea Route, a faster trade lane between Europe and Asia that was once frozen, and Russia aims to capitalize on this with its unrivaled icebreaker fleet.

These Arctic regions are rich in massive deposits of natural gas, with the Bovanenkovo field on the Yamal Peninsula alone holding approximately 4.9 trillion cubic meters of gas reserves, rivaling major U.S. fields such as Eagle Ford Shale. Russia had invested millions in LNG facilities along the northern route — until Western sanctions derailed those plans.

In 2019, Russia aimed for 30 percent to 40 percent control of the global LNG market and hoped to boost production to 70 million tons by 2030.

But Russia’s LNG industry is heavily reliant on Western technology and equipment, and it was crippled by the post-invasion sanctions. By 2024, Russia still had only an 8 percent market share.

Echoing Witkoff’s idea, Inozemtsev suggested that Trump could strike a deal with Russia by letting the United States have a stake in developing the LNG projects in Russia and then giving them a share of gas to resell to third countries.

One possible arrangement could see the United States acting as an intermediary for Russian gas sales to Europe, which after the Ukraine invasion largely weaned itself off Russian gas.

In this scenario, Inozemtsev said, Trump could push Europe to restart Russian pipeline gas imports, while Moscow, in return, would compensate the United States with a share of the Arctic liquefied gas that it could then ship to other countries at a higher profit margin.

“Russia has lucrative things to offer to the U.S., should the U.S., in turn, put pressure on Europe,” Inozemtsev said. The United States could fulfill its gas contracts to Europe by selling them reflagged Russian gas from the pipeline network and then sell its own LNG elsewhere.

There have also been reports of efforts to restart the Nord Stream pipeline which once brought gas across the Baltic Sea into Europe.

Pushing Europe to reopen sanctioned pipelines, however, is a hard sell after the continent’s painful breakup with Russian gas and oil after the invasion. German Economy Minister Robert Habeck dismissed the idea of reviving Nord Stream, calling it “completely the wrong direction,” following a recent Financial Times report about another possible effort. Similar resistance is likely across Europe, as many countries remain wary of rekindling ties with a supplier that has shown few qualms about using its resources for political ends.

In addition to gas, Russia’s Arctic is filled with rare-earth metals the Trump administration has publicly expressed interest in. At the forum, Dmitriev said the new fund plans to invest in development “with various partners.”

The Arctic is also rich in valuable minerals and metals such as lithium, nickel and aluminum, key resources for high-tech industries, renewable energy and defense.

“It’s a key thing it can offer beyond just energy extraction,” said Pavel Devyatkin, a Moscow-based senior fellow at the Arctic Institute, arguing that Moscow sees cooperation with the United States in the Arctic not from a purely economic standpoint but as a diplomatic tool to restore ties and global status with fewer geopolitical hurdles.

#### Cooperation on Arctic natural gas development bolsters diplomacy broadly and spills over to create cooperation on arms control

Pavel Devyatkin, 2025 – senior associate at the Arctic Institute (Washington, DC) and a PhD fellow and lecturer at HSE University (Moscow) “A New Age for US-Russia Arctic Cooperation?” The Nation, 3/18, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/russia-putin-trump-climate-diplomacy-war/> //DH

The Arctic, warming four times faster than the rest of the world, may be the key region for the US and Russia to advance cooperation. US-Russia rapprochement may broadly benefit the world by bringing an end to the disastrous war in Ukraine and reducing the risk of nuclear war, but existential environmental issues still demand attention.

The Trump administration has started purging government websites of climate data. It is now the task of civil society to elevate climate change as a concern and pressure the two countries to include climate change in the Arctic cooperation agenda. The Arctic climate crisis is the “canary in the coal mine” for what awaits other regions.

At the February 18, 2025, Rubio-Lavrov meeting in Riyadh, Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, named the region as a potential setting for US-Russia cooperation: “We need to pursue joint projects, including, for example, in the Arctic.” The Arctic region makes sense as a setting for cooperation as the two sides have explicitly expressed interest in exploring cooperation in energy, investment, and geopolitical issues. Western sanctions on Russia have led Moscow to step up its cooperation in the Arctic with China in joint energy ventures and grand plans for Arctic shipping. US officials now see Arctic cooperation as a potential means to “drive a wedge” between Moscow and Beijing.

In my meetings in Moscow with American and Russian diplomats and businessmen over the past few weeks, it is clear that many are interested in diverse forms of Arctic cooperation, from cultural diplomacy that celebrates the commonalities of Indigenous peoples on both sides of the Bering Strait, to scientific diplomacy to understand and adapt to climate hazards faced by both nations. Business interests, however, are at the top of the agenda.

Trump’s suggestion to acquire Greenland, not ruling out military or economic coercion, has reignited global concerns over Arctic stability. Trump’s threats against Denmark, a NATO ally, have caused alarm in the Euro-Atlantic community. While some Russian state media pundits celebrated Trump’s statements, Russian diplomats criticized the destabilizing effect of the proposal and said that Trump’s plan “can only bring uncertainty and tension to the region.”

Together with Trump’s desire to acquire Ukraine’s resources and reduce the US’ dependence on Chinese rare earth, it is clear that rare earth minerals are a key focus of Trump’s political worldview. Greenland has large deposits of rare earth elements and is strategically positioned alongside Arctic shipping lanes and offshore oil deposits. Putin’s offer to open Russian rare earth minerals to joint exploration with the US may also have implications for Arctic cooperation.

Trump has grumbled about Russian and Chinese ships “all over the place” near Greenland, indicating an element of great power competition in Trump’s Greenland fixation. This is a misunderstanding of Arctic security, as Russian and Chinese military activity is far from Greenland, occasionally operating together in the Bering Strait near Alaska. Greenland may, however, play a role in North American defense as a radar outpost to detect threats coming from across the North Pole.

The announced plan to revamp diplomatic relations and restore the staff of the countries’ diplomatic missions will significantly reduce the current obstacles to US-Russia scientific cooperation in the Arctic. By making it easier to issue visas and travel between the two countries, Americans and Russians will again be able to conduct joint research, expeditions, and scientific conferences and build models to better understand the unfolding climate emergency. Scientific cooperation to understand the changes affecting sea ice, permafrost, ecosystems, and local communities has been blunted by the political fallout of the war in Ukraine.

Cooperation in the Arctic can help build regional stability. More importantly, Arctic cooperation will build trust between the US and Russia that could complement or spill over into other crucial fields of cooperation such as arms control, Middle East peace, and global health.

#### Effective arms control reduces the risk of extinction

Charles Weiss, 2022 - is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, where he directed the Program in Science, Technology, and International Affairs. He has a BA, summa cum laude, and a PhD in chemical physics and biochemistry, both from Harvard University. The Survival Nexus: Science, Technology, and World Affairs. Online at Oxford Academic Press, accessed via University of Michigan //DH

In recent decades, these regimes have come under steadily increasing pressure. Politicized obstacles to the fight against COVID-19 have cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Arms control and nonproliferation agreements that have reduced the number and limited the spread of nuclear weapons have been slowly undermined or dismantled, and countries are pushing against the relatively few restrictions that remain. Efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions are falling far short of what is needed to prevent catastrophic global warming within the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren. Jobs lost from technological changes in manufacturing and services have stimulated a backlash against globalization and the rise of a brand of populism that is hostile to expertise and governance. The resulting revival of protectionism and economic nationalism threatens the trade regime that has brought prosperity and technical progress to much of the world.

We are needlessly allowing technology to take the world to the brink of disasters from accidental climate disruption, nuclear war, and pandemics—at the same time that we are allowing the means for controlling these technologies to erode. In effect, we are edging closer and closer to cliffs from which we have removed the guardrails. Fortunately, people are beginning to develop—or at least to think about—protections against some of these dangers.

A technology-based model of authoritarian government is being promoted and exported as a technological, economic, and political challenge to Western liberal democracies. The Internet and social media, conceived as vehicles for free exchange of information and platforms for untrammeled innovation, in some countries have become instruments of repression. At the same time, a systematic, worldwide campaign of misinformation and disinformation, spread via social and mass media, has deliberately sown distrust in the democratic process, in government, in international institutions, in science, in expertise of all kinds, and in the very idea that there is such a thing as truth. In the United States, the scientific consensus concerning climate change has been overwhelmed by misinformation and disinformation spread by political and business interests that it threatens, while public messaging regarding the COVID-19 pandemic has been at best mixed. All this has made it difficult for people to understand the complex and dangerous new threats to the environment, to their health, to their security, and to democratic government.

Stimulating and Guiding Technological Change

Science and technology have much to contribute to the resolution of all these issues. We need better scientific understanding of the climate, of the ways in which diseases spread, and of the likely impact of gene drivers and geoengineering. We need technological innovations to prevent or cure non-communicable diseases, alleviate malnutrition, conserve resources, defend against cyberattack, and restructure our economies along more sustainable and equitable lines.

But we cannot depend on science and technology to address these issues on their own. We also need policies and institutions that not only support research and encourage technological innovation but also guide scientific research and technological change in responsible directions. This will require both “top-down” measures by national governments and “bottom-up” pressures from public opinion, from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and from state and local governments that are often more directly responsive to public pressure. It will need ideas and inspiration from businesses, universities, research institutes, individual inventors, and ordinary citizens, and support from public opinion and from the actions and advocacy of individuals and communities. In some cases, it will require sustained effort to resist commercial, political, and military pressures to ignore broader social and environmental problems when investing in research and innovation and to deploy technologies before at least some of their consequences are understood and anticipated. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the denial of the reality of climate change in a number of countries show how even the best scientific advice can be undercut by the words and actions of shortsighted, self-interested political leaders.

We need to devise limits on technological innovations like autonomous weapons and hypersonic missiles that can lead to unintended nuclear war. We need to restructure our economy and redesign our cities to end, or at least to limit the use of fossil fuels and to increase the efficiency of our use of energy and materials. We need controls on technologies like artificial intelligence, gene drivers, and geoengineering, all of which both promise major benefits and involve great risks. We need to defend ourselves against technology-based attacks on the values of freedom of thought, communication, innovation, and access to information that were embodied in the original design of the Internet and social media but are now under attack.

At the same time, we need new science and technology to develop novel approaches to environmental sustainability: improved sources of renewable energy and innovative approaches to efficient energy use. We need both to expand and to restructure our electric energy grids to electrify our economy and to improve their efficiency, reliability, and security. We need to restructure our agricultural economy, our urban infrastructure and our transportation systems. We need explicit measures to ensure that everyone can participate in the benefits of technological change. We need research and development on orphan technologies, and vaccines and cures for the diseases that mainly affect people in low-income countries. Not a small menu.

Some of these issues, like climate change, nuclear weapons, and global health, are governed by long-standing regimes, norms, and institutions that now need strengthening and refurbishing to meet new political, economic, and technological challenges. Nonproliferation and anti-missile agreements need to be restored and extended to limit or ban development and deployment of hypersonic missiles, destabilizing weapons that are now under rapid development in many countries. Voluntary national limits on greenhouse gas emissions need to be urgently increased. Time is running out, and costs will be much greater the longer we take for effective action to mitigate and adapt to climate disruption. In the global health sphere, the system for emergency preparedness and pandemic control needs increased and sustained political and financial support to replace the long-standing pattern of crisis-to-crisis, feast-or-famine funding. Most low-income countries still need basic health infrastructure, both to provide health services to their population and to identify and control epidemic disease that could spread beyond their borders.

Cyberweapons, too, can quickly get out of control and wreak enormous damage on critical infrastructure, including the systems of command-and-control on which we would depend to prevent accidental escalation of a localized conflict to full-scale war. Like hypersonic missiles, the response to these weapons depends on artificial intelligence. Unlike hypersonic missiles, cyberweapons do not lend themselves to the type of verifiable arms control regime that has so far been successful for nuclear weapons. What is more, many governments oppose any limits on the use of cyberweapons, despite the risk they pose of accidental escalation. Continued research and international discussion on how these weapons can be controlled are urgent priorities.

Geoengineering and gene drivers also take the world into uncharted territory. Their governance is complicated by the fact that they are accessible not only to governments, but also to private businesses, NGOs, and individuals. It is far from clear how decisions should be made as to whether and under what circumstances these technologies should be developed, and what criteria should govern any such decisions. Advocates for these technologies have developed roadmaps for deploying them in a way that minimizes risks. Still, there are fundamental disagreements over whether geoengineering and gene drivers should be developed and implemented at all, and there is substantial support for the idea that one or both should be banned outright. Critics have called for moratoriums until the broader questions can be explored by a broad range of worldwide stakeholders, disciplines, and cultures. However, the disagreements we have outlined will probably never be totally resolved to everyone’s satisfaction, and deployment decisions will eventually have to be made one way or the other.

The governance of the Internet and social media involves measures to preserve the global Internet and to address those issues of cybersecurity that are of common concern to countries with very different political systems and very different ideas concerning civil liberties and human rights. The competition between authoritarian and democratic governments over freedom of information and innovation is likely to go on for a long time, but both sides have a strong interest in maintaining a functioning global Internet and in avoiding catastrophic damage to information and telecommunication systems.

Several academies of science, research institutes, NGOs, and religious organizations have proposed codes of conduct and declarations of principle to deal with the difficult philosophical, ethical, and practical issues involved in all these issues. These represent a useful beginning, and one may hope that they will reach the level of consensus that would allow them to be codified into national legislation or international agreements.

Dealing with these issues will require respect for expertise in the fields to which we have often referred: science, technology, politics, economics, business, law, and culture. We will need to incorporate scientific advice into decision-making processes, and to acknowledge and manage the risks and uncertainties in our understanding of the science and the technology we are trying to manage, as well as in their ramifications for the larger society. There is also a need to educate governments and the public, both on the underlying science and technology and on their links to the broader context. Finally, I would urge that there is a need for an international obligation to identify areas for scientific research and technological innovation that can help to resolve these issues and to support this research with adequate financial, human and institutional resources. This last requirement should become a general principle that should become part of the accepted framework for thinking about global issues and incorporated into formal agreements on these matters as a matter of usual practice.

Dealing with complex global, technology-intensive issues like these is a tall order, especially when they require democratic countries to find common interest with countries with whose governments they are otherwise deeply at odds. Nevertheless, the world has faced such issues successfully before under the arguably more difficult conditions of the Cold War, which pitted two ideologically opposed superpowers against each other that nevertheless managed to agree on elaborate and technically demanding measures to avoid nuclear holocaust.

#### The plan boosts relations even if no agreement is reached on Ukraine

Bloomberg News, 2025 – “US Eyes Post-War Joint Business With Russia in Energy, Metals” 4/25, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-04-25/us-eyes-post-war-joint-business-with-russia-in-energy-metals?embedded-checkout=true> //DH

The Trump administration is looking at cooperation in the Russian energy sector as a key element of economic enticements to win over the Kremlin as it pushes for a deal to end the war in Ukraine, according to people familiar with the planning.

Joint projects in the Arctic, as well as oil and gas and rare-earth minerals, are among the options being considered under a partnership the US would offer as part of a peace pact, the people said, asking not to be identified discussing matters that aren’t public.

Russia, encouraged by President Donald Trump’s talk of economic deals that could follow a peace agreement, is drawing up a list of projects and assets that officials hope might interest the US, according to people in Moscow involved in the effort. The ideas are collected by Kirill Dmitriev, President Vladimir Putin’s envoy for economic relations, who’s become a key conduit to the White House.

The two sides aren’t discussing plans directly at the moment, the people said. Any effort to rekindle economic ties would face enormous hurdles, from the thousands of sanctions still in place on Russia from the US and its Group of Seven allies to the Kremlin’s longstanding reluctance to allow foreign investors control in strategic sectors like energy.

The focus on possible business deals, especially in the energy sector, highlights the Trump administration’s transactional approach to foreign policy. If the agreements are realized, they could also leave US companies with a major role in the flow of gas, oil and electricity from Russia and Ukraine, including to Europe.

The effort follows on the heels of Trump’s push for a comprehensive investment agreement with Ukraine that would give the US a major role in projects to exploit the country’s mineral deposits and rebuild its infrastructure.

The US is driving for a quicker peace accord and has threatened to walk away from negotiations if the parties won’t agree to halt the hostilities. The US will demand that Russia accept Ukraine’s right to develop its own adequately equipped army and defense industry as part of a peace agreement, people said earlier this week, while Ukraine may be expected to give up some territory.

US envoy Steve Witkoff met with Putin in Moscow Friday for talks that the Kremlin described as constructive. Dmitriev participated in the meeting, according to state media.

“The way that Trump likes to frame politics is in reference points that he can understand like business, and for now the Russians are happy to go along with this,” said Emily Ferris, a senior research fellow in the International Security Studies department at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

The US proposed lifting sanctions on Moscow as part of any peace deal, according to people familiar with the situation, though that would also require agreement with the European Union as many of the most stringent restrictions have been imposed by the bloc.

The US sees economic incentives as a key element in persuading Putin in the drive for peace, according to the people.

“We do not confirm or deny details of ongoing negotiations. When the President has something to announce, we will announce it,” White House spokesman James Hewitt said in response to a request for comment for this article.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio denied a report he and Witkoff had discussed lifting energy sanctions.

Trump posted on social media Apr. 20 that if Russia and Ukraine reach a deal, “BOTH WILL THEN START TO DO BIG BUSINESS WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.”

Some Russian officials are hopeful they can establish an economic partnership with the US even if talks over ending the fighting in Ukraine collapse, one of the people close to the Kremlin said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov didn’t respond to a request for comment. Dmitriev’s office declined for comment.

“Russia’s trade with China is currently about 70-fold larger than its trade with the US, so that naturally limits the available options,” said Maria Snegovaya, senior fellow at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. Still, the White House could adopt a more flexible approach to sanctions enforcement, potentially allowing US energy companies to secure meaningful stakes in Russian energy ventures, including in the Arctic, she said.

# Case Extensions

## Russian Natural Gas Extensions

### They Say: “Putin is Resilient”

#### Putin can fall. It would only take a few hundred people to turn on him.

Marcel Dirsus 24 Non-Resident Fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (Germany) and a political scientist who has been studying dictators and how they hold or lose power for over ten years. As a postgraduate at Oxford, he examined the lives of members of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. (Article published on The Bell, citing an interview with Marcel Dirsus by Bell Editor Viacheslav Dvornikov, “Putin's regime could fall if he loses the support of just a few hundred people.",” The Bell, https://en.thebell.io/putins-regime-could-fall-if-he-loses-the-support-of-just-a-few-hundred-people/)//BB

The author of the book "How Tyrants Fall" on the specifics of dictatorships and how they collapse.

Despite their outward monolithic appearance, autocratic regimes have a number of weaknesses, says Marcel Dirsus, a political scientist and author of the book "How Tyrants Fall," released in July and recently included in The Economist's list of the best books of 2024. But the bad news is that democratization after dictatorships is extremely rare. The Bell editor Viacheslav Dvornikov spoke with Dirsus about how dictators lose power, whether it is possible to increase the chances of a democratic transition, why Alexei Navalny posed such a danger to the Russian regime, and what Russian civil society can do now.

Who is Marcel Dirsus

Dirsus is a Non-Resident Fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (Germany) and a political scientist who has been studying dictators and how they hold or lose power for over ten years. As a postgraduate at Oxford, he examined the lives of members of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Before returning to academia to complete his doctorate, he worked for a brewery in the Democratic Republic of Congo. There, in 2013, he witnessed a coup d'etat, which prompted him to begin studying how tyrants fall.

His work on irregular regime changes extends beyond academia. Dirsus advises multinational companies, foundations, and international organizations, including NATO and the OECD. He also works on the topic of regime instability, political violence, and Germany's foreign policy, and serves as a member of the Standing Expert Committee Terrorism and Interior Security at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

For his book, Dirsus not only gathered historical data but also spoke with diplomats, journalists, dissidents, human rights activists and former spies. He consulted with experts on economic sanctions, nuclear weapons, military history, quantitative forecasting, and many other topics.

How Putin's regime will fall

— Can we guess, based on the history of dozens of authoritarian regimes, how Putin's regime will fall? Will it be due to a conspiracy of elites, mass protests, or something else?

— For personalist dictatorships like Putin’s regime, the biggest threat typically comes from regime insiders. The less democratic a regime becomes, the more a dictator relies on a very small number of people in order to stay in power. The flip side of that is that Putin could fall if he loses the support of perhaps only a few hundred people.

I can't see into the future, but given everything that we know about the way the Russian regime works, as well as the history of the fall of tyrants, the main threat does not come from the masses in the streets, but from those closest to him.

#### He’s weaker than conventional wisdom suggests. The cracks are already visible.

Motyl 12-24-2024, professor of political science at Rutgers University-Newark. A specialist on Ukraine, Russia and the USSR, and on nationalism, revolutions, empires and theory, he is the author of 10 books of nonfiction, as well as “Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires” and “Why Empires Reemerge: Imperial Collapse and Imperial Revival in Comparative Perspective.” (Alexander, “The fall of Assad is an ‘emperor has no clothes’ moment for Putin,” *The Hill*, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/5051923-the-fall-of-assad-is-an-emperor-has-no-clothes-moment-for-putin/)//BB

But the conventional wisdom in much of the West was that Putin was strong because he insisted he was strong. It took Assad’s regime to fall and Putin to accept it meekly for the West to appreciate that things weren’t all that rosy in Tsar Vladimir’s rotting kingdom.

This means that Putin, who appeared to be the permanent president running a permanent war, may have a political lifespan that is far shorter than his braggadocio suggests. For the reality is that Putin is weak.

No one dare say that publicly in Russia, but everyone knows that he managed to transform a regional superpower with a healthy economy into a military and economic basket case. It will take decades for Russia to win back what it has lost thanks to Putin’s narcissistic pursuit of empire and glory.

The cracks within the elite are already visible, even on Russian television and in the ever-contentious blogosphere. Disagreements tend to be oblique and generally avoid putting the blame for anything on Putin, but it’s obvious to all Russians, especially those versed in reading between the lines, that a vicious power struggle is already taking place, as hardliners and softliners compete for favors while also proposing what they hope are effective policies.

Putin pretends to be above the fray, and, like every dictator whose power rests on balancing contradictory elite forces, he plays groups, factions and clans against one another in the hope that their internal struggles will distract them from the source of the system’s irremediable ills — Putin himself. But that strategy can work only as long as no one says that the emperor has no clothes.

Putin’s age, 72, doesn’t help. Nor does his questionable health. Both factors conspire to make him incapable of adopting innovative solutions to real problems. He is increasingly inclined to put his own political (and physical) survival above the needs of the country. Russia’s degradation, demise and possible collapse are therefore inevitable as long as Putin remains at the helm of his sinking ship.

Under such conditions — a war gone terribly wrong, a miserable economy, increasing poverty, elite dissatisfaction and dictatorial stasis — it would be a miracle if no one within the Russian establishment were not sharpening knives and preparing for the post-Putin age.

#### Putin’s power base is fragile and could crumble overnight

Evgenii Savostianov, 2025 - held a number of senior positions in the first postSoviet government of Russia. During the country’s August 1991 coup attempt, Savostianov played a leading role in defeating the pro-communist putsch, before personally shutting down the headquarters of the Communist Party of the USSR. “IS PUTIN’S COLLAPSE POSSIBLE?” American Foreign Policy Council, January, <https://www.afpc.org/uploads/documents/AFPC8176_Special_Report-Is_Putins_Collapse_Possible_-web.pdf> //DH

As we can see, behind the imposing facade of the Russian regime lies a web of serious internal conflicts, the severity of which may be vastly underestimated. However, as noted earlier, many of these conflicts could be resolved if Putin were to leave power.

Will that happen? For the reasons outlined above, the sudden collapse of Putin’s regime, if it happens, should not come as a surprise. A solitary and increasingly unsuccessful autocrat, Putin is separated from this outcome by only a few weak and fragile barriers, among them the loyalty of his thousands-strong corps of personal security, the court elite’s fear of personal losses (or loss of station), and the pervasive fear of the Russian state’s boundless repressive machinery.

Yet, this delicate structure could crumble overnight. Mounting military and economic hardships, including a new mobilization, could well ignite widespread public dissatisfaction. Or the old elites, recognizing the impending threat of their eradication, may overcome their mutual animosity and distrust and decide to act decisively.

#### Prefer our evidence. It’s based on direct personal experience in the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as history of other collapses

Evgenii Savostianov, 2025 - held a number of senior positions in the first postSoviet government of Russia. During the country’s August 1991 coup attempt, Savostianov played a leading role in defeating the pro-communist putsch, before personally shutting down the headquarters of the Communist Party of the USSR. “IS PUTIN’S COLLAPSE POSSIBLE?” American Foreign Policy Council, January, <https://www.afpc.org/uploads/documents/AFPC8176_Special_Report-Is_Putins_Collapse_Possible_-web.pdf> //DH

The question of why totalitarian regimes suddenly and unexpectedly collapse has long perplexed researchers, generating no shortage of post-mortems and scholarly analyses after the fact. Accurately predicting the longevity of such regimes is a risky enterprise, and the subject of this report – an examination of how close the regime created by Russian President Vladimir Putin might be to its downfall – is inherently speculative in nature. Yet, as a direct witness to the collapse of the Soviet Union, I have a clear sense of how the sudden collapse of seemingly unshakable power can occur. What follows is my best assessment of the current state of Putin’s regime, drawing on both general observations and extensive personal experience.

To begin, it is necessary to understand the natural life cycle of regimes such as the one created by Putin. In the early stages of totalitarianism, when the masses still enthusiastically and unconditionally support a tyrant, a collective mindset congeals. I refer to this frame of mind as the “Gracián Trap” after the 17th-century Spanish dissident monk Baltasar Gracián. His adage, “Better mad with the rest of the world than wise alone,” succinctly captures the conformity of a populace (whether coerced or natural) that emerges as a result of a period of peace and prosperity.

At this stage, the fact that this relative well-being comes at the cost of lost freedoms and forfeited rights does not trouble the overwhelming majority of people. Meanwhile, a skeptical minority, capable of seeing further ahead and understanding that the loss of freedoms will inevitably exact a steep price, is cowed into silence. At such moments, dissent is seen not merely as opposition to the tyrant himself, but as defiance of the people writ large.

Inevitably, however, the bill comes due. Over time, the people face poverty, oppression, and death on battlefields where wars are fought to defend the ego and vanity of the tyrant. At this point, the mood of the majority shifts dramatically and the era of late totalitarianism begins, marked by a populace that is critical or even hostile toward the tyrant but, due to disunity fostered (and encouraged) over the years is afraid to express its dissent.

This is where the “Gracián Trap” comes into full effect. Each individual believes he or she is alone in their doubts, while in reality such thoughts resonate with the rest. At this stage, a crucial crossroads emerges: the system may either languish in prolonged stagnation or evolve into a revolution. The latter scenario can transpire when, prompted by a dramatic event (such as the self-immolation of Jan Palach in Czechoslovakia in 1969 or of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in 2010) or the emergence of a charismatic leader (like Iran’s Ruhollah Khomeini or Russia’s Boris Yeltsin), a shared sense of unity takes root among the people based on the realization that the status quo is untenable.

From here, events may unfold along several trajectories, many of which have been observed within the former Soviet Union.

1. 1. The ruling elite initiates reforms, gradually adapting the country to new conditions. For example, in Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, local communist leaders transferred power to national-democratic movements in a smooth and relatively peaceful manner.

2. The ruling elite commences reforms, but loses control of the process and withdraws from power as new centers of authority emerge. The most striking and illustrative example of this scenario is the collapse of the Soviet Union itself.

3. A popular uprising begins to overthrow the elites, often fueled by waves of national or religious self-determination. Events in the Soviet regions of the Caucasus serve as a prime example.

4. The regime implements a “tightening of the screws” policy, intensifying repression. This, however, typically only delays the crisis temporarily, leading to an eventual radicalization of the populace and making scenario 3 above the most likely outcome (as seen in the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union, especially Tajikistan). In turn, several factors play a critical role in the collapse of a regime. They include: divisions within the ruling class; the sentiments of the middle generation, and; jealousy of foreign neighbors.

#### Past successes in resilience don’t mean that regime collapse won’t occur – and increasing economic problems and public discontent could break the regime

Julian G. Waller, 2024 - is Research Analyst in the Russia Studies Program at the Center for Naval Analyses and Professorial Lecturer in Political Science at George Washington University. “Putin the Resilient: Predicting the Collapse of His Regime Is Wishful Thinking” Foreign Affairs, 8/14, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/eastern-europe-and-former-soviet-union/putin-resilient> //DH

Through periods of considerable civil-military tension, a brief breakdown of public order by way of a warlord’s failed revolt, and significant personnel changes that risked stirring up elite dissent, Russia’s wartime dictatorship has remained resilient. Just as the Russian military has updated its strategy and operations in response to battlefield conditions in Ukraine, the Russian political system has built a similarly impressive record of adaptation.

Past performance, of course, does not guarantee future results. Just because Putin’s regime has headed off every internal threat so far does not mean that it will never meet an unmanageable challenge. The gerontocrats in the Kremlin could fall out of touch with the mood among elites, or growing economic difficulties and war fatigue among the public could eventually lead to disorder. The latter risk is particularly significant. For now, wartime payments and new privileges for veterans have benefited Russia’s lower classes, bolstering the regime’s base of support. But veterans who fought in Ukraine will eventually have to reintegrate into Russian society, and many will bring with them a less rosy view of the wartime experience.

Meanwhile, turf wars within the military bureaucracy continue, and the legacies of Prigozhin, Surovikin, and others who found themselves on the wrong side of political fights could, over time, crystallize resentments and become rallying points for a new generation of Russian officers. And if persistent infighting or command-and-control problems undermine Russian defenses against the recent Ukrainian incursion into Kursk, elite discontent could trigger yet another crisis for the Kremlin.

Russia is not invincible, and its political order is not eternal. Instability is a constant possibility, especially when the regime eventually selects a successor to Putin. Still, the Kremlin’s performance since 2022 has demonstrated a vast capacity for adjustment and resilience in the face of internal tensions. There is strength in Russia’s authoritarian political system, and observers should not pretend otherwise.

### They Say: “Russian Economy Won’t Collapse”

#### Russia’s on the brink of economic collapse

Javier G. Cuesta and Ignacio Fariza, 2025 – journalists for El Pais “Russia on the edge of economic collapse after 40 months of war” 7/7

<https://english.elpais.com/economy-and-business/2025-07-07/russia-on-the-edge-of-economic-collapse-after-40-months-of-war.html> //DH

Forty months is a long time in a war. Even more so for an economy already burdened by dangerous dependencies on a fossil-fuel-based world that, with luck, will be consigned to the history books within a few decades. Nearly three and a half years after Vladimir Putin gave the order to invade Ukraine — thus burning all bridges with the West — Russia is now trapped in a maze with no easy way out: sluggish growth and soaring prices, with annual increases in the double digits.

The St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, once a showcase and symbol of Russia’s strength in the global market, turned a couple of weeks ago into a parade of Putinism — though not a particularly cheerful one. “We are on the brink of a recession,” admitted Economic Development Minister Maxim Reshetnikov. The reserves that had supported the country’s finances in recent years, added Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina, “are depleted.”

Little remains of the Russia of late 2021, when verbal clashes with Kyiv were intensifying, but few — very few — suspected the step Putin was about to take. Today, in July 2025, the Russian Central Bank finds itself in a paradoxical crossroads: waging a double battle against inflation and against the Kremlin itself. Something like dancing a waltz on a barrel of dynamite.

“The country is in a state of stagflation,” the Centre for Macroeconomic Analysis and Short-Term Forecasting (TsMAKP). “Economic dynamics are declining rapidly, and there is a risk of a technical recession in the second and third quarters, but inflation remains high.”

It’s been less than three weeks since the central bank — supposedly independent from government control — symbolically lowered interest rates: from 21% to 20%. In doing so, it fulfilled a long-standing demand from the Kremlin. It was the first rate cut since September 2022, the year of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This marked a break from a long cycle of interest rate hikes aimed at curbing rising prices.

The situation, however, remains dire. Official inflation still hovers around 10% year-on-year, although several independent institutes estimate the real figure to be above 15%. With military spending still running wild, “risks remain skewed towards inflation,” warned Nabiullina. “Our rate cut approach requires greater caution.”

The contradiction facing the central bank is a true reflection of the current state of the Russian economy, which has long dropped out of the world’s top 10 in terms of size. By now, even the Kremlin is beginning to acknowledge the obvious: that the economic boom driven by the war industry is coming to an end and that the savings made before the war are no longer enough.

Maxim Oreshkin, economic advisor to the all-powerful Presidential Executive Office, declared that the emperor has no clothes just before the St. Petersburg Forum: “The model that ensured growth in recent years has largely reached its limit [...] We need to advance — not forward, but upward: to the next technological and organizational level.”

Still, Russian propaganda continues to claim that the country is doing better than the European Union, its continental nemesis. The unemployment rate, it boasts, is minimal — just over 2%. Russia’s national statistics office, Rosstat, highlights that the average monthly wage has, for the first time, surpassed the 100,000-ruble mark (about $1,300), a 40% increase compared to 2022.

Prices eating away at wage increases

That’s the snapshot in nominal terms — not in real ones. Even according to the official (and sanitized) figures, inflation has surged by 24% over that period. “The government and others are hiding the real inflation figures because if they reveal the truth, they would have to raise wages in the public sector, pensions, and other payments,” warned lawmaker Nikolay Arefiev a few months ago. “And they don’t want to spend the money.”

They don’t want to — and they can’t. Russian authorities had hoped to close out 2025 with a public deficit of just 0.5%, the lowest since 2021, back when the war was just beginning and high fossil fuel prices were filling the state’s coffers. But the extremely costly fighting in Ukraine continues, and the lower house has just revised its forecast to more than triple that figure: it now expects a deficit of 1.7%, the same as in 2024. The Kremlin has less than four trillion rubles in liquid reserves left in its sovereign wealth fund — roughly equal to the projected deficit for this year.

The real rise in prices is eating away at wage gains — week by week, month after month. It’s hurting Russians’ wallets, yes, but also the national mood in a country at war: only one in 10 Russians say their financial situation has improved this year, according to the FOM sociological research center. One in five say it’s gotten worse.

The TsMAKP think tank is equally pessimistic about the Russian economy: “There is a trend toward an almost complete slowdown in activity: the stagnation of investment in machinery and equipment has been exacerbated by the growing problems in the construction sector,” it warns. “And, most importantly, a crisis in consumption is looming, especially in the demand for non-food goods.”

After a period of economic overheating, signs of crisis are mounting. Despite countless government subsidies for the defense industry, overall credit growth has risen by just 1% so far this year. Seven out of 10 companies reported a collapse in consumer demand during the first quarter, according to a survey by the Stolypin Institute. Job vacancies have fallen to their lowest point since the start of the war, according to data from human resources firm Huntflow. Wage payment delays have tripled, while more than 8.8 million Russians are unable to repay loans that are less than 90 days overdue. Car sales have plummeted by 25% in the first half of the year, and clothing chains report sales down between 30% and 35% — partly due to the rising cost of other essential household expenses.

#### Putin’s collapse is inevitable due to economic meltdown and loss of public support for the war

Reuben F. Johnson, 2025 - has thirty-six years of experience analyzing and reporting on foreign weapons systems, defense technologies, and international arms export policy. He worked for years in the American defense industry as a foreign technology analyst and later as a consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense. Holds a master’s degree from Miami University in Ohio, specializing in Soviet and Russian studies “The Collapse of Russia Has Just Begun” National Security Journal, 7/22, <https://nationalsecurityjournal.org/the-collapse-of-russia-has-just-begun/> /DH

“Putin’s refusal to compromise on Ukraine, analysts say, is a colossal error costing Russia regional influence, lucrative energy markets and its place in the world,” reads the opening line to a recent article in the US newspaper, the Washington Post.

The subtext of the message being delivered by different analysts is that the refusal of the Russian President, former KGB Lt. Col. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, to change strategy or brook any compromise on the future course of his war in Ukraine is causing irreparable damage to his country.

This is not just the opinion of a single columnist of one American newspaper. The list of those who see long-term disastrous consequences for Russia – individuals both well-known and known only to those of us who have lived and worked in Russia in the past – grows by the day.

After the February 2022 full-invasion of Ukraine, one of the first to come out with dire predictions for the future of Putin’s homeland was retired US Army Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges. The retired three-star was the former head of European Command EUCOM and was also the one-time Pershing Chair for Strategic Studies at the Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA).

Hodges’s dire predictions for the disintegration of Moscow’s sprawling landmass began in the latter half of 2022, when he spoke on the subject with the Australian Broadcasting Service (ABC OZ).

A Warning to Russia – Predictions and What Leads to Collapse

Putin’s failure to successfully defeat Ukraine could be the beginning of the end for the Russian Federation, summarizing his assessment.

“There are centrifugal forces at work that are going to pull it apart,” he told Australia’s ABC News Daily podcast. “I believe we need to be prepared for the possibility of the break-up of the Russian Federation.”

This sentiment is now one increasingly expressed among Russia-watchers and those analysing the impact of the war in Ukraine.

It is also not the first time in Russian history that this has occurred – what seemed at the time to be a small-scale failure with cascading effects ultimately led to the end of an empire.

Ukraine is a nation orders of magnitude smaller than Russia and with none of its endless resources. But it is becoming another “David and Goliath”-type confrontation in which Russia has come out on the losing end.

In 1979, the USSR invades Afghanistan and is forced to withdraw a decade later – having lost 15,000 military personnel and achieved almost none of the objectives that prompted the incursion in the first place.

In late 1981 and under pressure from the Soviet Union, the Communist Party here in Poland instituted martial law to stamp out the Solidarity labor movement that was agitating for political freedoms. This period of repression ended in 1983, but instead of seeing the Solidarity movement dismembered Poland experienced even greater labor unrest.

By the end of the decade, the Polish Communist authorities are forced to bring the organization’s leaders into a cohabitation government, which eventually causes its dissolution and the creation of the modern, democratic Polish state.

Both instances are today assessed as the watershed moments that were the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union.

Moscow’s efforts to hold onto the empire by force in response to these initial indicators that the system was collapsing from within only accelerated that decline.

Petulance Triumphing Over Common Sense Created Russia’s Situation Today

Russian officials today explain Putin’s determination to prosecute the war as a necessary, strategic imperative and that this is the only way to “save Russia from NATO aggression” and “Ukrainian Nazis.”

However, most Western analysts view his continued petulance in continuing the war without regard for its effects on the nation and his refusal to compromise on any of his maximalist demands for a peace agreement as fatal, strategic errors.

The ultimate price will be a near-complete loss of Russia’s global influence, its few allies deciding to decouple from Moscow, and a loss of the energy export markets keeping the economy alive is the likely outcome.

Putin, writes the UK Independent correspondent Owen Matthews today, “is living on borrowed time.”

“Russia has begun running a fiscal deficit of some 1.5 per cent of GDP,” he observes.

“And most seriously of all, global oil prices have fallen a precipitous 35 per cent this year. As a result, Russia’s Central Bank is set to print 15 trillion roubles (£142bn) in cash come October – the largest issuance since the hyperinflation of the 1990s.”

“Putin, evidently, remains set on pursuing his obsession with subjugating Ukraine, apparently at any cost,” he continues. “Polls suggest that the number of ordinary Russians who agree with their leader’s dogged obsession is dwindling.”

“According to a study by Levada, Russia’s last independent pollster, in June, 64 per cent of respondents favored peace talks, which is six percentage points up since March. At the same time, the number of people who wanted the war to continue fell to 28 per cent, down from 34 per cent in March. “

There are no indicators that this downward trajectory of these economic trends will alter. Further eroding the population’s support for the war is the continued increase in both Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian cities and economic deterioration across the nation will only further erode. The combination is likely to lead to the collapse of the Russian state.

One might expect Putin to have the foresight to understand the perils of continuing to pursue a course of action that has led his country to the brink of instability. But there is very little evidence to suggest that he is willing to do so, which could very well be his – as well as Russia’s – undoing.

### They Say: “No Impact to Regime Change”

#### Regime change risks state collapse and nuclear use from competing factions

Christopher Clary and Joshua Shifrinson, 2023 - \*an assistant professor of political science at SUNY Albany AND \*\*an associate professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy. “Prigozhin’s Failed Coup Was a Blessing in Disguise” Foreign Policy, 7/10 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/10/russia-putin-prigozhin-wagner-ukraine-nuclear-weapons/> //DH

When the Wagner Group’s rebellion against the Kremlin unraveled, many commentators welcomed the prospect of Russian unrest and potential regime change as a way of complicating Russia’s war in Ukraine. In reality, however, the United States likely dodged a bullet when this uprising failed to topple Russian President Vladimir Putin. Though a weakened Russia might struggle to sustain its operations in Ukraine, political turmoil in a nuclear-armed state has historically given Washington good cause for hand-wringing, sparking fears about the stability and security of foreign nuclear arsenals. And even though Russia takes considerable steps to secure that arsenal in peacetime, the sheer size of its nuclear weapon and fissile material stockpile leaves it open to major risks. The Wagner Group crisis may be in the rear-view mirror for now, but as Washington contemplates future challenges to Putin’s authority, it ought to tread carefully. Russian political turmoil might be good for Ukraine today but awful for other U.S. priorities in the near and distant future.

Political instability in nuclear-armed states is more common than one might think. Of the 10 states that have developed a nuclear weapon, seven—France, China, the Soviet Union, South Africa, North Korea, Pakistan, and India—have experienced serious political turmoil in the form of coups or coup attempts, regime changes, civil wars, or other forms of widespread domestic instability. Lest anyone in Washington be too quick to judge others, the recent record of political stability in the United States is far from exemplary.

Domestic instability in nuclear states tends to scare foreign governments—and for good reason. In the nuclear age, no one wants ambiguity over who has authority over decisions to use or deploy nuclear weapons. Most states have announced publicly who has this authority in peacetime and crisis conditions, but domestic instability can render these procedures irrelevant, leading insiders and outsiders to fear the worst.

The canonical example is the Soviet Union. As Soviet political authority imploded in the early 1990s, punctuated by the August 1991 coup attempt against President Mikhail Gorbachev, there were pervasive fears that Soviet nuclear command and control procedures would unravel in chaotic fashion and undermine the U.S. ability to assess Soviet nuclear behavior. Following the collapse of the Soviet state in December 1991, Soviet nuclear weapons and material were scattered across four newly independent states—Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine—leaving U.S. policymakers scrambling to make sense of nuclear decision-making in a fluid security environment and to develop diplomatic, military, and economic tools to minimize the risk of crises.

Even when events threaten to topple an adversary, foreign-policy makers tend to worry that a replacement might be even worse than the leader or regime they know. For example, despite having started the Korean War in 1950 and fighting against the United States, when North Korean leader Kim Il Sung died in 1994, many U.S. officials feared his successor, Kim Jong Il, would be worse. William Perry, then the U.S. deputy defense secretary, went so far as to argue that before the elder Kim’s death, a primary goal of U.S. policy was to prevent North Korea from developing a nuclear arsenal in case a power transition turned violent. “This is a government which has clearly failed and in my opinion is going to collapse sometime in the next few years,” Perry said in 1993. “Our concern is, if it goes out with a cataclysm, we don’t want it to be a cataclysm with nuclear weapons.”

Equally disconcerting is the risk that political instability could lead to civil war and what former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker once called “Yugoslavia with nukes.” The problem here is both ambiguity over who controls a nuclear arsenal and the possibility that rival factions might deploy nuclear weapons against competitors. During a coup attempt in France in 1961, the coup plotters attempted to delay a scheduled French nuclear weapons test in Algeria. One of the plotting generals instructed the general responsible for the nuclear explosive device: “Refrain from detonating your little bomb. Keep it for us—it will always be useful.” After the plot fizzled, several members of the nuclear test team commented that they believed the plotters sought the device as a bargaining chip to blackmail Paris.

Meanwhile, because domestic instability by definition undermines law and order, it raises the risk that nuclear technologies will be lost, stolen, or diverted and imperil counterproliferation efforts. When South Africa’s apartheid government faced growing domestic unrest in the late 1980s, a major impetus behind U.S. engagement with the noxious white-minority government was the desire—driven to some extent by overblown fears of what Black-majority rule might mean—to prevent South African nuclear assets from spreading beyond its borders. The available evidence indicates that U.S. policymakers were “extremely concerned about the possibility of Pretoria’s nuclear capability falling into the hands of an irresponsible government with links to communist and extremist Islamic countries,” scholar Anna-Mart van Wyk writes.

Such worst-case scenarios have not come to pass, but the potential is real. Because these risks are so stark, foreign governments have tried to find ways of mitigating the dangers. But the options for confronting the collapse of a nuclear state are limited.

For the United States, the most widely discussed option involves using U.S. military action to secure if possible, seize as needed, or destroy if necessary nuclear assets in an imploding country. Military intervention, however, is a dicey prospect.

For one thing, intelligence of looming instability may not be available or sufficiently certain to act in a timely manner. Even if warning is available, states’ nuclear enterprises are opaque by design and frequently distributed across many sites—sometimes hundreds of locations for large, mature arsenals. As a result, it is difficult for a foreign-policy maker to know with confidence that all relevant nuclear assets have been identified ahead of time and seized or destroyed afterward. As the Brookings Institution’s Michael O’Hanlon put it when assessing a possible intervention in Pakistan or North Korea, “A surgical strike might, with excellent intelligence, destroy the weapons” but “such intelligence is usually lacking.” In the case of Pakistan, anonymous former U.S. officials have complained that they do not know even the total number of Pakistani nuclear warheads, let alone where each of those warheads is located. Former military planners say an attempt to secure the Pakistani arsenal with special operations forces “would be the most taxing and most dangerous of any special mission” that Joint Special Operations Command could be assigned.

The task at hand elsewhere would likely be no easier. An estimated tens of thousands of U.S. combat troops would be needed to secure North Korean nuclear assets, and the number would be orders of magnitude higher in a country such as Russia. Time and distance compound this dilemma. Not only would it take time for the requisite military forces to arrive in theater, but also, if the goal is to prevent the loss or diversion of nuclear assets, any delays increase the risk of mission failure. Depending on the scenario, an imperfectly timed military operation may make the problem appreciably worse by alerting local leaders to U.S. efforts and giving them time to hide or disperse nuclear assets under their control.

Given this reality, foreign governments facing instability in a nuclear state have instead tried to avoid the problem and help incumbent regimes survive when at all possible. Lingering U.S. concerns about the nuclear arsenal of a collapsed Pakistani government falling into the hands of terrorists has helped override pronounced U.S. differences with Islamabad—including Pakistani support for the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network as those groups targeted U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Even more dramatically, President George H.W. Bush’s administration held off on encouraging the breakup of the Soviet Union out of fear that successor republics would be unable to control Soviet nuclear weapons. No matter how noxious the existing regime, political instability in nuclear states has often pushed foreign governments to bank on the devil they know rather than risking catastrophe from the devil they don’t.

Despite foreign efforts to ensure stability in nuclear states, domestic implosions can still happen. When the government of a nuclear state collapses, however, foreign governments have generally tried to broker political deals to ensure continuity in the nuclear enterprise. The Soviet example is again illustrative. When Soviet authority began unraveling in the fall of 1991, the Bush administration made clear publicly and privately to the Soviet Union’s restive republics that the price for U.S. recognition of their independence would be their commitment to centralized control of any nuclear forces on their territory—meaning that Russia, as the designated successor state to the former Soviet Union, alone would operate ex-Soviet nuclear forces—and adherence to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). Until these pledges were received, the United States would hold off on backing their push for independence. Once the Soviet Union broke apart, the United States subsequently pressured Ukraine into returning the weapons to Russia as the surest route to maintain stable control of the arsenal. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the wisdom of the Ukrainian relinquishment has been questioned—indeed, John Mearsheimer made the case for a Ukrainian nuclear arsenal prior to Kyiv’s accession to the NPT. Yet for the United States in the 1990s, the dangers of a new nuclear state in a troubled region outweighed the hypothetical deterrent benefit.

As the United States and its allies ponder the future of Putin’s regime, policymakers would be wise to consider these experiences. A Russian domestic implosion might be good for Ukraine’s battlefield success but deeply injurious to other U.S. interests. Ironically, and for all that Washington has done thus far to support Ukraine, the closer Russia comes to a political collapse, the more likely Washington might be to step back from its efforts to punish Putin’s regime. Otherwise, it risks having to deal with instability and a new, potentially more reckless Russian leader with his finger on the nuclear button—or, even worse, more than one Russian leader. When Baker considered such dangers in 1991, he feared “an extraordinarily dangerous situation for Europe and for the rest of the world—indeed, for the United States.” For all the promise that domestic Russian instability may hold for battlefield progress in Ukraine, it risks opening the door to such extraordinary dangers again.

### They Say: “Lash Out is False”

#### Lash out is highly likely as a response to Putin’s humiliation

Hanna Samir Kassab, 2024 - Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northern Michigan University, USA “PRESTIGE, HUMILIATION AND SAVING FACE: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND GREAT POWER POLITICS” Contemporary Military Challenges, 2024 – 26/No. 1, <https://tinyurl.com/3pff3wkd> //DH

To combine point two from the “Tasks” and point two from “Prerequisites”, we can conclude that a major objective of all states would be to never lose face. Morgenthau stated that diplomacy is made more difficult because of this humiliation factor. There must be an allowance for saving face. In this way, diplomacy might be able to make “the peace more secure than it is today…” (Ibid., p 445). This not only minimizes the chances of a possible violent clash, but provides competing states with the acknowledgment of the prestige they seemingly crave. Thus, acknowledging greatness and saving face is necessary to keep the peace by providing a sort of balance of status in the international system. However, establishing this balance could be difficult if an actor feels that it needs to act aggressively to defend prestige and avoid humiliation. This requires diplomatic finesse. The United States must now deal with other great powers, China and Russia, with serious power potential. These two powers seem determined to overturn past humiliations. It may be necessary to placate their need for prestige and status through the recognition of their spheres of influence.

Some recognition of Chinese and Russian greatness may be necessary to maintain a balance of power to secure international stability. This might be achieved by advocating a spheres of influence model. As defined, a sphere of influence is any “geographic region characterized by the high penetration of one superpower to the exclusion of others and particularly of a rival superpower” (Kaufman, 1976, p 11). Etzioni (2015) suggests dividing the world into three spheres of influence:

– The United States: Central and South America and the Caribbean;

– Russia: Eastern Europe and the Caucuses;

– China: South-East Asia, the South and East China Seas (p 126).

He justifies this by looking at two main factors: geographic proximity and history. By acquiescing a specific area for a specific power, states will recognize one another for their power and prestige. Mutual recognition of spheres of influence, especially if deemed necessary to a state’s security, may be beneficial in order to stabilize status, specifically limiting any feelings of humiliation and thereby eliminating the need to seek prestige aggressively.

Ignoring the humiliation-prestige dynamic disregards the identity of states that have specific historical circumstances driving their contemporary behavior. Russia, the United States, and China all have exceptional histories and think of themselves as exceptional powers. To admit that these states are indeed behaving in an anachronistic manner may allow scholarship the ability to explain and understand what is at stake: international peace and security. It takes courage to allow competitors to save face and to do something that is indeed humiliating but in the state’s best interests. There is little marginal benefit at stake save great power pride.

By understanding the systemic importance of psychological/emotional feelings of humiliation and prestige, states will be better prepared to deal with one another. Appreciating that states behave in this way allows us to explain and predict aggressive or expansionist behavior. By adjusting structural realism slightly by adding the psychological/emotional variable to the analysis, one might see the benefit of facesaving behavior. It seems clear that humiliation causes the state to hurt, and this hurt may lead to future aggression, as prestige-seeking behavior may be perceived as the only real solution.

Prestige-seeking behavior may be destructive, as states use military and other forms of power to humiliate others to gain higher status. It could be useful to start tracing the psychological histories of states to understand the potential destructive ramifications of a possible rise to power. By documenting the prestigious rise and humiliating fall of great powers, we could extract patterns of behavior reflected by the prestige-humiliation dynamic. If this psychology did not matter, then why did the leaders of the cases discussed (Nazi Germany, China, and Russia) put so much emphasis on moments of humiliation, with hopes of future prestigious recognition? It seems clear that states are focused on their own identity, and in particular their status. They seek to avoid humiliation and win recognition from others.

Conclusion

Thousands of years may separate humanity, yet state behavior seems similar. Words like humiliation and prestige are better suited for the 19th century. Withdrawal signals weakness and humiliation. Emperor Aurelian of Rome had to withdraw from Dacia, once a gold and silver-rich province of Rome conquered by Trajan, a beloved emperor. By Aurelian’s time, much of that gold had been depleted (MacKendrick, 2000, p 132). Dacia had little material benefit, but to withdraw was to signal weakness. The problem was worsened by the fact that Dacia was difficult to defend and easy to attack. Aurelian made the difficult decision to withdraw, fending off much criticism for it. The United States has similar considerations. Mitch McConnell, in the light of President Trump’s sudden partial withdrawal from Afghanistan, said: “As several former officials and ambassadors recently stated, ‘The spectacle of US troops abandoning facilities and equipment, leaving the field in Afghanistan to the Taliban and ISIS, would be broadcast around the world as a symbol of US defeat and humiliation, and a victory for Islamist extremism’” (McConnell quoted in the New York Post, 2020). A United States withdrawal would mean humiliation for the United States and a much-admired victory for terrorist networks. McConnell compared it to another humiliating withdrawal: Vietnam. As a result, a state needs to save face: defending one’s reputation by avoiding humiliation and shielding prestige (Frevert and Bresnahan, 2020). Thus, this paper argues that there is a dichotomy between prestige and humiliation.

There is a negative, zero-sum relationship which drives prestige and humiliation: one state’s prestige is based on the humiliation of another. These are psychological forces that form part of the international system. These forces shape state behavior and must be included in any structural realist analysis. Even though these forces are immaterial, humiliation and prestige are major drivers of international relations. Saving face is a policy that avoids feelings of humiliation. A humiliated state may lash out, leading to conflict. We must thus understand the importance of the psychological aspects of state behavior.

#### Putin will lash out by striking NATO

Frederick et al, 2022 - Director, Defense and Political Sciences Department; Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation “Pathways to Russian Escalation Against NATO from the Ukraine War,” RAND, 7/26, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1971-1.html> //DH

Pathway 3: Domestic Instability in Russia Sparks Aggression

A dramatic increase in domestic, economic, and political instability in Russia also could lead the Kremlin to decide to attack NATO member states. Crucially, Russian leaders see antigovernment protests as a key element of a potential Western-backed campaign to overthrow their regime. According to Russian strategists, several other components of such a campaign are taking place: instability on Russia’s periphery, a buildup of U.S. forces near Russian borders, and Western economic warfare (Podberezkin, 2015, p. 303). Eventually, these strategists say, this campaign would culminate in direct kinetic strikes on the homeland. Therefore, Moscow is more likely to see large-scale protests that begin in the current environment as evidence of a coordinated Western campaign to topple the Russian government. Against this backdrop, officials from the United States or other NATO governments speaking openly about the possible “physical elimination” of President Putin, as one NATO foreign minister put it (“Luxembourg Foreign Minister Calls . . . ,” 2022), or highlighting the prospect that domestic unrest would depose the current regime, could heighten the Russian leadership’s perceptions that popular discontent is driven by U.S. or allied intelligence operations and therefore constitutes a non-kinetic attack on the homeland. The Kremlin would likely conflate the security of the regime and the security of the country.

To plausibly affect the Kremlin’s calculus about horizontal escalation, instability would have to grow significantly in size and scope beyond the relatively small antiwar protests that took place during the first weeks of the war in major cities. However, as opposed to the war itself, the dramatic economic contraction that has resulted from the war might well be the spark for such broader popular unrest once economic pain is felt over the medium to long term. The protests would likely need to reach the point where they threaten to exceed the Russian government’s ability to control them before Moscow would contemplate taking actions abroad.

Because the Russian government would likely view protests of this scale as a non-kinetic NATO attack, it might decide to strike NATO allies to compel a cessation of external support for the domestic threat. Russian responses are more likely to begin with non-kinetic attacks (e.g., cyberattacks against critical infrastructure targets such as power grids, power plants, or key information or telecommunications systems, including satellites) in an effort to dissuade future perceived NATO aggression at minimal cost. If these attacks are successful in substantially disrupting U.S. or allied economic and political life, the United States or other allies might feel compelled to respond in kind by disrupting similar systems within Russia. Such attacks, which would compound existing stresses from the war, could lead Russian leadership to conclude that it has exhausted non-kinetic options for reducing NATO threats to regime survival and therefore decide to turn to kinetic attacks.

### They Say: “Turn: Regime Change Good”

#### Regime change risks nuclear lash-out and whoever replaces Putin is likely to be worse

Ted Snider and Anatol Lieven, 2022 – \*regular columnist on U.S. foreign policy and history at Antiwar.com and The Libertarian Institute. AND \*\*Director of the Eurasia Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. “Why any US push for regime change in Moscow is a bad idea” Responsible Statecraft, 5/25, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/05/25/why-any-us-push-for-regime-change-is-moscow-is-a-bad-idea/> //DH

First and foremost however, if Putin and his inner circle believe that the West’s intention is to overthrow them whatever they do, then all incentive on their part to reach a compromise peace in Ukraine will disappear. In the worst-case scenario, they might resort to the use of nuclear weapons to save the regime (and as they would doubtless convince themselves, the Russian state itself).

As far as the Russian people are concerned, even many who have come to detest the regime for its corruption and criminality worry deeply that given the underlying weaknesses of the Russian state, forced and uncontrolled regime change could lead to the catastrophic weakening of the state itself, leading to another period of anarchy and economic collapse.

That may indeed be the hope of Western hardliners; but if so, they should think seriously about the impact of such a collapse on security in Eurasia and especially the radical Islamist threat to the West. In any case, fear of state collapse driven by America is likely to consolidate, not reduce, support for the regime among Russians. We should hardly forget that in the great majority of cases where Washington has used economic sanctions in an effort to produce regime change — Cuba, Venezuela, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea — that strategy has failed.

Western hardliners who want to weaken or destroy Russia appear to have no real interest in the character of a post-Putin regime, let alone the wellbeing of the Russian or Ukrainian peoples. For them, it is enough that Russia as a state should be crippled. Other observers (Russian liberals as well as Westerners) have come to believe that Putin is so evil that whatever replaces him simply has to be better.

If only this were true. Tragically, if there is one lesson that the European and Russian history of the last century should teach us, it is that however bad things may be, they can almost always get even worse. Bad as Putin is, he is by no means the worst leader that Russia might throw up, especially in the circumstances of the increasingly harsh nationalist extremism generated by the war in Ukraine. It is entirely possible given the present mood in Russia that even a popularly-elected successor to Putin might be even more recklessly aggressive.

In this context, U.S. analysts should also carefully examine the history of U.S.-backed coups in various parts of the world, and the unforeseen and awful consequences that often resulted — a history magisterially critiqued by Stephen Kinzer. In her careful analysis of US-backed coups, “Covert Regime Change,” Lindsey O’Rourke says that one of the two necessary criteria for Washington to support regime change is the ability “to identify a plausible domestic political alternative to the target regime.” If you are going to remove a leader because of unsolvable policy differences, there must be the promise of a new leader that “share[s your] policy preferences.”

Those Western (and Russian liberal) commentators who believe in the possibility of a pro-Western successor to Putin are in some respects making the same mistake as those who demand that Russia become a “normal nation-state.” They are ignoring the power of nationalism, which dominates throughout the former Soviet bloc. The entire eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union since the end of the Cold War, and the reconstruction of states that it has entailed, has been powered very largely by local ethnic nationalisms; which in some cases (Poland and Hungary), with Western protection secured, have become virulently hostile to contemporary Western liberal democratic culture.

Russia, under both Yeltsin and Putin, inherited by contrast the state nationalism of the USSR (and even of the Russian empire that preceded it). This has had bad and good effects. On the bad side, it has meant that Russia has inherited the imperial character and ambitions of those states. On the other hand, it has meant that within Russia, unlike in Hungary, Poland or the Baltic States, the state has not yet become narrowly ethnic nationalist; which has been very fortunate indeed for Russia’s ethnic and religious minorities.

In an essay published in 2012, Putin himself wrote of Russia as an innately multi-ethnic and multi-religious state (albeit with Russian language and culture as the central element), and he warned that Russian ethnic chauvinism would destroy the Russian Federation. In keeping with this belief, Putin’s regime and its top economic elites have been thoroughly multi-ethnic, and the cultural traditions of Russia’s autonomous republics have been respected. There is no guarantee that this would continue to be the case under Putin’s successor.

As far as relations with the West are concerned, Putin has clearly now shifted to an extremely hostile position. Previously, however, this was not so. For a long time, Putin often sought to portray Russia as a kind of “third West” (alongside the two Wests of America and Europe); culturally and politically distinct, but part of the Western world.

Above all, Putin sought to appeal to France and Germany against America — something which in the view of hardliners within the Russian regime (now widely called “the Party of War”) led him to act in 2014 with far greater military restraint towards Ukraine than he should have done. Today, these same people are said to be advocating a terrifying escalation of the war in Ukraine. If they replace Putin this would not be better for anyone.

American advocates of regime change should remember both the unpredictable and sometimes terrible results of U.S.-inspired regime change elsewhere in the world; and America’s absolutely awful record of trying to manage Russian internal affairs in the 1990s. That effort helped to produce Putin’s regime; a repeat performance could produce something even worse.

#### Whoever replaces Putin would still continue with the war

Shawn Cochran, 2022 - senior political scientist at RAND “Will Putin’s War in Ukraine Continue Without Him?” War on the Rocks, 10/10, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/10/will-putins-war-in-ukraine-continue-without-him/> //DH

For Putin, the war in Ukraine could be, effectively, a matter of political survival because defeat could very well lead to his ouster. But the risk of punishment does not just pertain to Putin’s remaining tenure in office. Defeat in Ukraine would significantly taint Putin’s image and long-term legacy. Putin envisions himself as a modern-day Peter the Great and wants to be remembered as such. He sees it as his mission and destiny to return Russia to its rightful status as a world power, erasing the indignity of a loss in the Cold War and subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union. The situation in Ukraine puts this personal legacy at risk, and the West should not underestimate how far Putin will go to stave off defeat.

But what if Putin is deposed with the war ongoing, whether due to declining health or domestic opposition? For any successor, the current state of Russian domestic politics would be a proverbial minefield and disincentivize any move to extricate Russia from the conflict, at least in the short term. According to one Russian journalist, a vicious blame game has erupted in Russia over the flailing special military operation. Particularly, Kremlin officials are working to shift blame from Putin to senior military leaders, effectively “manufacturing a crisis with its Ministry of Defense in an attempt to distance President Vladimir Putin from the stunning retreats and other embarrassing battlefield failures.” Military leadership, already on edge given a rash of senior commander firings, is pushing back, deflecting blame to other parts of the state for providing faulty intelligence and for inadequately resourcing the military, or otherwise tying the military’s hands.

The central role of the military in the politics of blame is especially problematic. For new political leadership seeking to end a protracted war short of achieving the state’s objectives, the support of military leadership is critical given what civil-military relations scholar Peter Feaver refers to as the special moral competence of the armed forces in the context of war termination. Absent this support, new political leadership is more vulnerable to attacks by hawkish elements of the political opposition and more susceptible to backstabber and sellout accusations. But garnering military leadership backing for military withdrawal in such a scenario is no easy task. Even if military leadership is in favor of abandoning the war, military leadership is unlikely to support any such move unless there is a strong civil-military relationship, or civil-military bargain, characterized by mutual trust so that military leadership does not fear being scapegoated by political leadership in an effort to deflect blame. This condition does not currently exist amidst Russia’s vicious blame game, and it would likely take time to build in the wake of a change in political leadership, as history suggests that the Russian military’s sensitivity to scapegoating goes deeper than the current conflict. In the course of Russia’s First Chechen War (1994-1996), for example, Russian Gen. Alexander Lebed declared to the media, “Every time, the orders were explicit and came from the highest level … And every time, when we [the military] had done their dirty work for them [the politicians], they ran away and left us to take all the blame … Believe me, the army will never allow that to happen again.”

Will Putin’s War Continue Without Putin?

If Putin departs office (voluntarily or not) with the war in Ukraine ongoing, his successor may elect to quit fighting, but the decision will not be easy or risk free, and this holds regardless of who replaces Putin, whether it is Medvedev, Sobyanin, or even Navalny. Given his responsibility for starting the war, Putin is highly susceptible to blame and punishment for how the war ends and is apt to keep fighting despite mounting costs and little hope of winning. But any new leader who inherits Putin’s war would not be immune to similar domestic pressures. With any case of costly, protracted war, the politics of blame can have a powerful impact on war termination decision-making and potentially drive new leaders to keep fighting even if they did not support the war prior to taking office. But Russia’s current domestic political environment, with its vicious blame game pitting political versus military leadership, would be especially problematic for a new political leader seeking to extricate Russia from the war. Looking at the historical record, many new leaders in comparable circumstances have decided to keep fighting an ongoing war or else push for peace only to have the extrication process drag on for years. It is difficult and probably pointless to predict the outcome of any wartime change of leadership in the case of Russia’s war in Ukraine. At a minimum, however, the West should not assume a change of leadership would result in an end to the war, at least in the short term, as Putin’s war could very well continue without Putin.

### They Say: “US Companies Won’t Invest”

#### Prior losses won’t deter US investment – energy firms think pragmatically about overall profits

Buchanan, 2023 - PhD, lecturer in strategic studies at Deakin University specializes in Arctic and Antarctic geopolitics and Russian foreign energy strategy, Non-Resident Fellow with the Modern War Institute at West Point. (Elizabeth, Red Arctic: Russian Strategy Under Putin, Kindle Edition //DH

For now at least, Russia’s Arctic priority remains the western Russian Arctic zone, specifically the Yamal Peninsula. The majority of Russia-West tensions will therefore continue to emerge in this European Arctic region, potentially extending out to the Greenland- Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap. However, this does not negate the strategic value of Russia’s eastern Arctic flank. Russian cooperation with international partners is also a reality of the underdeveloped Russian eastern Arctic zone. Along the Laptev and Kara Seas, US firm ExxonMobil remains interested in offshore oil plans. Despite one of the biggest write-downs of its commercial history, ExxonMobil’s offshore Russian Arctic investments located here are still on the books. Again, energy giants think long-term and pragmatically.

#### US companies have already approached Russia over Arctic LNG

Interfax, 2025 – “U.S. companies seem keen on investing in Russia's Arctic region, including LNG – Dmitriev” 3/27 <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/110640/> //DH

Companies in the United States are showing their interest in investing in the Russian Arctic region, including liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, and in the case of such investments, Russia should retain control, Russian Special Representative for Investment and Economic Cooperation Kirill Dmitriev said on Thursday.

"It is very important that we really see our Arctic region as being one such place for joint development for many countries. Of course, it makes sense to combine efforts, including on the climate agenda, the investment agenda, the energy agenda. And we really see a possibility of cooperation, including with the U.S., on a number of Arctic projects. We are seeing a U.S. interest in a number of Russian technologies, including in the LNG sphere. We are seeing U.S. companies' desire to invest in various Arctic projects. But of course, it is very important here for any such investment to remain under Russia's full control," Dmitriev told journalists on the sidelines of the International Arctic forum.

The Arctic region contains 13% of the world's untapped oil reserves and 30% of its untapped gas reserves. "Russia will certainly play a key role in the development of these resources, but international partners, including U.S. ones, can also be invited [to hold] minority stakes," Dmitriev said.

## Relations Extensions

### They Say: “Can’t Solve Relations”

#### Putin wants the plan – Arctic development is his most important goal

Lyle J. Goldstein, 2024 – Director of Asia Engagement at Defense Priorities and serves concurrently as Director of the China Initiative and Senior Fellow at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University. “Trump can leverage the Arctic to end Ukraine War” Responsible Statecraft, 12/20, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/ukraine-artic/> //DH

However, the incoming administration has an opportunity to break from the status quo and entice Russia to end the war. This should include incentives with respect to the Arctic — an issue guaranteed to capture Russian President Vladimir Putin’s attention. Such an option could also prove attractive to Trump, who approaches the world through the lens of a businessman looking to strike big deals.

Putin’s participation in a November ceremony launching the new nuclear icebreaker Chukotka elicited little notice in the West but demonstrated the Russian president’s laser-like focus on developing the Arctic region. The vessel is reported to be the largest and most capable icebreaker in the world at 567 feet in length and displacing 33,500 tons, with two nuclear reactors that provide 350 megawatts of power, allowing it to break through ice nearly 10 feet thick.

Such ships do not come cheap, and the Chukotka is priced at about half a billion dollars.

The Chukotka is the fourth in a series of nuclear icebreakers, with another of the same class, the Yakutia, also nearing completion and a fresh keel due to be laid down in 2025. In October, an even more ambitious class of nuclear icebreakers received the green light for production in a shipyard near Vladivostok, costing $1 billion, an astronomical sum in today’s Russia.

The destination of the icebreakers is the Northern Sea Route (NSR), a shipping route that runs north of Russia and connects Western Europe to the Asia-Pacific. This year, a variety of new records have been set in the NSR, including for the largest ever container ship, which traversed the NSR in September, and the most oil ever transported.

For the Russian leader confronting both political and economic headwinds, the Arctic is always near the top of the agenda because it comprises about 10% of Russian GDP and 20% of its exports. Russian energy analysts are aiming to multiply Russian resource exports over the NSR by six or seven times to 200 million tons in the next five years. According to a mid-2024 report, “Russia certainly has the Arctic resources to power this enormous expansion of exports.”

Yet, the Kremlin’s Arctic ambitions go well beyond oil and gas. As all Russian leaders understand, the country’s economic growth has always been stymied by the simple fact that most of Russia’s giant rivers, such as the Ob, the Yenisei, and the Lena, all flow north into the Arctic. Thus, a functional NSR that has year-round navigation logically holds the key to unlocking major development in the country’s vast, resource-rich interior and more broadly for Siberia — a goal almost as old as the Russian state itself.

Putin is well aware that building tanks and missiles alone will not in itself make Russia strong and prosperous in the future, but this mega-project could open this possibility.

China has also embraced the NSR through its “Polar Silk Road” and has sought to partner closely with the Kremlin in the Arctic. A 2024 Chinese analysis argued that Beijing should ensure that Chinese and Russian corporations investing in the Arctic transit corridor are profitable.

Yet despite incremental progress, Chinese and Russian analysts are aware that the Arctic passage will never achieve its true potential without Western backing. This is why focusing on the Arctic is likely to have the largest effect on stopping the war in Ukraine. The long-sought shipping route across the High North remains one of the few relatively concrete geo-economic prizes that the Kremlin prizes on par with Ukraine itself.

Crucially, a newly dynamic transport corridor should apportion some percentage of the ample profits — say, 5 percent for the next five decades — to rebuilding Ukraine’s destroyed infrastructure. This consistent stream of resources would be a form of reparations payments to Kyiv that would likely amount to hundreds of billions of dollars.

Undoubtedly, China would strongly support this plan. But a number of other interested countries that are currently estranged from Russia — whether Canada, Finland, Norway, and Sweden in the West, or South Korea and Japan in the East — stand to profit from the NSR as well, with the potential to ease global tensions across Eurasia.

Parts of the U.S. could also economically benefit, including Alaska, most obviously, but also northern ports like Seattle and even Boston. Western countries at the table for the NSR, moreover, will likely mean sounder environmental standards.

For this deal to have meaningful results, the U.S. would need to lift sanctions that have been applied against NSR projects. It would also be helpful if they acted to facilitate major European shipping companies like Hapag Lloyd and Maersk to green light the route. These steps might be sufficient, but the U.S. and Europe could further sweeten the pot with encouragement and even incentives for Western investment along the NSR.

#### The plan removes a huge geopolitical flashpoint between the US and Russia, and Putin sees increasing Arctic LNG as vital to geopolitical status

Anna Hirtenstein and Georgi Kantchev, 2024 – reporters “The U.S. Is Trying to Cripple Russia's Vast Arctic LNG Project; Washington wants to ensure Putin's flagship liquefied-natural-gas project is 'dead in the water'” Wall Street Journal, 4/14, factiva //DH **edited for ableist language in brackets**

Supercooled gas has quickly become one of the world's most important energy sources—and a flashpoint between Russia and the U.S.

Nowhere is that contest more apparent than in Russia's Arctic north. An enormous new coastal facility is being built there to produce liquefied natural gas, a key project for Russian President Vladimir Putin .

The U.S. is using a barrage of sanctions to ~~cripple~~ [stop – edited DH] the initiative, known as Arctic LNG 2. These have stopped Russia from taking delivery of specialized, colossal tankers that it needs to transport the gas, and made it hard to build alternative vessels domestically.

"Our role is to ensure Arctic LNG 2 is dead in the water," Geoffrey Pyatt, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for energy resources, told a conference in Switzerland on Monday.

Globally, LNG is ascendant. Demand is buoyant as governments ditch dirtier coal and the uptake of power-hungry artificial intelligence accelerates. Supply is surging too, and players such as industry heavyweight Qatar have major expansion plans.

The Arctic tussle comes at a delicate time for energy policy in the U.S., which last year became the biggest LNG exporter. The Biden administration has paused approval of new LNG exports due to environmental concerns. The move has angered business groups and customers in allied, energy-poor countries such as Japan and Germany, and some think it will handicap U.S. efforts to limit Russia's profits from sales of natural gas.

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R., La.) is pushing to reverse the pause, possibly linking it to a vote on Ukraine aid in the chamber. Johnson's home district in Louisiana is home to a proposed LNG export terminal affected by the halt.

For Russia's part, Putin aims to more than triple LNG exports in the coming years. His goal: Bring in more money to fund the war in Ukraine and offset a decline in Russia's traditional business of exporting gas via pipelines.

Gas exports have crashed since the invasion, with Europe weaning itself off piped Russian gas and China now Moscow's main customer. While Russia has found new markets for its oil, transported by ship, replacing lost volumes that used to flow through fixed gas pipelines has proved harder.

That is where LNG comes in. Russia's experiment with liquefied gas so far is comparatively small, but it wants to expand fast. About 32 million metric tons a year of capacity are under construction, according to Rystad Energy , a consulting firm, on top of an existing 29 million tons.

Geopolitical considerations also matter, said Tatiana Mitrova , a research fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy. "It's about expanding presence with LNG, especially with China and in the global south," she said.

"Gas has always been an important tool of influence for Russia," Mitrova said.

### They Say: “Putin Pockets Concessions”

#### Satisfying Putin’s status concerns makes genuine cooperation possible

Mikhail Polianskii, 2024 – Department of International Institutions, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), Frankfurt am Main, Germany “Russian Foreign Policy Research and War in Ukraine: Old Answers to New Questions?” Communist and Post-Communist Studies (2024) 57 (2): 156–172.

<https://online.ucpress.edu/cpcs/article/57/2/156/200348/Russian-Foreign-Policy-Research-and-War-in> //DH

Even though there is no consensus in the scholarly community about the exact ingredients of Russia’s strategic identity, most researchers in this strand of literature note that the country is internationally guided by the feeling of “[being] a great power, preferring bilateralism, emphasizing traditional elements of national might and desiring equal status with the most powerful members” (Lo 2015, 194). As far as the first component is concerned, researchers argue that for the Russian leadership, being a great power is synonymous with the very foundations of Russia’s existence (Schmitt 2020). Recovery of great-powerness, which has been forfeited with the collapse of the Soviet Union, is therefore a central motivation for many Russian leaders (Clunan 2014; Tsygankov 2014). As Larson and Shevchenko (2019, 244) assert, Putin’s foreign policy is largely driven by his determination “to ultimately restore Russia to great power status with [its own] sphere of influence.”

The West, being the most “significant other” for Moscow and thus the main enabler of these status claims, denied what Russia believed to be a deserved place in the European and global order in the late 2000s, which led to the Kremlin’s irritation and ensuing tensions between the two (Leichtova 2016; Polianskii 2021). White and Feklyunina (2014) point out that the conflict over status recognition particularly worsened as Russia increasingly started viewing itself as normatively and morally superior vis-à-vis the “decadent” West in the early 2010s. In this reading, Moscow’s increased opposition toward the West since the mid-2000s comes from Moscow’s self-perception as a great power and the urge to make others recognize it as such (Polianskii 2022). This mechanism suggests that when Russia’s status concerns have been met, its foreign policy becomes more cooperative, whereas when they are ignored, the Kremlin becomes increasingly aggressive.

#### Even decorative minor concessions help in restoring relations

Anton Mardasov, 2025 – Non-resident scholar and researcher at the Middle East Institute. Military expert at the Russian International Affairs Council. “Can Arctic cooperation thaw US-Russia tensions?” Al Majalla, 5/23, <https://en.majalla.com/node/325707/politics/can-arctic-cooperation-thaw-us-russia-tensions> //DH

The Arctic and the North Pole did not arise by chance. It is clear that American and Russian negotiators initially sought to separate overall bilateral ties from the war in Ukraine. It is therefore no coincidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin included Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, in the negotiating team. His task was to energetically and clearly explain the benefits of restoring investment and economic cooperation to a business-minded Donald Trump.

Moscow’s emphasis on potential collaboration in the Arctic seems logical, given the US president’s assertive desire to gain control of Greenland and limit China’s activities in the region. There have, after all, been positive examples of cooperation in the past, including joint ventures between Russia’s Rosneft and US companies ExxonMobil and General Electric.

In 2014, collaboration between Rosneft and ExxonMobil led to the discovery of a field in the Kara Sea with reserves of 130 million tonnes of oil and 422 billion cubic metres of gas. However, the exploration was affected by Western sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014, leading to ExxonMobil’s withdrawal from the project.

The Kremlin chose to publicly develop this theme during Putin’s visit to Murmansk, which was timed to coincide with US Vice President JD Vance’s visit to Greenland. During his participation in the ‘Arctic: Territory of Dialogue’ forum, the Russian president called for cooperation with the US in the Arctic and effectively voiced support for Washington’s claims to Greenland. He also pointed out that the question of Greenland had nothing to do with Russia, while expressing concern that NATO countries consider the North Pole a possible conflict zone. In particular, the alliance’s newest recruits, Finland and Sweden, have been involved in military exercises in the territory.

At the same forum, Dmitriev announced Russia’s plan to create a special investment fund for Arctic development by the end of the year. This fund, he claimed, would attract capital from partners in the GCC and “a number of Western countries”. He also noted the US has shown interest in investing in Russia’s Arctic region, including LNG projects.

On the one hand, the Kremlin’s exploitation of the Arctic can be viewed within the framework of Russia’s diplomatic approach to the current US administration. Moscow is ready to throw decorative minor concessions to Trump in order to prevent fundamental disagreements over Ukraine from interfering with the restoration of bilateral relations.

Good cop/bad cop

Moreover, in his communication with the US, Putin uses the traditional good cop/bad cop tactic, with the role of the good guy played by Dmitriev. Experienced diplomats and security officials, meanwhile, are left to play the hardliners. At the same time, the Russian president realises that both groups are bound to compete with each other, leading to more effective negotiations and honest reporting.

The Kremlin is also well aware that Trump’s Arctic ambitions – such as acquiring Greenland, increasing activity within the framework of the Icebreaker Cooperation Effort (ICE), and purchasing icebreakers from Finland—are directly related to the containment of Russia’s Arctic expansion and the build-up of US military infrastructure in the region.

At the same time, Washington’s Arctic policy is not only related to Trump’s business acumen – it follows on from previous administrations. During Joe Biden’s presidency, for example, the US made a qualitative leap in Arctic policy. It mentioned the Arctic in its National Security Strategy, adopted a new Arctic strategy, established the post of Arctic ambassador, concluded an alliance with Canada and Finland, and initiated large-scale modernisation of the joint North American Aerospace Defence Command with Ottawa.

So, while Moscow and Washington continue to play geopolitical chess—anticipating and concealing their next moves—dialogue helps reduce mutual misunderstanding.

Prior to the war in Ukraine, Russia invested heavily in rebuilding its Arctic military presence, which is now much larger than all other countries in the Arctic combined. However, almost all of its facilities are concentrated in the western Arctic, specifically the Kola Peninsula, with the exception of a small cluster on the Novosibirsk Islands.

### They Say: “Arms Control Fails”

#### The internal link is linear---less cooperation directly contributes to increased risk of miscalculation and escalation.

Ryan Burke et al. 25. \*\*\*Ryan Burke is the Professor of Military & Strategic Studies at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Professor in the Center for Arctic Security and Resilience at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, PhD from the University of Delaware, M.P.A. from Harvard University, M.S. from Saint Joseph’s University. \*\*\*Andrea Charron is the Director of the Centre for Defense and Security Studies and Professor of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, PhD in War Studies from the Royal Military College of Canada, M.A. in International Relations from Webster University, M.A. in Public Administration from Dalhousie University. \*\*\*Michael Paul is a PhD, Senior Fellow of the International Security division of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. “Trump 2.0’s Arctic Opportunity: Thawing Frozen Dialogue”. Wilson Center. 03-11-2025. https://ukraine.wilsoncenter.org/article/trump-20s-arctic-opportunity-thawing-frozen-dialogue

The Biden administration’s 2022 National Security Strategy pledged to restore American leadership on the global stage while tacitly criticizing the previous Trump administration’s self-interested and transactional approach to world affairs. However, when it comes to Russian relations, neither the first Trump nor Biden administrations did anything to rescind Obama’s Kremlin ban. Decreased dialogue between Washington and Moscow only degrades diplomacy, exacerbates tension, and increases the unknowns. Since the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the global situation has gone from bad to worse. It has become particularly troubling in the Arctic where military and commercial activities continue to increase in scope and scale and where there are no functioning forums—at the official level—enabling Washington and Moscow to deescalate tensions. Absent a structured forum for de-escalation, the risk for miscalculation and escalation increases.

The Arctic presents an opportunity for the Trump administration to pursue pragmatic and more open engagement between Washington and Moscow, specifically in the military and security space. Such a forum currently exists at the Track 2 level, but absent official participation from Washington and Moscow decision makers, this forum’s efforts to curtail conflict will struggle.

#### Even partially successful arms control reduces the risk of war and builds trust for future agreements

Paul Scharre and Megan Lamber, 2022 - \*Vice President and Director of Studies at CNAS and \*\* Associate Fellow for the Technology and National Security Program at CNAS. Center for a New American Security. October <https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/AI-and-Arms-Control_FINAL.pdf?mtime=20221017102323&focal=none> //DH

Arms control is deemed successful when state behavior is restrained—in weapons development, quantity produced, deployment posture, or use. For the purposes of this paper, arms control agreements that fail to restrain state behavior are not considered successful. In rare instances, restraint occurs by tacit agreement, without any formal treaty or other mechanism. Generally, however, formal agreements are a useful coordination mechanism between states for reaching clarity on what is permitted and what is not. In many cases, success exists on a spectrum. Few arms control agreements are 100 percent successful, with zero violations. Some of the most successful agreements, such as modern bans on chemical and biological weapons or limits on the proliferation of nuclear weapons, have some exceptions and violators. Other agreements are successful only for a period of time, after which technology or the political environment changes in a way that causes them to collapse. Nevertheless, even partially successful agreements can be valuable in reducing harm by improving stability, reducing civilian casualties, or reducing combatant suffering.

DESIRABILITY OF ARMS CONTROL

A weapon that is effective, grants unique access or a capability, or provides a decisive battlefield advantage has high military value. Although relinquishment is not impossible, states will be reluctant to give up a weapon that provides a critical advantage or a unique capability even if the weapon arguably causes other significant harm. A weapon’s military value is the most important factor that influences the desirability of arms control. Above all, states want to ensure their own security.

Weighed against a weapon’s value is its perceived horribleness—meaning the type of injury it causes, its stability risks, its impact on the social or political order, or its indiscriminate nature. Although most successful bans are against weapons that are not particularly effective, it is oversimplified to suggest that bans are not feasible for any weapon with military value. War is horrible, and states have at times sought to temper its horror through arms control measures that restrain their actions or capabilities.

States have often sought to restrain weapons that increase combatant or civilian suffering in war beyond that required for battlefield effectiveness. States have at times restricted weapons that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering to combatants, for example, if such weapons are not deemed to be uniquely effective. 16 A bullet that leaves glass shards in the body, for example, causes superfluous injury beyond that required to disable combatants and win on the battlefield, because glass shards are not detectable by x-rays, and are therefore more difficult to remove from wounded personnel. (Weapons that leave undetectable fragments in the body are prohibited under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Protocol I.17) States have also attempted arms control for weapons or weapons delivery systems that are difficult to use in a discriminate manner to avoid civilian casualties. International humanitarian law already prohibits weapons that cause superfluous injury and indiscriminate attacks, yet states have sometimes coordinated on regulations that identify which specific weapons are worthy of special restraint.

Throughout history, those with political power have sought to control disruptive weapons, such as early firearms or the crossbow, that have threatened the existing political or social order. States have also tried to regulate weapons that could cause undue instability in crisis situations, such as intermediate-range ballistic missiles, anti-ballistic missile systems, or space-based weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Weapons that are perceived as destabilizing because they could provoke an arms race may also be susceptible to some form of regulation. For instance, a primary motivation for signatories to the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty was a desire to avoid a costly naval arms race.

A key factor to a state’s continued desire for arms control is reciprocity. While there are myriad threats and inducements that compel states to comply with arms control agreements in times of peace, it is not international opprobrium that restrains militaries in the heat of war—it is the fear of enemy reprisal.

FEASIBILITY OF ARMS CONTROL

Whereas the desirability of arms control encompasses the criteria that incentivize or disincentive states to attempt some form of control, feasibility includes the factors that determine if long-term, successful arms control is possible.

An essential ingredient for effective arms control is clarity among states about the degree of restraint that is desired. Lines clearly delineating what is and is not permitted must exist for arms control to succeed; ambiguous agreements run the risk of a slippery slope to widespread use. Simplicity is key. Agreements with a clear focal point, akin to the “no gas” and permanently blinding lasers prohibitions, are more effective, because states have a clear understanding of the expectations of their behavior and that of their adversaries’.18

A closely related issue is the necessity of states’ being able to comply with an agreement to restrain use. In the early 20th century, states sought to limit the use of submarines and aerial bombardment, but practical realities in the ways submarines and aircraft were employed made it difficult for states to comply with the agreed-upon limits. States initially restrained their use in wartime, but restraint did not last once the practical difficulties of doing so in war were revealed.

Arms control’s feasibility is also affected by states’ ability to verify whether other parties are complying with an agreement. This ability can be accomplished through a formal verification regime, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be. The key to verification is ensuring sufficient transparency. For weapons that can be developed in secret—such as chemical or nuclear weapons—transparency may need to be assured through a verification regime. In other cases, countries may adopt less formal measures of verifying other states’ compliance, such as relying on national intelligence collection measures.

The overall number of countries needed for an agreement to succeed also influences the feasibility of arms control. Feasibility increases when fewer countries are necessary for arms control to succeed. If the polarity of the international system causes military power to be concentrated in a small number of states, getting those states to agree is crucial to success. Despite their mutual hostility, the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States had a number of successful arms control treaties during the Cold War, some of which were bilateral agreements and some of which included many states but were led by the United States and USSR. Alternatively, in some cases, few states may be needed for an agreement to be successful simply because by virtue of technology, the weapons—such as nuclear weapons, long-range ballistic missiles, or space-based weapons—are accessible only to those few states. Diffuse weapons are more difficult to control, and more nations need to reach agreement for arms control on them to be lasting and successful. Which countries support an agreement is also important. As Rebecca Crootof explains, “If a treaty ban is ratified by the vast majority of states in the international community, but not by states that produce or use the weapon in question, it would be difficult to argue that the ban is successful.”19

Finally, arms control is often path-dependent, with successful regulations piggybacking on prior successful regulations of similar technologies. Modern bans on chemical and biological weapons build on long-standing ancient prohibitions on poison. The 2008 ban on cluster munitions was likely enabled by the successful 1997 ban on antipersonnel landmines. Cold War–era strategic arms control treaties likely had a snowballing effect, with successful agreements increasing the odds of future success.

The criteria within these two dimensions—desirability and feasibility—capture the most important factors that affect the success or failure of arms control. While not all-encompassing, these factors appear to be the most significant when examining the historical record of attempted arms control. If past historical experience turns out to be a useful guide for the future, then these factors are likely to influence the desirability and feasibility of arms control for new and emerging technologies, including military applications of AI.

#### There’s no evidence substantiating Russia violating NEW START---the treaty’s flexibility incentivizes both sides to abide by it.

Pranay Vaddi et al. 19. \*\*\*Pranay Vaddi is a Frank Stanton Professor of Nuclear Security and Political Science and Director of the Center for Nuclear Security Policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, \*\*\*Nicholas Blanchette is a former Research Assistant at the Nuclear Policy Program, \*\*\*Garrett Hinck has a BSFS in Science, Technology, and International Affairs, Georgetown University. “What Happens If the Last Nuclear Arms Control Treaty Expires?” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 9-5-2019. https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2019/09/what-happens-if-the-last-nuclear-arms-control-treaty-expires?lang=en

Why did both countries sign up?

The treaty entered into force in 2011. The then president Barack Obama’s administration successfully negotiated it as a follow-on to the original START Treaty, which was in effect from 1994 to 2009. The older START Treaty had expired without a replacement.

Neither Russia nor the United States were carrying out START-related inspections and notifications during this gap between the agreements, so each country lost valuable insight into the other’s nuclear forces.

Moscow and Washington both wanted provisions that allowed them to be flexible in the make-up of their nuclear arsenals, to inspect each other’s nuclear bases, and to limit either side’s ability to cheat and build a secret force of weapons to break out from the treaty. These provisions provided transparency into each side’s nuclear operations and thereby reduced at least one major source of potential instability between them. The treaty also gives both countries a useful amount of flexibility to decide what mix of missiles or bombers they prefer, as long as the total numbers of these systems remain under the limits.

Why is New START in danger of expiring?

The treaty is set to expire on February 5, 2021. The two countries could extend it by simple agreement. However, U.S. President Donald Trump has expressed hostility toward all agreements negotiated by the Obama administration, including New START. Trump administration officials have refused to commit to extending the treaty, saying they are still evaluating it. In June 2019, National Security Adviser John Bolton said although the administration had not yet reached a decision, New START extension was “unlikely.”

Yet U.S. military leaders have expressed clear support for New START. For example, General John Hyten, the leader of U.S. Strategic Command, has praised New START’s onsite inspections: “We have very good intelligence capabilities, but there’s really nothing that can replace the eyes on, hands-on ability to look at something.” Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that if Washington shows no interest in extending New START, “we won’t do it, then.”

It would be easy to extend New START. The treaty’s term can be lengthened for up to five additional years—until February 5, 2026—if the two countries’ presidents just agree to do so. Importantly, extension would not need to be ratified by the U.S. Senate. The Senate ratification requirement in the past has posed a major barrier to arms control treaties and would be difficult and time-consuming.

Are there valid reasons for letting New START expire?

Critics say that New START does not limit Russia’s large arsenal of shorter-range nuclear weapons and that Moscow is developing new experimental long-range systems, like its nuclear-powered cruise missile. This criticism is misleading in vital ways. The treaty was never designed to address Russia’s shorter-range arsenal. The long-range missiles it does limit are the only ones that could actually reach the U.S. homeland and therefore pose the greatest threat to U.S. national security.

Moreover, New START would restrict many of Russia’s newer weapons systems. And other new systems would not even be deployed until after the proposed period of treaty extension ends in 2026, meaning that a new agreement would need to be negotiated to deal with these weapons in any case. Letting New START expire is a surefire way to leave Russia’s most threatening long-range nuclear weapons unconstrained, while failing to set any limits on other Russian weapons either.

Critics also say that Russia has cheated on its arms control commitments. But there is no evidence that Moscow has violated New START—in fact, Russia has stuck to its rules so far. What’s more, the treaty’s robust verification provisions guard against future cheating, which is one reason why the U.S. military supports it. Verification under New START makes it more likely that the U.S. government will detect Russian preparations to break their treaty commitments, providing time to address these issues through diplomacy. Robust verification actually deters cheating.

### They Say: “No Arms Racing”

#### Arms control failure leads to nuclear war

Narang and Vaddi 25, \* Frank Stanton Professor of Nuclear Security and Political Science and Director of the Center for Nuclear Security Policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. From 2022 to 2024, he served as U.S. Principal Deputy and then Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy, \*\*Senior Nuclear Fellow at the Center for Nuclear Security Policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. From 2022 to 2025, he served as Senior Director for Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation at the National Security Council. (Vipin and Pranay, “How to Survive the New Nuclear Age: National Security in a World of Proliferating Risks and Eroding Constraints,” *Foreign Affairs*, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/how-survive-new-nuclear-age-narang-vaddi)//BB

In addition to reaffirming extended deterrence, the United States should seek to revive arms control and nuclear risk-reduction efforts, even if today’s environment has made such measures far more difficult. By adjusting its own nuclear posture, the United States could motivate China and Russia to come to the table. If that happens, Washington should tailor agreements to allow for evolving and emerging threats. For example, by permitting a higher warhead ceiling for deployed weapons, an updated New START agreement with Russia could, in theory, maintain mutually stable deterrence between Moscow and Washington while permitting the United States to counter and prioritize the increasing threat from China’s ICBM silos. Because Russia retains a relatively fixed number of strategic nuclear delivery systems, a Russian effort to increase the number of warheads on a given delivery system would be largely immaterial to U.S. strategists: to maintain an effective counterforce deterrent, U.S. Strategic Command would still need to target an unchanged number of Russian delivery systems but would have the required additional warheads available to target Chinese ICBMs.

Getting the three major nuclear powers to agree to some form of nuclear guardrails across all domains—nonstrategic and strategic nuclear weapons, missile defenses, and space—will be highly complex. To have even a chance of success, any such agreement will need to be innovative and flexible. For example, it might impose warhead limitations on all nuclear weapons states but allow for specific exclusions, including for capabilities that address imbalances in the relative number of warheads, strategic delivery platforms, or other big-ticket items. A model for such an approach might be the 1922 Washington Naval Conference, which limited the overall tonnage of great-power navies with the goal of preventing a naval arms race, but tailored the specific limits to each party’s needs, relationships, and naval status. Regardless of the path taken, American policymakers must urgently craft creative, practical solutions, both formal and informal, to manage a world of multiple nuclear actors that are currently unwilling to negotiate in good faith.

In the decades after the Cold War, many senior U.S. officials hoped that nuclear weapons might recede from global politics entirely. But that prospect turned out to be an illusion. Instead, nuclear weapons are back with a vengeance. To maintain a credible strategy for this new nuclear age, the United States must begin by recognizing and understanding the world as it is—not as many hoped or wished it would be. It will need farsighted analysis by some of the country’s finest strategic minds. It will need to reaffirm American leadership to allies across the world. In no future is the United States safer without its network of allies, regardless of the costs the country must pay to ensure that its security guarantees and extended nuclear deterrent remain credible. And it will require a concerted effort by senior U.S. officials and members of Congress to realign the U.S. arsenal to meet today’s and tomorrow’s threats: the United States cannot simply hope that China’s large nuclear expansion might someday be reversed.

One thing is clear. If the United States does not urgently prepare for the impending nuclear hurricane, it could find itself in a place it has never been: a situation in which China, North Korea, or Russia—acting separately or in concert—uses a nuclear weapon against a U.S. ally or even the U.S. homeland because Washington appears to be unwilling or unable to deter such an attack. The world has never lived through such a storm. For eighty years, U.S. strategists have successfully fought to prevent it from arriving. But it is now coming faster than anyone forecast, and complacency may be deadly.

#### Successful arms control eliminates first-strike fears.

Lukasz Kulesa 23. Deputy Head of Research at the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Senior Associate, European Leadership Network. *Russia’s War on Ukraine: The Implications for the Global Nuclear Order*. “Strategic Arms Control Deadlock and the Possible Ways Out”. 2023. Ch. 6

There can also be, however, a contrarian perspective, according to which continuation of bilateral US–Russia arms control can be pursued in the absence of a peace arrangement ending the Russian–Ukrainian war. According to this line of argumentation, the need to prevent direct war between the two nuclear superpowers remains, more importantly, and urgently than before, due to the dangers inherent to the escalation of tensions between the US and Russia around Moscow’s war against Ukraine. Continuation of the SSD cannot, therefore, wait for the cessation of hostilities or manifestations of the Russian “good faith.” Given that the Russian leadership might remain in power for another decade or more, the West should be prepared to talk to Moscow on nuclear arms control.

This line of reasoning directly or indirectly calls to return to the Cold War roots of arms control, namely re-discovering its role as one of the tools for managing the highly dangerous confrontation between the nuclear powers, a relationship based on the concept of mutual assured destruction. During the Cold War, arms control would serve the purpose of limiting or eliminating the incentives for a nuclear first strike (crisis stability) and also to reduce incentives to race towards nuclear superiority (arms race stability). It would thus serve as an instrument of shielding the interna- tional community from the danger of the general nuclear war between the two powers rather than pave way for major reductions of arsenals. Providing some degree of predictability, transparency, and confidence regarding the nuclear potential of both opponents would mean returning to the basic arms control aims identified in the early 1960s, e.g., by Tom Schelling and Morton Halperin.

Another argument in support of engagement has to do with the duration of the New START constraints and verification regime, and the argument that letting the agreement expire without a successor would increase the danger of nuclear war. Without treaty constraints, Russia could have incentives to increase its strategic arsenal in a manner that would be less visible to the US. Combined with the increase of the Chinese nuclear stockpile and delivery systems, this may put the US and its allies in a disadvantageous position. Given that the year 2026—when the New START will expire—may be seen as being “just around the corner,” and taken the complexity of any potential negotiations with Russia, it can be argued that the pause in the SSD should be as short as possible.

# Lift Sanctions Counterplan

### 2AC – Lift Sanctions Counterplan

#### 1. Permute: Do both. It shields the net benefit by removing sanctions so that China can continue to invest.

#### 2. US technology deficit. Only the US has the technology that can bring Arctic LNG 2 online – that’s key to Putin’s status

Ben Aris, 2025 –an Eastern Europe specialist; also editor and publisher of Intellinews, news wire agency and media company focusing on global emerging markets.a “Russia and China remain rivals in the Arctic, and now the US is knocking at the door” Intellinews, 2/26,

<https://www.intellinews.com/russia-and-china-remain-rivals-in-the-arctic-and-now-the-us-is-knocking-at-the-door-369227/?source=china> //DH

What role the US might play together with Russia in the Arctic remains unclear as the talks on a ceasefire deal are right at the start, but US President Donald Trump has made it clear that expanding US oil and gas production is at the heart of his “drill, baby, drill” plans.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who lead the Riyadh delegations also hinted heavily business deals in the works; he said if a ceasefire deal could be done it would “unlock historic opportunities for cooperation” between the US and Russia.

Pre-war US companies were actively working in Russia’s Far North, led by ExxonMobil, and it is possible that if tensions subside, they may be allowed to return. Trump has several trump cards to play, especially lifting the ban on the export of technology that would allow Novatek to finish the second train of the LNG-2 project. Russia wants to triple its LNG exports, but without that technology it is struggling to finish work on the plant which has hampered the expansion of production.

Only days after the Riyadh meeting, Putin ordered the govt to draw up rules for re-entry and opened the door to the return of Western companies.

Russia and China remain close, but Putin has been careful to continue to build up his own block of support to counterbalance China’s dominant position in the relationship. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is travelling constantly in Asia, Latin America and Africa to meet with the leaders of Russia’s so-called friendly countries and Putin has been on trips to places like Vietnam last year, traditionally seen to be in China’s sphere of influence.

Famous for being more of an opportunistic tactician than a long-term strategist, an alliance between Russia and the US in the Arctic could prove very useful to Putin as he strives to develop his “multipolar world.”

#### 3. Status deficit. Only US economic cooperation boosts Russian leadership and patronage

Alexandra Prokopenko, 2025 – Fellow, Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center “Trump’s Moscow Mirage: Profits for a Select Few” 3/7 <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/03/russia-business-economic-hopes?lang=en> //DH

Russia’s interest lies not in restoring broad U.S. investment; it’s about crafting exclusive deals for a select group of businessmen. And the person facilitating these deals from the Russian side is telling.

Kirill Dmitriev, head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and a prominent participant in the talks with the United States, boasts strong ties to Trump’s inner circle. A Kyiv-born graduate of both Stanford and Harvard, Dmitriev has frequently served as an intermediary between Russian President Vladimir Putin and foreign investors. Recently, he was appointed the Kremlin’s special envoy for investment and trade: a role tailored specifically for him that comes with no executive authority but does grant direct access to Putin.

Dmitriev is also known for his 2017 Seychelles meeting with Erik Prince, founder of the U.S. private military company Blackwater, and for his reported connections to figures like former White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner.

While the RDIF’s stated goal is to attract investment to Russia, the fund’s operations remain shrouded in secrecy. Little is known about its investment strategies, partnerships, returns, or investor exits—leading some to view it less as a private equity firm and more as an exclusive investment club for insiders.

Dmitriev’s network will likely serve as a parking lot for American capital, which will then be funneled into sectors dominated by Putin’s allies.

Which sectors could be on the table? Trump has a penchant for quick wins, high profits, and projects with headline-grabbing potential. Energy and artificial intelligence (AI) were reportedly on the agenda during his phone call with Putin. One particularly intriguing area could be projects tied to the Northern Sea Route—Russia’s ambitious alternative to the Suez Canal, offering the shortest passage between Europe and Asia. That could involve logistics, port construction, Arctic oil and gas development, and icebreaker fleets.

For Trump, investing in the Northern Sea Route isn’t just a huge infrastructure project—something he has long admired—but is also about limiting China’s influence in the Arctic and leaving his mark on the region’s exploration and development, especially if his plan to acquire Greenland doesn’t work out. Domestically, such investments could be sold to American voters as job-creating ventures in logistics, energy, and shipbuilding.

The Northern Sea Route is managed by Rosatom, Russia’s state nuclear monopoly, which also has other potentially lucrative offerings. Notably, small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) have become increasingly vital as demand for computational power surges, especially for AI and cloud services. Despite sanctions against its leadership, Rosatom itself has avoided broader restrictions and aims to capture 20 percent of the global SMR market. The prospect of dominating the energy supply for the world’s most promising technology—artificial intelligence—is likely irresistible to both Trump and his tech-enthusiast allies.

The Kremlin’s motivations are equally clear. Beyond the obvious financial benefits, Moscow would gain access to technologies currently blocked by sanctions and potentially leverage U.S. partnerships to position itself as a global leader in AI. There may be other projects, too.

#### 4. Patronage payments are vital for Putin regime stability

Elmore 21, MA in Security Studies, Captain, United States Air Force (Jeffrey, “RUSSIA’S CONTRADICTORY ARCTIC STRATEGIES: COOPERATION, CONFLICT, AND EVERYTHING IN-BETWEEN,” https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/trecms/pdf/AD1164907.pdf)//BB

However, Russia’s economic motivations in the Arctic Russia’s extend beyond the pursuit of economic growth for the state. The significance of the Arctic resources for the patronal system on which Putin’s regime is built on also provides evidence in support of the “Regime preservation/diversionary” hypothesis. Henry Hale writes that “Vladimir Putin has proven to be a master practitioner of patronal politics,” by which he holds on to power by rewarding loyal political allies with economic incentives, resulting in an economic and political system that is fraught with corruption and nepotism.145 The regime’s patronal system relies heavily on resource rents, which is evidenced by comparing Russia’s reliance on this source of income with that of other Arctic states. Jonathan Markowitz illustrates that while Norway and Russia are about on par in leading the Arctic states in gas and oil exports as a percentage of their respective GDPs, Russia’s reliance on resource rents as a percentage of its GDP is nearly double that of Norway, with the other Arctic states falling far behind in resource rent reliance.146 Specifically, Markowitz estimates that “roughly 40% of Russia’s central government revenue and 60% to 70% of its export earnings derive from the extraction, production, and export of energy.”147 Furthermore, Russia has been largely unsuccessful in diversifying its sources of state revenue, and in 2018 energy resources accounted for 65 percent of Russia’s total exports.148 As a result, both Russia’s macroeconomic stability and—perhaps more importantly to Putin—the stability of the ruling regime’s patronage system, are crucially dependent on energy rents.149

### 1AR: Technology Deficit

#### Only the US has the relevant experience and technology

TASS, 2025 – Russian news service. It is quoting Alexey Fadeyev, Doctor of Economics, Deputy Chairman of the Public Council under the Committee on Arctic Affairs of St. Petersburg “Expert Fadeev: Cooperation between Russia and the US in the Arctic can be maximally effective” 2/19, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/23183991> //DH

Joint implementation of projects in the Arctic by Russia and the United States could be the most effective area of cooperation between the two countries, in particular, not only hydrocarbon production, but also the development of the Northern Sea Route and the creation of the Northern Air Bridge. This opinion was expressed to TASS by Alexey Fadeyev, Doctor of Economics and Deputy Chairman of the Public Council under the Committee for Arctic Affairs of St. Petersburg.

Earlier, the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund Kirill Dmitriev said in an interview with Politico that at the talks in Riyadh, in addition to discussing the rapprochement of the two countries' positions and contacts on Ukraine, they separately touched on the topic of the possibility of joint projects in the Arctic.

"Russia has always been open to cooperation with international partners. And the Arctic is precisely the territory where cooperation can be most effective. Development of its hydrocarbon potential is one of the possible areas of agreement between the United States and Russia. The United States has significant experience in developing both shelf deposits in the Gulf of Mexico and shallow-water deposits in the Beaufort Sea in Alaska. The transfer of effective organizational, economic, environmental experience and knowledge would be useful for both parties," Fadeyev said.

The expert added that in 2012, Russia had already begun cooperation with the United States in this area. In 2012, agreements were signed between the Russian company Rosneft and ExxonMobil and General Electric, as a result of which the Pobeda field in the Kara Sea was discovered, but in 2014, due to the complications in Russian-American relations, cooperation was frozen, and ExxonMobil was forced to leave the project.

#### US expertise and technology is vital to unlocking Russian Arctic LNG.

Meduza, 2025 – a Russian- and English-language independent news website, headquartered in Riga, Latvia. The article interviews Illa Shumanov, the director of the Arctida project, non-profit organization focused on analysis and investigation within the Russian Arctic “The Arctic is rapidly melting. This is a threat to local ecosystems, but new opportunities for the US, Russia and China” 7/9 <https://meduza.io/feature/2025/07/09/arktika-stremitelno-taet-dlya-mestnyh-ekosistem-eto-ugroza-a-dlya-ssha-rossii-i-kitaya-novye-vozmozhnosti> //DH **This story is in Russian; translated via Google Translate. An English-language version was not available**

Is US-Russia Cooperation Possible in the Arctic?

And why the Arctic race is overrated

Russia and the United States have never had large-scale ties in the Arctic. Since the 1990s, Russia has been exploring for oil in the Arctic with the American giant ExxonMobil, but that all stopped after the annexation of Crimea. However, at a meeting of the countries in Riyadh to end the war in Ukraine in February 2025, the sides discussed working together in the Arctic.

Cooperation between Russia and the United States in the Arctic is possible and seems logical: despite all the political difficulties, the US view of the Arctic is closer to Russia than the concept promoted by China, believes Ilya Shumanov.

"China demands the internationalization of the Arctic zone and access to it for all actors, including natural resources. And Russia and the United States advocate sovereignty, sovereign borders - so that only those countries that already have access to the Arctic have access. Accordingly, in this sense, the potential for cooperation between Russia and the United States is very high," Shumanov believes.

Potentially, a rapprochement between Russia and the US in the Arctic would be very beneficial for Washington, as it would strengthen America's position in the competition with China. "Of course, it looks like the United States is trying to befriend Russia so that Russia does not become too friendly with China," says Nail Farkhatdinov.

The issue of resource extraction in the Arctic has always rested on technology , and for Russia, on cooperation with other countries, Shumanov notes. And the US can offer exactly this: American companies will provide technology and equipment, and Russia will provide the deposit itself.

Another thing is that such cooperation is complicated by three factors. Firstly, for any international cooperation in the Arctic, sanctions against Russia must be lifted, since the US has a ban on investments in the Russian energy sector.

The second obstacle is that the Russian National Security Strategy lists the US and NATO as the main opponents. The US Arctic strategy also lists Russia as the main opponent. Moreover, Russia, concerned about its sovereignty, declares the need to exclude foreign influence from strategically important industries, and Arctic projects are precisely such industries: ports, logistics, energy and natural resource extraction, Shumanov notes.

And the third issue is that Russia's friendship with the US puts an end to the continuation of friendship with China, says Shumanov. Plus, Russia will have to rebuild relations with Europe, which after the start of the war significantly reduced its purchases of Russian oil and gas and is now less tolerant of Russia than the Trump administration (in the absence of China, Europe is the main market for Russian energy).

#### Technology’s key – ice-related operational problems are shutting down Russian LNG

Richard Meade, 2025 – Editor-in-Chief of Lloyd’s List. “Russia’s Arctic LNG ambitions remain largely frozen” Lloyd’s List, 7/17,

<https://www.lloydslist.com/LL1154256/Russia%E2%80%99s-Arctic-LNG-ambitions-remain-largely-frozen> //DH

Two LNG tankers have been tracked loading at Russia’s flagship Arctic LNG 2 project in the past month, but with operational delays and sanctions putting off buyers, the cargoes are likely to follow a familiar pattern of not reaching a final destination

A SECOND sanctioned liquefied natural gas tanker calling at Russia’s flagship Arctic LNG 2 project in less than a month has raised speculation that Novatek, Russia’s largest independent gas producer, may be trying to resume loadings at the embattled export facility.

But with limited options in terms of buyers, floating storage availability and challenging ice conditions to contend with, the prospect of any immediate change in fortunes for the heavily-sanctioned project remains slim.

On Wednesday, the 175,120 cu m LNG tanker Voskhod (IMO: 9953511) berthed at Arctic LNG 2’s Utrenniy Terminal in ballast.

Voskhod was one of several LNG vessels sanctioned by both the US and EU last year in a bid to prevent the Arctic LNG 2 project from becoming fully operational and allowing Russia to significantly expand is energy export capabilities.

Last month, a similarly sanctioned Russian LNG tanker, Iris (IMO: 9953523), also called at the terminal after sitting idle for most of the year along with several other sanctioned LNG tankers.

While it is assumed that Iris loaded a cargo, the LNG tanker moved immediately into a holding position just south of the Kara Sea and has not moved since, according to Lloyd’s List Intelligence data, corroborated by satellite imagery.

Voskhod is expected to follow the same pattern.

The last time LNG was shipped from the plant was in early October 2024, but production was shut down shortly after due largely to tightening sanctions from the US, but also a build-up of ice around the facility and persistent operational problems.

The US directly sanctioned Arctic LNG 2, a project publicly backed by Vladimir Putin and thought to have cost in the region of $25bn to construct, in a bid to ensure that the project would be rendered “dead in the water”.

While Novatek had initially hoped that Donald Trump’s entry into the White House could herald an easing of US secondary sanctions on the Arctic LNG 2 project, the restrictions have remained in place and progress to operationalise the project has largely frozen.

While power units have now been delivered into critical gravity-based platforms, best-guess estimates from analysts suggest they have at best half capacity on each train. While that represents an estimated potential 6.6 million tonnes a year, it is not just the operational restrictions that are holding the project back.

The Kremlin is keen to develop the northern sea route via Arctic shipping lanes as it reorients its export-driven economy from European to Asian markets, but that ambition has been thwarted by western sanctions against its Arctic energy facilities and tanker fleet.

Politically speaking, Russia has been left out in the cold, suspended from the Arctic Council, the co-operation body for the region, and cut out of scientific co-operation.

Economically, the sanctions have stymied routes to market.

### 1AR: Status Deficit

#### China can’t provide Russia the same status and prestige that the plan can

Vasilis Petropoulos, 2024 - Analyst at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies “The Role of Prestige in the China-Russia Partnership” 3/16,

<https://sites.tufts.edu/fletcherrussia/the-role-of-prestige-in-the-china-russia-partnership/> //DH

Prestige as a Strategic Culture Attribute

Strategic culture is a set of ideas, shared values, and assumptions that shape a country’s behavior in the world scene and influences its foreign policy conduct. These ideas, values, and assumptions are mainly formed by history, cultural traditions, and geography. Prestige weighs immensely in both China and Russia to a magnitude rarely found in other countries. History, distinct geopolitical conditions, a unique culture, and old customs have shaped the Russian and Chinese mentalities. Both countries have a long tradition of centralized power and authoritarian rule. They have learned to exist as great empires with vast territories which require that their leaders be constantly on alert to maintain them. Additionally, there are unique factors for each that explain the special importance China and Russia place on pride and prestige. For the former, it was Confucianism’s emphasis on the pursuit of personal excellence that instilled into the Chinese the mindset of competition and prestige. For the latter, it was the sheer size of its land and its geographical position between Europe and Asia that gave it a sense of uniqueness, which progressively translated into the ‘Russian pride’.

Shifting Dynamics

At the moment, Russia remains an indispensable provider of military technology to China. On the other side, China is Russia’s largest trading partner. With Moscow militarily superior and China economically stronger, a balanced interdependency has been created, not by design but by circumstances, in which both sides need each other. Although Russia’s need of the Chinese market and capital is not likely to fade in the coming years, especially as long as Moscow faces heavy sanctions, this will not be the case for China’s reliance on Russian arms and technology. The Chinese military industry has greatly benefited from the Russian arms exports of the last decades, and it is now evolving rapidly into a self-sufficient arms powerhouse. The Chinese increasing self-sufficiency in military equipment is evidenced by the dramatic drop in arms imports from Russia after 2018. In fact, Beijing is now even exporting some armaments to Russia, such as the Type 054A frigate. The dynamics in the field of military technology are also shifting in China’s favor. Harnessing its astounding economic growth and its ability to reverse engineer Russian technologies, Beijing has leapfrogged to one of the most technologically advanced military industries in the world, not too far behind Moscow. Russian experts have even admitted that in some areas, such as the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), China is technologically superior to Russia. China still needs Russian radars, submarine technology, air missile defense systems, and aircraft engines. However, the pace of China’s development in military technology and production capacities suggests that, eventually, Beijing will not only catch up with Moscow technologically and in terms of armaments production, but it will almost certainly supersede its former patron emerging as a peer arms exporter. Besides, China is already committing considerable resources to buttress its military modernization. The research and development expenditure (R&D) data, which is the most reliable indicator when trying to gauge a state’s future technology capacities, ascertains that China has the will to invest in improving its military technology. According to the World Bank, Beijing has been spending more than 2% of its total GDP on R&D since 2012 and the figure for 2020 stood at 2.4%. At the same time, Russia has been spending barely more than 1% of its considerably smaller GDP on R&D and the number for 2020 was just 1.1%. The R&D expenditure trends for Beijing and Moscow indicate that while the latter has stagnated the former will continue to spend significantly more on R&D supplanting Russia in terms of military technological prowess. The consequences of the inevitable rise of China above Russia in military power correlations are indeed bound to be detrimental to the Sino-Russian military ties. Russia will no longer have anything tangible to offer in the partnership and the current mutually beneficial interdependence will turn into a one-sided dependency akin to the one in the 1950s that led to the Sino-Soviet split. This time, the roles will be reversed. Russia will be the junior partner and China will be the overwhelmingly powerful ‘big brother’.

The Potential Rift

Given Russia’s proud strategic culture of derzhavnost– that is the persistent desire to be a great power but also to be perceived as such- it is almost certain that the Kremlin will not tolerate to become a mere client state patronized by China. Similar to Russia, China has its own proud strategic culture of fuqiang. Fuqiang (stands for ‘great power’ in Mandarin as a shortened version of the ancient motto fuguo qiangbing that means rich country, strong army) and derzhavnost respectively are products of the aforementioned experiences that synthesize the strategic cultures of China and Russia. Russia’s strategic culture leads it to always seek a seat at the table for all the global issues that need to be addressed by the great powers of the world. It will always want to maintain an independent foreign policy and to shape the international system. China could, possibly, accommodate Russia’s great power ambitions by keeping the partnership in balance and not stripping Moscow of having a say in regional and global developments, even on matters that are of paramount importance to Beijing. However prudent this sounds, there are two gravitational powers that will not let the Sino-Russian balance remain intact:

The opportunity of the strong

Historically, countries that found themselves in a position of power vis-à-vis adversaries and allies, they took advantage of the privilege that their power afforded them and gradually imposed their own terms. Some indicative cases of hegemonic attitude toward allies are: Denmark toward Sweden and the subsequent dissolution of the Kalmar Union in the 16th century, France toward Italy in the immediate aftermath of the latter’s unification in the late 19th century, and Russia toward its Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) allies in the post-Soviet era. Another contemporary example is the transatlantic alliance. The United States emerged from World War II as the undisputed leader of the Western block that included erstwhile hegemons, such as the United Kingdom, or traditionally influential states, such as France. With both European powers ravaged from the war, the United States took charge in constructing the new world order. Washington was the architect of the international system in all domains, from financial to military arrangements. The American hegemonic tendencies caused frictions within the Western block when De Gaulle’s France felt like a second-tier power. Prestige drove France out of the military component of NATO in 1966. No matter how closely aligned the United States and its allies were in terms of values and fundamental principles, Washington did not maintain a balanced partnership. Rather, it created a hierarchy with itself at the top. This behavior is not to be attributed to a sort of American megalomania nor is it a trait of the American strategic culture. It is an instinct of the strong to dictate their terms simply because they can. On the contrary, it is very difficult to find a peacetime example of a powerful state that had the power to impose its will on its allies but chose not to do so. Hence, China is more likely to act hegemonically in its relations with Russia than maintain a balanced partnership once it becomes significantly more powerful in the military domain. Sino-Russian past animosity and current differences in both their ends within the existing international order and the means they employ to achieve them will probably push China to take full charge of its partnership with Russia, thereby creating the sense of superiority that will prove corrosive to their bilateral relations.

China’s fuqiang strategic culture

Enunciated to attest China’s determination to avoid a remake of the tragedies that had befallen upon it during the ‘century of humiliation’, fuqiang implies that Beijing desires to lead as a great power. China’s eagerness to wield influence on the world stage and reshape the global order in accordance with its own aspirations will let little room for a sort of a ‘power sharing’ arrangement with Russia in leading a revisionist bloc as an alternative to Washington. The residues of the past Sino-Russian confrontations will only reinforce Beijing’s tendency to lead Russia rather than treat it as an equal partner.

Even if China somehow resists the power of the instinct to which the strong succumbs restraining the policy options of its allies and leading them as the undisputed hegemon- or if China somehow weathers the impetus of its fuqiang– the relations with Russia are likely to get shaky. Russia will grow insecure when China will not need it militarily. Not unlike the 1950s, when Soviet Union’s proposals were regarded as diminishing by China even if they were not aiming at belittling Beijing, Chinese policy suggestions or actions will be placed under scrutiny by Moscow and will be deemed unilateral and demining of the Russian status. The mentality of derzhavnost will make Russia hypersensitive in matters where China will inevitably have a bigger say because of its sheer political, economic, and military (pending) clout compared to Moscow.

#### Russia is the junior partner in its relationship with China and the relationship hasn’t met expectations

Natalia Chabarovskaya, 2025 – Center for European Policy Analysis “Going Steady: China and Russia’s Economic Ties are Deeper than Washington Thinks” 6/16,

<https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/going-steady-china-and-russias-economic-ties-are-deeper-than-washington-thinks/> //DH

Russia-China economic cooperation over the past decade has developed under the twin pressures of anti-Russian sanctions and deteriorating US-China relations. In many respects, the reality and constraints of this economic partnership have not met Moscow’s expectations. Nevertheless, the overall direction of the multifaceted relationship is continuing toward stronger cooperation based on common strategic objectives. Russia has clearly become the junior partner, primarily due to its limited economic alternatives. At the same time, it has emerged as an important testing ground for Chinese industrial and technology companies. After the first wave of anti-Russian sanctions, Chinese contractors took over from their European counterparts on the Yamal LNG project, for example, gaining an opportunity to test their equipment in the harsh conditions of the Russian Arctic. The Russian market is also becoming valuable for many Chinese consumer goods manufacturers. Given Moscow’s enthusiasm for promoting de-dollarization of international payments, Russia is also developing into a significant experimental arena for yuan internationalization, which has been Beijing’s goal for more than a decade.22