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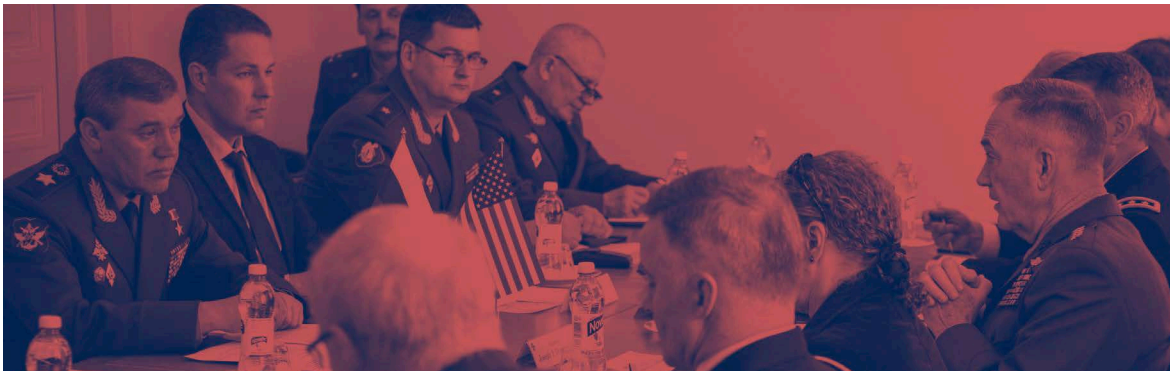
Stabilizing Great-Power Rivalries



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Preface

This report documents research and analysis conducted as part of a project entitled *Sustaining a Stable Strategic Competition with Near-Peer Competitors*, sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, U.S. Army. The purpose of the project was to provide the Army an assessment of the emerging strategic competitions between the United States and both China and Russia, examine the approaches most likely to preserve long-term stability in these competitions, and draw implications for Army capabilities and posture.

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Contents

Preface iii
Figures and Tables vii
Summary ix
Acknowledgments xxi

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction: Anticipating an Era of Great-Power Rivalry 1

CHAPTER TWO
Theoretical Foundations: Understanding Rivalry 5
Defining Strategic Rivalry 6
Managing Strategic Rivalries 10

CHAPTER THREE
Theoretical Foundations: Understanding Stability 13
Literature on Stable Strategic Rivalries 14
Characteristics of a Stable Strategic Rivalry 15
National Policies That Affect the Stability of a Strategic Rivalry 17
Contextual Factors That Affect the Stability of a Strategic Rivalry 21
Perceptual Factors That Affect the Stability of a Strategic Rivalry 26
Quantifying Rivalries and Their Outcomes 30
Organization of Case Studies 37

CHAPTER FOUR
Case Study: The Anglo-German Rivalry, 1871–1913 39
Competition but Limited Hostility, 1871–1889 40
The German Challenge, 1890–1904 43
A Brittle Peace, 1905–1913 48
Factors That Promoted Stable and Unstable Competition 54
Implications for Today 59

CHAPTER FIVE
Case Study: The Sino–Soviet/Russian Rivalry, 1950–2001 61
Incipient Competition, 1950–1956 63
Increasingly Unstable Competition, 1956–1969 66
Unstable Competition, 1969–1989 74

Stable Competition, 1989–2001 78
Factors That Promoted Stable and Unstable Competition 82

CHAPTER SIX
Case Study: The Cold War, 1947–1989 85
National Policies 86
Contextual Factors 129
Perceptual Factors 139
Lessons and Implications: Stability During the Cold War 143

CHAPTER SEVEN
The Emerging U.S.-Russia Rivalry, 1991–2019 145
National Policies 146
Contextual Factors 163
Perceptual Factors 166
Conclusion 172

CHAPTER EIGHT
The Emerging U.S.-China Rivalry, 1996–2019 175
National Policies 176
Contextual Factors 193
Perceptual Factors 202
Conclusion 208

CHAPTER NINE
Overall Findings and Implications for the U.S. Army 213
Basic Themes and Variables 213
Lessons from Historical Case Studies 215
Lessons from the Cold War 218
Findings for the Emerging U.S.-Russia Rivalry 220
Findings for the Emerging U.S.-China Rivalry 221
Implications and Recommendations 224

Abbreviations 229
References 231

Figures and Tables

Figures

S.1. Sources of Stability and Instability in Strategic Rivalries xi
3.1. Sources of Stability and Instability in Strategic Rivalries 14
4.1. Population of European Great Powers, 1860–1889 40
4.2. British and German Iron Production, 1872–1899 41
4.3. British and German Steel Production, 1900–1913 43
4.4. National Capabilities of Germany and Britain, Composite Index, 1871–1913 49
4.5. Summary Chronology of Anglo-German Competition, 1871–1913 54
9.1. Key Variables in the Historical Cases 217
9.2. Key Variables in the Cold War Case 219

Tables

2.1. Characteristics of Rivalries, Drawn from the Literature 8
2.2. Categorizing Bilateral Relationships 9
3.1. List of Key Rivalries, 1816 to 2010 31
3.2. Frequency with Which Key Rivalries Escalated to War 32
3.3. Duration of Key Rivalries 32
3.4. Years from Key Rivalry Initiation to War 33
3.5. Militarization of Key Rivalries 33
3.6. Intensity of Militarization of Key Rivalries 33
3.7. Mean Balance of Capabilities Between Key Rivalries 34
3.8. Territorial Claims Between Key Rivalries 35
3.9. Economic Interdependence Between Key Rivalries 35
3.10. Regime Differences Between Key Rivalries, 1816–2010 36

Summary

The research reported here was completed in May 2020, followed by security review by the sponsor and the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, with final sign-off in October 2021.

Introduction

The consensus of official U.S. government policy and most analysis outside government is that the international system is headed for a renewed era of intense and sometimes bitter competition among leading states, particularly between the United States and both Russia and China. In this report, we identify the factors that keep such rivalries stable and the contrary factors that lead to unstable and conflictual outcomes. We also specify the general criteria for stability and offer a road map toward moderated and less-volatile rivalries between the United States and its two emerging competitors.

To achieve these ends, we pursued five lines of research. First, we reviewed the theoretical literature for models that characterize the nature of rivalries. Second, we developed a list of real-world rivalries over the past two centuries and conducted a statistical analysis to determine whether any variables were strongly associated with stability or instability. Third, we examined theoretical traditions and national security literatures in search of factors that could help stabilize a strategic rivalry. On the basis of that analysis, we assembled a framework of variables that are associated with the stability of strategic rivalries. This framework was designed to offer variables that, in varying combinations and varying degrees, are associated with the stability of rivalries. The framework provides a menu of factors that together provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect stability and a menu to work from when assessing a dyadic rivalry. Although the research does point (as we will argue later) to two consistent features of stable rivalries, the framework does not—neither could any such framework or concept of stability—provide simple causal relationships between specific variables and specific outcomes that will be true in all rivalries at all times.

Fourth, we conducted case studies of key bilateral rivalries since roughly 1800 to determine the factors that could suppress or exacerbate instability and confirm that the variables included in the framework were supported by historical experience. We examined several pre–Cold War rivalries and then considered the Cold War period in much greater depth. One goal of these assessments was to identify, within the larger framework of variables, the factors that seemed, in the pre–Cold War and Cold War contexts, to be especially important—to exercise a disproportionate effect on the stability of the rivalry.

Fifth, we applied the variables gleaned from the theoretical and historical analyses to assess the current state of U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China relations in 2019. Our primary goal in this analysis was to assess the condition and trajectory of these rivalries, using the framework

of variables developed for this report. Each of these cases also suggested its own lessons about which of the variables appear to be exercising an especially important effect on the stability of these two emerging rivalries. We derived conclusions and implications for the U.S. Army and the U.S. government more broadly from these lines of inquiry.

Understanding Rivalry

The existing theoretical and historical literature points to several key components in defining a rivalry, which we use as the basic definition for the purpose of this report. To count as rivals, two states must

- have very roughly comparable amounts of national power and influence, although the actual degree of equality required for a rivalry is contested in the literature
- believe they are engaged in a rivalry—have a perception of mutual hostility and lack of trust
- have an expectation of future competition and, possibly, conflict
- have actual or perceived contention over specific policy issues that bear on their mutual national interests and objectives and are unable to resolve these disputes
- have some history of conflict, although the frequency and intensity can vary.

These characteristics clearly apply to the U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China relationships in 2019.

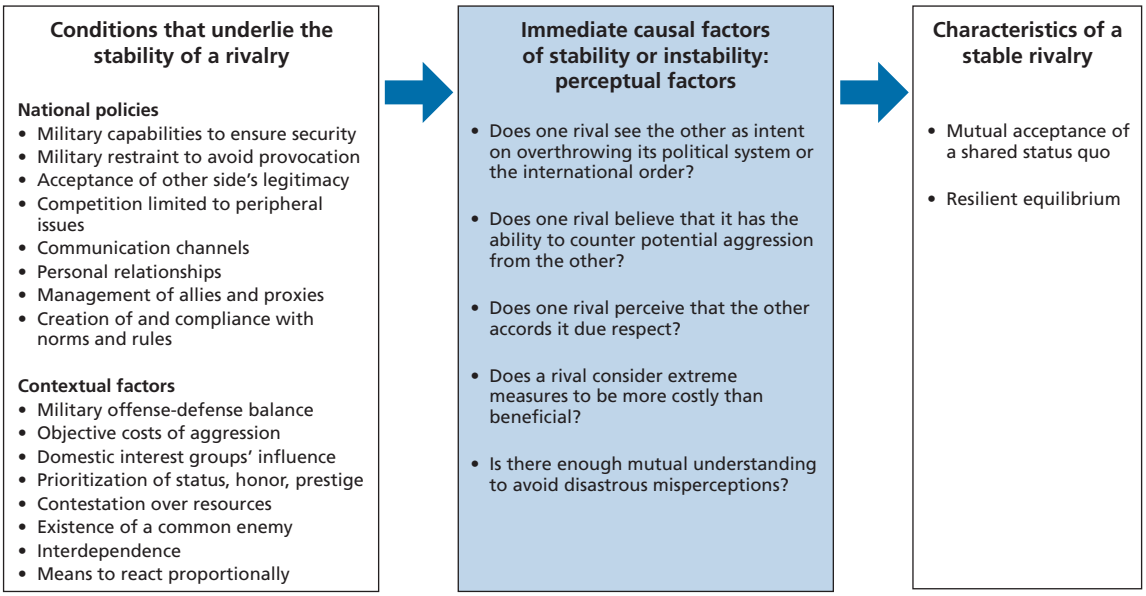
The term *strategic rivalry* refers to cases that go beyond a localized bilateral dispute to include contestation over regional or global issues. This also implies that strategic rivalries take place between states that are major powers with global influence. The relationship between North and South Korea is largely confined to the Korean Peninsula, and neither qualifies as a great power; this would therefore not count as a strategic rivalry. The current rivalry between Russia and the United States, on the other hand, involves two of the world's leading military powers that are contesting essential principles of international governance and influence across multiple regions. It, like the U.S.-China rivalry, can therefore be considered strategic.

Understanding Stability

If there is a general lesson to be learned from the literature on the nature of rivalries and the statistical analysis of variables associated with them, it is that rivalries do not conform to any universal pattern. No statistical variables emerged to establish clear and consistent predictive relationships regarding when rivalries lead to war and when they remain stable.

The theoretical traditions and national security literature suggest that a stable rivalry has two defining characteristics: (1) the mutual acceptance of a shared status quo and (2) a resilient equilibrium in which the rivalry can absorb shocks and return to a stable center. These two characteristics are believed to be the end products of several factors that govern the stability of a rivalry: *national policies* voluntarily adopted by the rivals; *contextual factors*, which can mitigate or exacerbate instability; and *perceptual factors*, which filter the national policies and the contextual factors. Thus, the national policies and contextual factors have only the effects that perceptions allow or cause them to have. Figure S.1 charts the posited relationship, from

Figure S.1
Sources of Stability and Instability in Strategic Rivalries



the national policies and contextual factors through the perceptual factors to, ideally, a stable rivalry.

The framework outlined here—of 21 factors theoretically affecting stability—serves as the basis for assessing the following five case studies. This list represents a comprehensive set of the primary factors that emerged from our survey of the historical and theoretical literature on rivalries. In some cases, we combined similar factors into one variable, but, at this point in the analysis, we did not discard factors. The approach was to allow the case studies to highlight the factors from the historical roster that were most important in each case and then to draw insights from the range of cases and what they said about the relative importance of the variables.[1]

The Anglo-German Rivalry, 1871–1913

The Anglo-German case provides strong support for the proposition that perceptions of the adversary as fundamentally revisionist and as threatening to existential security are closely correlated with levels of rivalry instability. There is also evidence of a correlation between instability and a perception that war is no longer too costly, either to disrupt the status quo or to defend it. But both the acceptance of extreme measures and the unsteady equilibrium appear to have been driven by the perception that at least one state in the rivalry had both the intention and the capacity to threaten the existential security of the other. In such a situation, a willingness to resort to war might be an understandable response. The other two

[1] In addition to the case studies surveyed in detail in this report, we conducted in-depth research on two others: The historical rivalry between the United States and Great Britain between 1812 and 1905 and the Sino-Japanese rivalry between 1870 and 1937. These were interesting historical examples, but both displayed unique aspects that impaired the ability to draw transferable lessons. Neither offered insights distinct from the other case studies.

perceptions—whether the adversary was viewed as legitimate and whether there was sufficient mutual understanding to avoid misperception—were not as clearly associated with the changes in stability that occurred.

The most relevant insight for today relates to the dangers for all great powers of threatening the existential security of another. Signaling both the intent and capability to undermine another state's security should be expected to trigger a destabilizing reaction that could lead to war. States, such as China and Russia, should be mindful that their assumptions about U.S. policies might not hold if the states develop capabilities and demonstrate an intent to threaten U.S. existential security. Likewise, the United States should understand that its ability to threaten other states could lead them to react unexpectedly. For example, concerned about U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization expansion and U.S. support for "color revolutions" in nearby states, Russia illegally annexed Crimea and interfered in U.S. elections. Vulnerable states are likely to be extremely sensitive to perceptions of aggressive intent. Stable competition between rivals requires diplomatic, political, and military restraint when the capacity exists to threaten the existential security of the other.

The Sino–Soviet/Russian Rivalry, 1950–2001

From 1950 to 2001, relations between China and the Soviet Union/Russia went full circle, starting with the 1950 signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty and ending with the 2001 signing of a new friendship treaty that ended their rivalry and reaffirmed their ties. Throughout all stages of the rivalry, the poorly demarcated border between the two states was less a cause of conflict than a symptom of larger political tensions that were often motivated by their competition for status as leader of the communist world and for status within the international system.

Status considerations, especially on the Chinese side, represented the most significant driver of instability. Chinese status considerations influenced mutual threat perceptions and initiated a security dilemma. The relationship stabilized once China achieved not an equal but a dominant status in the dyadic relationship and once the threat perceptions were reduced on both sides. These shifts took place over several decades amid the parallel increase in Chinese economic and military capabilities and the decline in Russian economic and military might. The Chinese-Russian rivalry became stable only when China's need to surpass Russia in world affairs was satisfied—*and* once both sides stopped perceiving each other as revisionist, as posing a significant threat to one another's security, and as challenging one another's ideological legitimacy. It is worth noting that Russia's junior-partner status today has not yet catalyzed instability in the relationship. This could be a function of deft Chinese diplomacy, unlike the Soviets' heavy-handed approach to Beijing, or because of Russia's in some ways superior military power and residual global role. But history suggests that instability could result over time if the level of China's relative status in the relationship continues to grow.

The Sino-Soviet rivalry has four implications for today. First, the issue of status represents one of the most important factors in determining whether a rivalry is stable or unstable. China and the Soviet Union were extremely sensitive to their relative status, with Chinese great-power ambitions driving much of the instability in their relationship, until the Soviet Union lost the Cold War and ceased to exist as a political entity.

Second, a competitive or negative personal relationship between the leaders of China and the Soviet Union increased the instability of the rivalry. Their personal ambitions and personal quest for status translated into policies and measures—such as the acquisition of nuclear capabilities—that further destabilized the rivalry.

Third, Chinese domestic political divisions were redirected externally and had a negative effect on the relationship with the Soviet Union. For example, Chairman Mao Zedong's attempts to consolidate power in China and to eliminate his rivals in the Communist Party translated into increased anti-Soviet propaganda and actions, injecting instability into the rivalry.

Fourth, mutual threat perception acted as an intermediary mechanism, provoked by status considerations, policies, and actions. With the exacerbation of threat perceptions associated with status revisionism, challenges to ideological legitimacy, and state security, the Sino-Soviet rivalry became unstable. When threat perceptions reverted to lower levels after 1989, the competition gradually stabilized, waned, and ultimately dissipated.

This rivalry demonstrates that status considerations are closely related to other factors and policies that affect mutual threat perceptions and rivalry stability: acceptance of the other side's legitimacy, competition on peripheral matters, perceived cost of aggression, and identification of a common enemy. If these factors and policies act in tandem with status considerations, the mutual threat perceptions and the resulting intensity of a competition often become accentuated.

The Cold War, 1947–1989

The case study of the Cold War as a test of stability held a number of lessons. One is that the predominant factor in sustaining stability was the fear of nuclear annihilation. The central conviction that major war was no longer a sensible instrument of statecraft never really wavered. This principle played the most essential stabilizing role in the conflict by constraining the degree of escalatory options each side believed that it could employ.

A second lesson of the Cold War period is that even rivals can have strong reasons to ease their tensions from time to time, and part of the challenge of stabilizing a rivalry is to take advantage of these when they emerge. However, as the experience of détente makes clear, such efforts will always rest on shaky ground when the overall rivalry remains in place: Especially in the United States, the policy of détente was controversial from the beginning and eventually gave way to a renewed effort at confrontation designed to transcend, rather than manage, the rivalry.

The Cold War suggests a third lesson, that stability is a function of a delicate dance between firmness and accommodation. American deterrent strength in drawing clear lines in Europe that Joseph Stalin could challenge only at the risk of war was essential to creating the status quo; otherwise, the Soviet Union would have been tempted to press the boundaries of Western security in much more profound ways. At the same time, the development of capabilities, doctrines, and strategies to support such firmness posed some of the greatest risks of destabilization, whether in terms of specific weapon systems or overall military postures.

Fourth, the Cold War points to the chief culprit in destabilizing a strategic rivalry: the strong sense on one or both sides that the other is determined to undermine its stability and

security. When a contest is believed to be absolute, it is very difficult to keep it stable because neither side believes that such a thing is possible in such an existential conflict.

The Cold War also speaks to a fifth lesson: the potentially destabilizing role of allies and proxies and how they could drag the United States and the Soviet Union into clashes that both would have preferred to avoid but that created some of the greatest risks of war throughout the period. The classic example was the Cuban Missile Crisis, born of Nikita Khrushchev's desire to protect the Cuban revolution, but there were many others, including insurrections in Eastern Europe and the maneuverings of Taiwan and North Korea.

Finally, the United States and Soviet Union frequently fell victim to a phenomenon that represents a sixth lesson for stabilizing rivalries, the role of so-called credibility doctrines in exaggerating threat perceptions and catalyzing overreactions to limited strategic moves. Because of these doctrines, both countries gave unwarranted significance to developments with little intrinsic importance to their interests, from the U.S. reactions in Korea and Vietnam to the Soviet actions in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan. The doctrines turned out to be engines of instability.

The Emerging U.S.-Russia Rivalry, 1991–2019

Our assessment of the U.S.-Russia rivalry produced a disturbing conclusion: *All* eight categories of national policies are pushing this rivalry toward destabilization. The five primary policy drivers of destabilization are the following:

- *Military capabilities.* Russia views U.S. deployment (and potential future deployment) of capabilities, particularly ballistic missile defense, as an existential threat.
- *Military restraint.* Restraint has been decreasing on both sides but especially on that of Russia, with its greater willingness to use force in regional crises and to unleash its cyber capabilities directly against the United States. In response, the United States has enhanced its posture near Russia's borders.
- *Acceptance of the other side's legitimacy.* Russian aggression against Ukraine has precipitated U.S. questioning of the legitimacy of the Russian government, with open U.S. calls for undermining political stability in Russia.
- *Competition on peripheral issues.* The locus of the competition is in Russia's immediate neighborhood. The rivalry is playing out in post-Soviet Eurasia, a region Moscow has long signaled to be vital to its national interests (not peripheral).
- *Creation of and compliance with norms and rules.* There has been an erosion of written and unwritten norms. Key elements of the arms control infrastructure have collapsed, norms governing new domains have not been established, and unwritten understandings regarding acceptable behavior are absent.

The three remaining sets of national policies seem to have aggravated the underlying instability:

- *Communication channels.* Confidence-building measures and intergovernmental communication channels have broken down. The collapse of these ties between working-level officials in both governments has made crisis management more challenging and has led to more acute threat perceptions.

- *Personal relationships.* Working relationships among heads of state and senior officials have dangerously weakened. Constructive interpersonal relationships between U.S. and Russian presidents have been important stabilizing factors at times but have not prevented significant downturns.
- *Management of allies and proxies.* Both the United States and Russia have suffered from some degree of inability to manage the behavior of close partners or allies. A recent example is the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons.

Three of the eight contextual factors remain important stabilizing factors:

- *Military offense-defense balance.* The mutual strategic vulnerability of nuclear deterrence continues to make direct armed conflict between the rivals highly unlikely.
- *Existence of a common enemy.* Although shared counterterrorist objectives have not overcome differences in the relationship, these objectives do serve as something of a common ground of last resort and are the cause of cooperation even during periods of high tension.
- *Interdependence.* Russia remains dependent on the U.S.-dominated global economic infrastructure. This factor does not stop Russia from taking necessary steps to ensure its security but does affect its cost-benefit calculation regarding moves that could produce a domestic backlash.

Two additional contextual factors have worsened the instability but are less central than those just described:

- *Domestic interest groups' influence.* There are few powerful interest groups that have the goal of stabilizing these relationships. Given the relative paucity of the bilateral economic relationship, there is no particularly significant set of domestic economic actors in either country with a major stake in the stability of the bilateral relationship.
- *Prioritization of status, honor, prestige.* Russia's quest for great-power status is a seemingly immutable element of its strategic culture. The United States is loath to grant Russia this status.

None of the five key perceptual factors augurs well for the stability of the rivalry:

- Each rival sees the other as deeply revisionist vis-à-vis the international order and intent on threatening the other's domestic political systems.
- Each rival sees itself as existentially threatened by the other in the cyber domain.
- Because Washington remains resistant to negotiate on core issues, Russia believes that the United States is unwilling to accord it the respect it feels it deserves.
- Increasingly, both sides, particularly Russia, act as though the benefits of taking extreme measures outweigh the costs.
- In part because of the breakdown of communication channels, there is little mutual understanding, and both rivals see each other as innately and immutably hostile.

There are serious grounds for concern about the stability of the U.S.-Russia rivalry. Given the negative dynamic in nearly all these variables, the future seems likely to be even worse. However, certain contextual factors, such as mutual strategic vulnerability, will remain buffers of conflict (although they cannot rule it out completely).

The Emerging U.S.-China Rivalry, 1996–2019

The strategic competition between China and the United States has intensified to a level not seen since the Cold War. The two countries compete for influence and leadership on a broad range of issues, from security and political influence to trade and investment. The competition has expanded beyond the Asia-Pacific region to the global level.

There are reasons to worry about the future trajectory of the contest, which appears to be intensifying rapidly. In terms of the eight national policy variables in our theoretical framework, most now appear to be either directly tending toward destabilization of the U.S.-China rivalry or showing at least a mixed picture with growing elements of potential instability:

- *Military capabilities that provide for essential security.* Both countries possess strategic weapons and strong military capabilities that render them confident of their abilities to deter threats to their existence. Both countries have stepped up their investments in military capabilities aimed partly at one another. Although each side ought to have confidence in its ability to provide for its vital security interests, these and related trends taken together have all the hallmarks of an emerging arms race across several domains of military capability, of the sort that has typically been associated with unstable rivalries.
- *Military restraint.* Both countries have adopted policies that demonstrate restraint and contribute to stability in the bilateral relationship. However, a deepening competition in recent years has loosened these restraints and unmoored policies that promote stability. Each seems increasingly willing to undertake directly confrontational military deployments and activities in contested areas.
- *Signaling acceptance of legitimacy.* China and the United States have taken many steps to acknowledge each other's basic sovereignty and legitimacy as great powers. However, an undercurrent of such existential competition is increasingly present in a debate that, on both sides, has begun to consider whether the United States and China can adequately function in an international system that includes the other as currently constituted. Chinese Communist Party leadership remains highly sensitive to perceived U.S. efforts to call into question the legitimacy of its system of governance.
- *Competition only on peripheral issues.* The United States and China have refrained from challenging the core interests that could undermine the existence of the other's government. It is true that many in Beijing see U.S. policy on Taiwan as challenging a core national interest, but the sides have managed that disagreement relatively effectively. However, recent years have seen disputes expand across virtually all policy domains, and some areas that had previously been viewed as secondary—such as trade disputes and political influence-seeking—have now moved to the top of the list of issues of concern for both sides. The competition is rapidly losing the flavor of being over peripheral issues.
- *Communication channels.* Officials in both countries have sought to establish institutions and mechanisms to manage tensions and handle crises. However, all these mechanisms remain largely nascent and untested, and the tenor and tone of official engagements tend to reflect that of the overall bilateral relationship. Moreover, there has been a significant diminishment in the quality and frequency of bilateral exchanges since 2016.
- *Building personal relationships at various levels.* A dense network of such relationships has emerged across various levels of the U.S.-China relationship, both within government and, indeed, especially beyond it. But while bad relationships can uniquely subvert a

stable rivalry, good personal ties between senior officials cannot rescue a relationship that is being destabilized by many other strategic, political, economic, and ideological factors.

- *Management of allies and proxies.* Both countries have exercised restraint regarding their allies and proxies, but actions taken to shore up their security partnerships have exacerbated suspicions. Both sides have allies and proxies that are capable of upsetting the stability of the rivalry by taking positions that push the United States and China into new confrontations.
- *Creation of and compliance with norms and rules.* Over the past three decades, the trajectory on this variable has been highly incomplete but largely positive, with the United States and China joining many organizations, processes, and venues that placed both under the aegis of shared norms and rule sets. Yet each is now increasingly focused on rule and norm violations by the other side rather than on areas of common interest. China's conduct since roughly 2016–2017 in areas ranging from cyber intrusions to intellectual property theft to human rights practices appears to demonstrate a growing willingness to act in its own interest even in contravention of established norms.

In terms of the eight contextual factors in our theoretical framework, three of them suggest sources of stability for the U.S.-China rivalry:

- *Military offense-defense balance.* The survivable nuclear deterrents both sides possess, the robust military capabilities of each, and the relative immunity of both homelands continue to provide an essential, top-level military balance that appears to be characterized by defensive dominance. This principle does not apply to all forms of aggression below the threshold of war, however, such as cyberattacks; in the event of a large-scale crisis, the premium on striking first could become significant. But the overall rivalry is not characterized by a dangerous level of offensive dominance.
- *Objective costs of aggression.* The mutual possession of nuclear weapons and economic interdependence raise the potential cost and risk of major war to exorbitant levels. These objective cost factors generally favor stability because the two relatively developed nations do not face the incentives for major war that characterized past zero-sum competitions.
- *Interdependence.* The two countries compete within the context of a global market system that provides ample opportunities to secure resources and markets peacefully and efficiently. The two countries maintain highly interdependent economies that would suffer enormous disruption in the event of conflict. Moreover, the global economy would likely suffer severe repercussions if the world's two largest economies should war against one another.

Three other contextual factors, however, suggest sources of instability for the U.S.-China rivalry:

- *Domestic interest groups' influence.* Domestic constituencies of foreign policy elites, government officials, and military leaders are forming in favor of harder-line policies.
- *Status considerations.* China's determination to reestablish what it views as its rightful place in world politics, overcoming a century or more of perceived humiliation at the hands of Western imperialism and hegemony, creates grievances and conspiracy-based thinking that add fuel to the rivalry and risk destabilizing it.

- *Existence of a common enemy.* China's ideological affinity with Russia means that it will not see the United States as a partner against that potential enemy. This absence of any common enemy deprives the relationship of a potential influence in favor of stability and enables a deepening antagonism.

Two of the five perceptual factors in our theoretical framework indicate a growing risk:

- *Perceived defense against existential threat.* The governments of both countries have avoided language that could stir up public hatred and enmity but have offered increasingly blunt characterizations of the other country as a competitor and potential source of threat. Among the foreign policy elites who influence policymaking, opinion appears to be consolidating in favor of harder-line approaches.
- *Enough mutual understanding to avoid disastrous misperceptions.* Polls suggest that the peoples of both countries regard one another with a mixture of both positive and negative views. The same polls suggest trends are moving toward heightened threat perceptions. The aggravation of trade-related disputes and feuding over long-standing sore points, such as Taiwan and the South China Sea, could deepen hostile perceptions. A militarized crisis in China's near seas could crystallize suspicion and distrust into enmity.

This comprehensive assessment provides reason for concern that the U.S.-China rivalry could be trending toward instability and volatility. The two countries are unavoidably locked in a deepening competition at the regional and global levels. Disputes might not be existential, but they appear to be spreading across virtually all domains and have grown intractable and acrimonious. Both countries have shown restraint in handling disputes, whether over Taiwan, maritime sovereignty, or trade. But statements from top leaders, confrontational trade and other policies, and continued military buildups have loosened that restraint and suggest a deepening trend toward mutual distrust. The rules of the game remain incomplete and immature, and the stabilizing institutional influences that characterized the late phases of the Cold War remain undeveloped. Given the significant changes in recent years, it appears too early to determine whether the strategic competition between China and the United States has, as of 2019, reached a resilient equilibrium that would be needed to absorb shocks and weather discontinuities in the bilateral relationship.

Implications and Recommendations

This analysis carries several leading implications for U.S. national security policy. These implications largely point to the importance of unintended perceptual effects of U.S. decisions. These implications lead to five overall recommendations for U.S. defense and foreign policy:

- *Consider the unintended effects of military capability decisions.* The deterrent effect of capability decisions is only half of the equation. When the United States makes decisions about posture or capability development, it should also consider their effects on stability.
- *Take seriously the need to develop formal and informal rules of the road*. The historical cases highlight the importance of rules and agreements to stabilize rivalries. These can range from informal understandings about the conduct of exercises to hotlines to military-to-military rules of engagement to more-strategic implicit agreements, such as restraint in

areas close to the borders of rivals. Intensifying discussion of such rules will be important even as the rivalries deepen, particularly to clarify redlines and reduce the chance of miscalculation. In today's context of the U.S. relationships with China and Russia, new norms are urgently needed to limit the employment of homeland-disruptive tools, such as cyberwarfare, political warfare, and informational manipulation.

- *Shape the international system to magnify its constraining effects*. An important component of the post-1945 world has been the set of norms and institutions the United States has helped create, which have served as a stabilizing ballast in the international system by making international status contingent on some degree of restraint. Meanwhile, the global alignment of value-sharing democracies represents another form of structural constraint that historically has been associated with stability. U.S. policy should seek to sustain and, where possible, deepen these normative and structural factors.
- *Seek opportunities for mutual transparency, notification, and arms control*. These formal agreements would go beyond the rules of the road mentioned earlier to limit the deployment of new capabilities and create mechanisms to reduce uncertainty. New or renewed strategic arms agreements, new limits on conventional forces in key regions, and open skies–style accords to enhance transparency could all serve these objectives.
- *Look for ways to grant rivals increased status in exchange for creating a trade space for arrangements that would serve U.S. interests and enhance stability.* The major U.S. rivals today seek what they see as their rightful places in world politics as much as, or more than, territorial gains or damage to the United States or other democracies. If the United States is willing to offer signifiers of status in, for example, international institutions and the ways in which it handles major crises and if it is also willing to constrain, at least slightly, its own deployments and policies out of respect for its rivals' interests, it could both create a trade space for achieving other goals and reduce the incipient instability of the two rivalries.

These implications and recommendations apply directly to the U.S. Army insofar as they offer insight into the general U.S. defense policy mindset that will be important for stabilizing the rivalries. This analysis carries the following additional implications and recommendations specific to the Army:

- *The Army, like all services, will serve the nation's interests most effectively if it continuously thinks in terms of stabilizing the rivalries rather than merely providing capabilities to threaten the adversary.* Historically, the highest risks of war between strategic rivals have stemmed from their fears of existential risk.
- *Ground forces can in some places and in some ways effectively thread the needle between effective deterrence and destabilizing provocation.* These forces can sustain credible deterrence and reassure allies with a nonprovocative local presence. But there are limits: Some ground force capabilities (e.g., potential armored brigade combat teams deployed to the Baltics) are among the most provocative capabilities to rivals.
- *Work diligently on military-to-military communication with China and Russia and on efforts to build useful rules of engagement and communications channels between ground forces.*
- *Keep in mind that arms restraints, controls, and reductions can enhance stability.* For example, the Army could take the lead in examining potential constraints in the deployment, posture, and capabilities of ground forces in the European region in ways that would enhance stability.

These conclusions point to one overarching theme: A time of intensified competition does not call merely for persistent additions to capabilities, taking every opportunity to threaten rivals. Rivalries remain stable—and thus avoid war—for complex sets of reasons that do involve a degree of preparedness on both sides but also go beyond that. The U.S. Army, like the other services and the broader defense establishment, will increasingly have to think in terms of stability as it works to help the United States manage this challenging new era of competition.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Anticipating an Era of Great-Power Rivalry

The consensus of official U.S. government policy and most analysis outside government is that the international system is headed for a renewed era of more intense and sometimes bitter competition among leading states. The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) warns of the "growing political, economic, and military competitions" that the United States confronts.[1] The unclassified public summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) serves as a wake-up call: "We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order. . . . Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security." The NDS suggests that what is underway is nothing short of the "reemergence of long-term, strategic competition by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers." The NDS specifies two countries as potential rivals: China and Russia. "It is increasingly clear" that both states, the strategy concludes, "want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions."[2]

So far, however, little work has been done to delineate the parameters of this emerging era. Strategic competition can take many forms, and it is not clear what the emerging era will look like. Historical examples range from moderated competitions over colonies or other forms of influence to extremely aggressive confrontations between actors engaged in zero-sum battles.

In fact, the world described in the 2017 NSS and 2018 NDS does not represent generalized competition so much as two rivalries—between the United States and both Russia and China. The parts Iran and North Korea play are much more of spoiler roles because neither has the military power to challenge the United States as a true rival, especially beyond its own region. Because the risks outlined in U.S. national security strategy documents today pertain mostly to great-power bilateral rivalries, it is critical to understand that concept—what such rivalries are; how they tend to work; and, most important, how they can be kept stable.

An emerging era of intensified rivalries could have varying levels of stability. We define the term *stability* later, but, broadly speaking, we mean a relationship that is resilient to shocks and resistant to rapid and disproportionate change, especially in a negative direction. The bilateral rivalries of the era could end up being highly unstable, characterized by multiple crises, few established rules or norms, and the constant danger that small provocations or misperceptions could produce conflict. By contrast, these relationships could come to reflect

[1] White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017b, p. 2.

[2] U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, Washington, D.C., January 2018, pp. 1–2.

an era of broadly agreed rules of the road and a general confidence that strategic issues will not escalate to threaten vital interests, even while maintaining competition among the powers.

If the international system is indeed coming to reflect much-greater elements of rivalry, keeping the rivalries stable will be one of the most important priorities of U.S. national security strategy and policy. A period of more intense rivalry will be one in which it is more difficult to generate collaboration on multilateral problems but also one in which the risk of outright conflict is much greater—with potentially catastrophic results. If the United States is convinced it is embarking on such an era, it needs a strategy for stabilizing the expected rivalries.

Although broad in sweep, this report focuses on the emerging U.S. strategic rivalries with the two near-peer competitors mentioned in the NSS: Russia and China. It is thus an examination of bilateral, dyadic rivalries, not of broader systemic dynamics. It aims to identify the factors that keep such rivalries stable and the contrary factors that lead them to unstable and conflictual outcomes. In this report, we seek to specify the general criteria for stability and to offer a road map toward moderated and less-volatile rivalries between the United States and its two emerging competitors. Our assumption is that the rivalries are embedded in the current relationships and that, therefore, the purpose of the report is not to identify ways to end the rivalries but rather to reduce their intensity and address potentially unstable patterns in them.

We pursued five lines of research to investigate these questions. First, we reviewed the theoretical literature for models that help characterize the nature of rivalries. Second, we developed a list of real-world rivalries over the past two centuries to test the roles of different variables. We coded the cases according to their relationships with these variables and conducted a statistical analysis to determine whether any of the variables were strongly associated with stability or instability. The findings from these two related lines of inquiry appear in Chapter Two.

Third, we searched for factors that could promote the stability of a strategic rivalry. We conducted this search by examining various theoretical traditions and national security literatures—in areas including international relations theory and the literature on nuclear balances. This was in addition to the earlier literature review that focused narrowly and explicitly on works dealing with the concept of dyadic rivalry. Chapter Three presents the results of this analysis.

Fourth, we conducted case studies of historical bilateral rivalries to determine the factors that tended to suppress or exacerbate instability. In selecting these cases, we looked for dyads that involved major or great powers; that collectively spanned an entire region or even the globe rather than being limited to narrow disputes, such as those over a contested piece of contiguous territory; and that were multifaceted, involving rivalry in several domains. The U.S.-Soviet Cold War was an obvious case to include: We conducted multiple analyses of different issue areas during that period, generating, in effect, a collection of issue-area case studies of much greater depth than the other case studies. The criteria also led us to four earlier historical cases: Germany and the United Kingdom from 1871 through 1913, the United States and the United Kingdom from 1812 through 1905, China and Japan from 1870 through 1937, and the Soviet Union/Russia and China from 1950 through 2001. Of those, the U.S.-UK and China-Japan cases turned out to display unique features that we believed reduced their analytical value in drawing lessons for other periods of rivalry. Moreover, neither of these cases offered lessons distinct from the other three. The remaining three case studies appear as Chapters Four through Six.

Clearly, each case that remains possesses elements that make it somewhat unique and different from the U.S.-China and U.S.-Russia relationships. We highlight some of these differences in the chapters that follow. Pre–Cold War cases, for example, reflect the major difference that they occurred in the prenuclear era. Some involved rivalries between countries that shared a border, as opposed to the current cases of rivals that are more distant from one another. We consciously designed the research with pre–Cold War, Cold War, and current cases knowing that each would offer some unique aspects. Part of the goal of the analysis was to test factors across this range of periods to look for commonalities.

Fifth and finally, we conducted detailed research into the current state of U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China relations as of 2019, rigorously applying the framework and variables derived from the theoretical and historical analyses to assess the stability of the current dyadic relationships. Chapter Seven summarizes our findings on Russia; Chapter Eight, on China. Chapter Nine draws together the lessons of all lines of research to offer general findings and implications for the U.S. Army and the U.S. government more broadly.

It is important to clarify the role of the framework-based approach in assessing the stability of strategic relationships. This is an established approach that RAND Corporation researchers have employed in other work.[3] Through a review of available literature on the issue, we developed a framework of factors designed to capture the major variables that appear to be associated with stability. We then tested the framework through in-depth historical case studies, which both confirm the relevance of the variables and suggest some that may be especially significant. The framework then provided a lens or menu of factors through which to assess rivalries to determine their stability. This method does not claim to have identified specific causal relations between particular variables in the framework and specific outcomes; rather, the framework distills the insights of historical and theoretical work on rivalries and offers a mechanism for assessing the characteristics of current rivalries.

In pursuit of these five components, the methodology relied on several core qualitative analyses supported by a quantitative evaluation of the well-established set of modern rivalries as defined in multiple data sets. As noted earlier, the qualitative analysis began with an in-depth review of two overlapping sets of literature: that on bilateral, or dyadic, rivalry and that on stability in international relationships. Our review of major pre–Cold War and Cold War cases of rivalry relied on available primary sources and secondary accounts; these qualitative analyses were subject to multiple subject-matter expert assessments in meetings of the project group. The quantitative analysis represented a search for relationships among war and several of the variables contributing to stability assessed in our report; its specific methodology is described in Chapter Two. Taken together, then, the research reflects the extensive efforts of a cross-disciplinary team to assess historical, theoretical, and quantitative sources of evidence to draw conclusions about the current degree of instability in bilateral rivalries among near-peer competitors.

It is important to be clear about the findings such a methodology can support. The combination of a review of literature for key variables governing stability and an analysis of how the variables appear to affect a number of specific cases cannot definitively provide generalizable causal relationships. Merely because several variables were critical in determining the stabil-

[3] See, for example, Michael J. Mazarr, Arthur Chan, Alyssa Demus, Bryan Frederick, Alireza Nader, Stephanie Pezard, Julia A. Thompson, and Elina Treyger, *What Deters and Why: Exploring Requirements for Effective Deterrence of Interstate Aggression*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2018.

ity of two or three great-power rivalries in the past does not mean they will have significant effects in the U.S.-China or U.S.-Russia contexts today. In fact, *no* methodology could produce a reliable, predictive assessment of the factors and causal relationships that will determine the stability of the current rivalries. Too many variables are at work; the problem of stability is too situation-dependent; and causal relations are too obscure and often arbitrary for that. What decisionmakers and analysts need is a place to start—a foundation of factors that have been historically important in determining the stability of rivalries and a detailed examination of the current relationships to see whether the factors appear to be important. That is what this report provides—an analytical framework, grounded in theoretical and historical analysis rather than anything like a formal model.

A complicating factor, from the standpoint of applying existing research, is that this report defines stability as more than the absence of war. We did so because we are interested in the broader degree of tension and equilibrium in strategic relationships. We therefore chose a more eclectic definition of stability, which, by its nature, will manifest itself slightly differently in each context—aiming for a rich and nuanced depiction of this central concept and relying on judgments in our case histories. This conception of stability is reflected in our framework and how the notion of stability is operationalized in the report.

As a result, the concept of stability in this report cannot be viewed as a singular factor but rather a collection of factors. The framework does highlight two factors of particular importance in defining the essence of a stable competition: The mutual acceptance of a shared status quo and a resilient equilibrium in which the relationship can weather crises and disputes and return to a stable balance. Each of the case study chapters in this report addresses these two factors in particular and highlights other factors from the framework that help explain the stability, or lack of it, in the rivalries under consideration.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Foundations: Understanding Rivalry

Prior to considering the key factors that define a stable strategic competition, we sought to define the nature of such competition itself. As important as competition or rivalry is to international relations and conflict, there is a dearth of comprehensive definitions of these terms in the literature. Defining when two states are in competition is arguably more difficult than doing so when they are in cooperation: States tend to announce or formalize cooperation through alliances, treaties, and agreements. In contrast, competition short of war is rarely explicitly and publicly acknowledged.[1] A recent *Joint Force Quarterly* article offers a comprehensive definition of strategic competition that is useful for the purposes of this report: "when two actors in the international system have incompatible high-priority interests and one or both actors engage in behavior that will be detrimental to the other's interests."[2]

The focus of this research is on bilateral, dyadic competitions between states that have a global dimension. We therefore concluded that the term *rivalry* best captured the dynamic at the core of our investigation. *Competition*, broadly speaking, is generally used to describe a systemic reality and is a more encompassing term that can include anything from friendly economic competition to militarized disputes. *Rivalry* tends to imply a serious clash of goals and objectives between groups or individuals with an ingrained sense of dislike or hatred and with some degree of zero-sum clashes of intentions. The next section defines strategic rivalry in more-specific terms.

No matter how they are defined, rivalries are important drivers of international conflict. A comprehensive examination of international conflict over the past two centuries found that a small handful of dyadic rivalries was responsible for most international conflicts.[3] This small group of rivalries was disproportionately responsible for perpetuating war over the past 200 years: Less than 1 percent of all the dyads in the past two centuries were responsible for nearly 80 percent of the interstate warfare in this period.[4]

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[1] William R. Thompson, "Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 45, No. 4, December 2001, p. 563.

[2] Daniel Burkhart and Alison Woody, "Strategic Competition: Beyond Peace and War," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 86, 3rd Quarter, 2017.

[3] Zeev Maoz and Ben D. Mor, *Bound by Struggle: The Strategic Evolution of Enduring International Rivalries*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 3.

[4] Michael P. Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William R. Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics: Position, Space and Conflict Escalation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Perhaps because the phenomenon of rivalries has existed for so long that it has been taken for granted and understood as a natural part of international politics.[5] William Thompson, one of the preeminent scholars of strategic rivalry, aptly noted in 2001 that the study of rivalry was largely nonexistent, characterized by "a large number of relatively casual references to the phenomenon" in the traditional international relations literature.[6] Much of the existing strategic rivalry literature has been focused on how to end rivalries, as opposed to a focus on managing ongoing rivalries and identifying characteristics of stability.

Defining Strategic Rivalry

There is disagreement within the literature on strategic rivalry over how to define the phenomenon and identify when states are engaged in it. Like the broader international relations literature, there is no consensus on what relationships qualify as strategic rivalries and how to measure their intensity or stability.

Standard dictionary definitions of *rivalry* include such concepts as "antagonism" and "opposition."[7] They also sometimes equate the term *rivalry* with a "competition," although many terms used in definitions of rivalry imply an especially serious version of competition.

Within the field of international relations, some analysts rely exclusively or primarily on quantitative thresholds of militarized disputes. Diehl and Goertz restricted the competitions in which they were interested to militarized ones. For them, militarized competition is necessary to rivalry because the resort to military tools illustrates the intensity of that competitive relationship. They required that competitors engage in at least six militarized disputes within 20 years.[8] Similarly, one of Bennett's criteria is that states engage in at least five militarized disputes over at least 25 years.[9]

Various scholars have employed different terms to modify the nature of international rivalries between major powers. *Enduring rivalry* was the predominant way to understand bilateral competitive relationships before Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson popularized the term *strategic rivalry*.[10] Either way, however, the basic definition was the same: The label of *enduring rivalry* largely referred to recurrent militarized disputes between states.[11] Diehl described enduring rivalries as "those in which two nations engage in at least three militarized disputes within a

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5 Karen Rasler, William R. Thompson, and Sumit Ganguly, *How Rivalries End*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, pp. 1–2.

6 Thompson, 2001, p. 558.

7 See, for example, Dictionary.com, "Rivalry," undated, and Merriam-Webster, "Rivalry," undated.

8 Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 19–25.

9 D. Scott Bennett, "Security, Bargaining, and the End of Interstate Rivalry," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 1996. Also see D. Scott Bennett, "Integrating and Testing Models of Rivalry Duration," *American Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 42, No. 4, 1998.

10 Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008.

11 Charles S. Gochman and Zeev Maoz, "Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1976: Procedures, Patterns, and Insights," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 28, No. 4, December 1984; Paul F. Diehl, "Contiguity and Military Escalation in Major Power Rivalries, 1816–1980," *Journal of Politics,* Vol. 47, No. 4, November 1985.

period of fifteen years."[12] Because different scholars use different thresholds to categorize rivalries, there has not been one universally accepted data set of rivalries: Bennett pointed to 63 enduring rivalries,[13] Maoz and Mor to 110,[14] and Klein, Goertz, and Diehl to 120 (in addition to 170 *proto-rivalries*, or shorter-term rivalries).[15]

A history of conflict is an important indicator of future conflict, because the history demonstrates unresolved issues, willingness to fight, and ability to do so. Although there are problems with relying exclusively on a certain number of past militarized disputes to define strategic rivalry, it does allow analysts a way to empirically assess these three factors. History of past conflict can also influence an actor's perception of the threat of future conflict.

However, using strict thresholds of military disputes to define a rivalry is somewhat arbitrary. The major risk with setting a quantitative threshold for militarized disputes to qualify a relationship as a rivalry in the way that is commonly done in studies of civil and interstate war is that important phases of strategic rivalries or entire rivalries may be excluded.[16] Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson have asked, "must relationships become sufficiently militarized before we recognize it as a rivalry?"[17] There is no consensus on how militarized a relationship needs to become before it is understood as a rivalry, and Thompson raises the concern that different opinions on this will greatly influence the data sets and findings of future studies.[18]

Thompson therefore proposes additional qualitative metrics to define rivalries, using the less tangible but likely equally important aspects of rivalry built around subjective threat perception. When two states *believe* themselves to be engaged in a rivalry, Thompson suggests, such a condition exists. Most scholars have since followed Thompson in incorporating metrics related to mutual threat perception into their conceptualizations of strategic rivalry. According to Diehl and Goertz, "rivalries consist of two states in competition that possess the expectation of future conflict."[19] Bennett defined rivalries by the presence of protracted disagreements that produce frequent diplomatic or military disputes. He emphasized that the issues under dispute remain the same or related over time. If these issues have not been resolved in the past, they are unlikely to be peacefully resolved in the future unless there are significant changes in the bilateral power dynamic, priority shifts (or leadership change) in either country, or strong external shocks.[20]

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[12] Diehl, 1985, p. 1204. This is a different level from the one the same scholar would employ in 2000.

[13] D. Scott Bennett, "Measuring Rivalry Termination, 1816–1992," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1997.

[14] Maoz and Mor, 2002.

[15] James P. Klein, Gary Goertz, and Paul F. Diehl, "The New Rivalry Dataset: Procedures and Patterns," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2006.

[16] For example, the Correlates of War project, which informs many studies of conflict, including studies of rivalries that rely on quantitative data on militarized disputes, established a threshold of a certain number of battlefield deaths within a 12-month period to qualify an episode as war. See Correlates of War Project, homepage, 2020.

[17] Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008, p. 22.

[18] Thompson, 2001, pp. 558–559.

[19] Diehl and Goertz, 2000, pp. 19–25.

[20] Bennett, 1996. Another source similarly points to four defining characteristics of a rivalry: two states that have fought repeatedly, that cannot fundamentally resolve the sources of their conflict, that retain mutual expectations of hostility, and that have not fought continuously. See Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008, pp. 10–12.

The literature diverges over whether states must possess roughly equal capabilities to engage in a strategic rivalry. In general, the literature agrees that strategic rivalries are more likely to develop and endure when states have a relatively equal distribution of power (at least as they mutually perceive) than when there is a stark power differential.[21] Intuitively, this is sound: If one state is much stronger than the other, barring a powerful third-party protector, the stronger state should be able to compel the weaker state to comply, thus obviating the opportunity for a true competitive rivalry to develop. Vasquez contended that relative power symmetry is a "prerequisite of rivalries," because "relative capability places the actors in a situation from which neither can make a decision without the agreement of the other . . . . which fuels both hostility and recurring disputes."[22]

The literature is not entirely in agreement on this point. Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson have disagreed with Vasquez on this condition, citing such rivalries as that between Vietnam and Cambodia or Uruguay and Brazil, and ultimately concluding, "objective capability ratios do not always govern the way decision-makers behave."[23] Thompson did not require symmetric power capabilities for rivalry but did contend that, all things being equal, power symmetry makes rivalry more likely and more enduring.[24] Ultimately, the issue is simply that a true rivalry, as the term is understood in the realm of international politics, cannot exist between countries of radically different power standing—the United States and Honduras, for example, or Russia and Denmark. Rivalries as counted and defined in the literature exist between countries generally understood to be major or "great" powers, which, at a minimum, belong to a select group of states with the power to be able to challenge one another in some spheres.

Table 2.1 summarizes the core characteristics of rivalries, as discussed in the literature and by whom.

Table 2.1
Characteristics of Rivalries, Drawn from the Literature

Characteristic	Sources
History of past conflict	Diehl, 1985 Diehl and Goertz, 2000 Bennett, 1996
Perception of mutual hostility, lack of trust, expectation of future conflict	Diehl and Goertz, 2000 Thompson, 2001 Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013 Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008
Recurring disputes over the same issues; inability to resolve sources of conflicts	Bennett, 1996 Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008
Similar (but not fully equivalent) national power	John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 Thompson, 2001 Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013

[21] Thompson, 2001, p. 573; Klein, Goertz, and Diehl, 2006.

[22] John A. Vasquez, "Distinguishing Rivals That Go to War from Those That Do Not: A Quantitative Comparative Case Study of the Two Paths to War," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4, December 1996, p. 533.

[23] Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008, p. 32.

[24] Thompson, 2001, p. 573.

The authors of *How Rivalries End* suggested that a *pair* of criteria are required for classifying a strategic rivalry: Two states must regard one another as both "competitive" and "threatening."[25] Such conditions are most likely to arise, they contended, when states view potential rivals as capable of mobilizing capabilities and resources at roughly the same level, i.e., when there is capability symmetry. Furthermore, the authors suggested, states are more likely to perceive a rival in another state that has done harm to it in the past or is projecting some possibility of doing harm in the future. Determining whether another state is threatening, therefore, involves perception and identity factors in addition to assessing objective capabilities.

The most common bilateral relationship in international politics is when states are not especially competitive with or threatening to one another (the "nonthreatening noncompetitors" referred to in Table 2.2). States that are competitive but nonthreatening could include states of similar capability that at one point were strategic rivals but that no longer see each other as physically threatening (such as France and Germany). In general, rivalries occur either between two major powers or two minor ones; asymmetrical relationships are often temporary and are resolved when one state marshals its greater capacity to dominate the other state or push some resolution. However, while power asymmetry makes major power–minor power rivalry less probable, these relationships can develop into persistent rivalries under certain conditions.[26] Such outright strategic rivalries are relatively rare but disproportionately likely to escalate into conflict: Nearly 80 percent of the wars since 1816 have involved confrontations between such rivals.[27]

Although there is no consensus on *how* militarized a rivalry must be, one criterion often applied to rivalries as classically understood is that they are by definition *militarized*. The disputes in a geopolitical rivalry must contain some risk of breaking out into military conflict, some treatments suggest, or they fall into another category. One prominent study of the issue concludes simply: "We cannot compare how non-militarized rivalries might be different from those that become militarized for non-militarized rivalries do not even exist by definition."[28] What precisely counts as militarization is not always clear, however. Broadly, it seems to be the expectation of war and significant military preparations, but this could vary from case to case.

Table 2.2
Categorizing Bilateral Relationships

	Perceived as Threatening	Not Perceived as Threatening
Roughly equal capability	Strategic rivalries	Nonthreatening competitors
Asymmetric capability	Asymmetrical relationship (can develop into rivalry under certain conditions)	Nonthreatening noncompetitors (most bilateral relationships)

SOURCE: Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013, pp. 3–4.

[25] Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013, p. 3.

[26] One such example is the rivalry between the United States and Cuba. In the context of the Cold War, Cuba was essentially able to act well beyond what its power capabilities would normally dictate and became a strategic rival of the United States for a significant period of time. See Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013; Thompson, 2001, p. 560.

[27] Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013, p. 5.

[28] Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008, p. 51.

Meanwhile, some analyses have defined different types of rivalries according to the primary catalyst or object of the rivalry. Rivalries can be over territory, over status or position within the system, over competing ideologies, or over resources or can be grounded in ethnic or religious disputes.[29] Classic rivalries have tended to focus on material factors, whether land, resources, or control of populations. More-recent ones have largely been about status, position, and ideology. One interesting finding with particular relevance to the current moment is that positional (political) disputes can be as important as territorial ones in prompting conflict.[30]

In sum, therefore, in defining a rivalry, the existing theoretical and historical literature points to several key components. To count as rivals, two states must

- have somewhat comparable amounts of national power and influence, though they need not be equal
- believe they are engaged in a rivalry—have a perception of mutual hostility and lack of trust
- have an expectation of future competition and, possibly, conflict
- have actual or perceived contention over specific policy issues that bear on their mutual national interests and objectives and be unable to resolve those disputes
- have some history of conflict, although the frequency and intensity can vary.

These characteristics clearly apply to the U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China relationships in 2019.

Managing Strategic Rivalries

The literature also explores the life cycle of strategic rivalries, how they begin, how they evolve, and how they can be managed or even transformed into nonrivalries. Many factors can perpetuate rivalries, including domestic and individual drivers.

In *How Rivalries End*, Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly identified four factors they believed necessary for reducing conflict between strategic rivals and possibly ending a rivalry: (1) *internal or external shocks* that drive states to overcome inertia and alter their strategic approaches, (2) *expectancy revision* (changes in perceptions of the competitiveness of one's rival or oneself, or of the threat the rival poses), (3) *reciprocity*, and (4) *reinforcement*. Policy entrepreneurs (leaders who want to alter the strategic approach to the rivalry) and third-party interveners could also reduce the risk of strategic competition escalating into conflict but are neither necessary nor sufficient.[31]

Reinforcement can mitigate the intensity of rivalries by establishing a cycle of mutual concessions. This is why it is critical for each actor first to reciprocate concessions offered by the other.[32] At the same time, one perceived hostile incident can reinforce the expectation of future hostility and establish a negative reciprocal cycle that makes future hostile behavior

[29] Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008, p. 79.

[30] Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008, pp. 187–188.

[31] Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013, p. 11.

[32] Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013, p. 186.

more likely even if neither side truly desires it,[33] not unlike defensive realism's conceptualization of a spiraling security dilemma.[34] Over time, each state's expectations of the other become more entrenched, making it less likely that they can break out of their adversarial relationship.[35] Unsurprisingly, most crises occur between states that have a previous history of mistrust.[36]

Wendt's approach to international relations as driven by intersubjective social constructs supports this understanding of mutually reinforcing perceptions.[37] Repeated interaction between states "rewards actors for holding certain ideas about each other";[38] this notion is not too different from Jervis' and others' conception of the prisoner's dilemma as a game that is played multiple times, with perversely self-fulfilling results. This way of understanding interstate relationships supports the argument made in the strategic rivalry literature that states with a history of competition are more likely to engage in future rivalry or even conflict: Distrust and negative perceptions of another state are self-reinforcing constructs.

Interstate rivalry is predicated on the mutual assessment that the other actor poses a threat. Changing the threat perceptions (what Thompson and colleagues called "expectational change") is difficult to achieve in isolation from shifts in other factors (such as power capabilities and adversary regime priorities). In addition, in many of the "strongly entrenched rivalries" that Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly examined, there were limits to the degree of expectation revision achieved.[39] Realists would find this unsurprising, given the core realist tenet that states can never fully trust another state's intentions and must therefore rely on an assessment of capabilities—and a state with similar capabilities must always be watched warily.

The liberal and constructivist paradigms of international relations theory offer some relevant notions on how to constrain state behavior to make all states feel more secure and to shift threat perceptions. International institutions can mitigate the negative effects of anarchy and promote peaceful relations between states.[40] Such institutions, both formal and informal, can facilitate greater cooperation between states, which reduces competition and the likelihood of conflict. More institutions and interactions increase trust, improve communications, and promote stability, which decreases the likelihood that states will need to resort to conflict to deal with problems. Jervis wrote that it is in the interest of each actor to have others be "deprived of the power to defect" from an agreement or coalition; he claimed that each actor would be willing to restrict his own ability to defect if it meant others would be restrained as well.[41] Membership in institutions (be they formal, such as a bilateral arms control treaty, or informal, such as the norm of nuclear weapon nonuse) makes it harder for states to defect from agreements

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[33] Thompson, 2001, p. 562.

[34] Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, January 1978, pp. 167–214.

[35] Thompson, 2001, p. 562.

[36] Martin C. Libicki, *Crisis and Escalation in Cyberspace,* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1215-AF, 2012, p. 5.

[37] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992.

[38] Wendt, 1992, p. 405.

[39] Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013, p. 188.

[40] Robert Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Summer 1999, p. 63.

[41] Jervis, 1978, p. 171.

and mitigates the security dilemma. Additionally, economic interdependence tends to increase the gains of mutual cooperation. Jervis argues that such interdependence is another method of escaping from a spiraling security competition,[42] and it is also a facet of Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly 's benefits of reciprocity.

Wendt's conceptualization of interstate relations as intersubjective social constructs holds that relationships are primarily determined not by material factors but by shared ideas that form the basis of actors' identities, interests, and behaviors.[43] Factors that affect state security and state interactions under anarchy (such as whether two states will cooperate or compete, will be revisionist or status quo powers, or will recognize one another's sovereignty) are "fundamentally intersubjective."[44] Wendt even suggests that rivals can simply decide to stop being rivals.

In this report, we are interested in how rivalries can be steered between the poles of war and transformation—rivalry management. War with Russia or China is, of course, a highly undesirable outcome, and transformation, while possibly desirable, is highly unlikely.

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[42] Jervis, 1978, p. 171.

[43] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 1.

[44] Wendt, 1992, p. 396.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Foundations: Understanding Stability

This report's focus is not merely on the existence or character of a rivalry per se but more specifically on the factors that tend to make rivalries stable or unstable. Like many other terms relevant to the emerging strategic environment, however, the concept of stability is poorly defined in the literature. Our literature review turned up dozens of articles that employed the term in the title and then explicitly or implicitly used the concept as either a dependent or independent variable—yet never actually defined it. Even less definitional clarity is associated with stable or unstable *dyadic* relationships. There is little theoretical work, let alone scholarly consensus, on what defines a stable rivalry and how to differentiate it from an unstable one.

It is possible, as a starting point, to define the general characteristics of the sort of rivalry the United States would want to encourage to avoid war and otherwise reduce the cost and risk of the relationship. A strategically unstable relationship would be inherently escalatory and nonlinear, in which small actions would tend to produce large reactions (or, put another way, in which actions would generate overreactions). It would be a situation constantly surging away from a mean or equilibrium and perpetually risking conflict.

If these concepts reflect the basic elements of instability (and if their inverse would reflect stability), we can begin to assemble a framework of specific factors and variables that can be used to assess the stability of a strategic relationship. We propose a set of such characteristics for a stable rivalry based on the historical and theoretical literature.

We developed this list by reviewing the historical and empirical literature on rivalries, surveyed in the previous chapter, for the factors that bear on the risk of war, conflict, or escalation. The empirical and quantitative literature on rivalries highlighted several specific variables that were found to be important in determining stability or the onset of war. Our approach was to build a set of factors that represented as close to a comprehensive set as possible, as suggested by the existing theoretical and case literature. We subjected that list to a test of subject-matter experts on the project team, then used the list of variables as a lens to examine the pre–Cold War and Cold War historical cases. The following sections describe each of these variables in more detail and cite the literature that supports their inclusion.

In this initial roster, we did not attempt to distinguish among factors that are more or less significant but sought to derive from the existing literature a comprehensive set of the variables that determine the stability of a rivalry. The purpose of this chapter is not to develop causal ties among the variables but to identify factors that appear to be closely related to the stability of a strategic relationship. The goal of the case studies, including the extended consideration of the Cold War, was then to apply this comprehensive list to specific cases and draw out the factors that seem especially important.

From that general set of variables and relying again on the conclusions of the existing literature on rivalry and stability, two factors emerged that offer a useful pair of considerations for defining the very concept of a stable rivalry. These are *mutual acceptance of a shared status quo* and the existence of a *resilient equilibrium* to which the relationship can return after perturbations. In our initial theoretical and historical review, we found these two factors to be present in all stable rivalries we examined and their absence to be a consistent hallmark of rivalries that become unstable. In subsequent chapters, we apply these factors to the cases we considered to determine whether this initial judgment was correct and conclude that, indeed, all our analysis ultimately supports these two factors as the axes around which stability revolves.

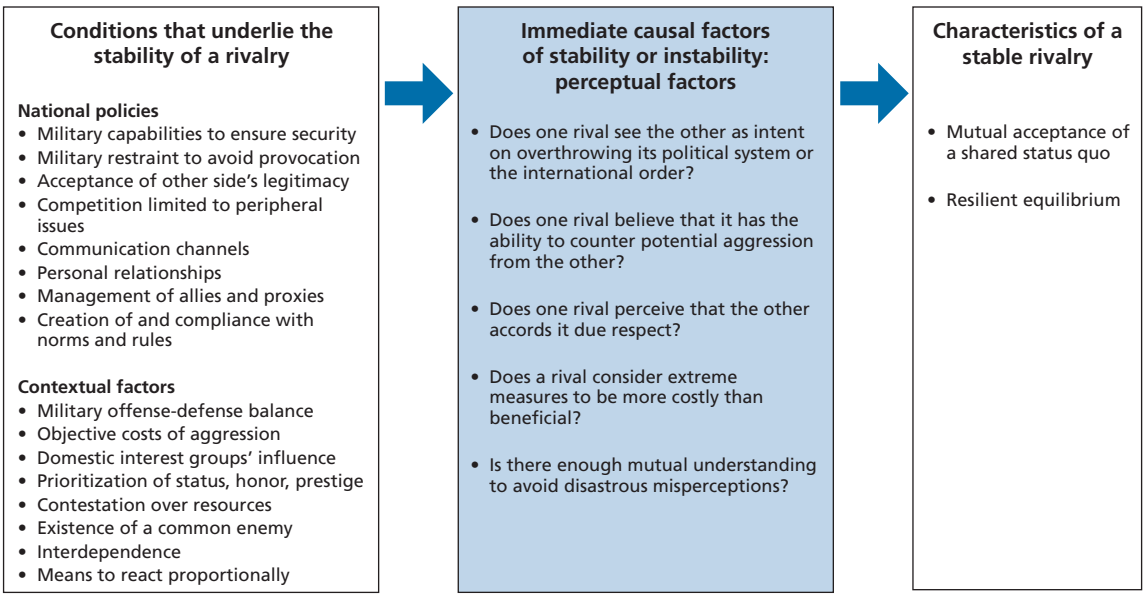
As noted in Chapter One, our goal was not to consider stability as a singular variable, which could be tested in formal models. It was to understand the broader concept of stability in its complexity and nuance, including many factors that work together to produce or undermine it. These factors combine and interact in different ways in different cases, making the character of stability significantly situation-dependent. Very seldom can neat and clean relationships be established between discrete sets of dependent and independent variables. But the available literature does identify a range of factors that should be taken into account when attempting to assess the stability of a relationship, even if they cannot be assembled into a singular variable termed *stability*.

The following sections examine these variables in more detail.

Literature on Stable Strategic Rivalries

The literature on rivalries, competition, and strategic stability suggests several primary characteristics of a stable strategic rivalry. These are the conditions generally required for two rivals to avoid excessive volatility in the relationship. Figure 3.1 outlines the findings. The box on the right suggests that the two defining characteristics of a stable rivalry are the mutual acceptance

Figure 3.1
Sources of Stability and Instability in Strategic Rivalries



of a shared status quo, with accompanying limits on competitive behavior, and a resilient equilibrium in which the rivalry can weather shocks and crises and return to a stable center. These two characteristics are the end product of several variables that govern the stability of a rivalry: *national policies* voluntarily adopted by the participating rivals (and, in some cases, their friends and allies); *contextual factors*, which either mitigate or exacerbate the sources of instability in a rivalry; and *perceptual factors*, which serve as a filter for both the national policies and the contextual factors. National policies and contextual factors thus have only the effect on a rivalry that perceptions allow or cause them to have. Perceptions are the engines of attitudes and behaviors that either produce or undermine the two characteristics of a stable rivalry.

In the sections that follow, we discuss these elements in detail: the basic characteristics of a stable rivalry, the national policies that produce or undermine stability, the contextual factors that produce or undermine it, and the perceptual factors that shape the rivals' beliefs and actions.

Characteristics of a Stable Strategic Rivalry

As noted earlier, the literature suggests that two fundamental characteristics define a stable strategic rivalry: the mutual acceptance of a shared status quo and a resilient equilibrium that allows the relationship to absorb discontinuities and return to the mean rather than spiral out of control.

Mutual Acceptance of a Shared Status Quo

This condition describes a situation in which both members of a rivalry implicitly or explicitly commit themselves to certain critical elements of a shared status quo that can provide a baseline for a stable relationship. Such elements can include the territorial integrity of each other and of states on each other's periphery; respect for the norm of territorial nonaggression, except in extreme circumstances of self-defense; mutual acceptance of (formal or informal) limitations on the development and/or deployment of destabilizing capabilities; and foundational institutions of the Westphalian system, including the status of diplomats from the rival's foreign service. The list can be long or short, and the rivals' commitment to it can be implicit or explicit (or, typically, a combination of both). If no such agreed status quo exists—if one or both members of a rivalry are revisionist regarding the existing situation—stability is, by definition, ruled out.[1]

One condition Jervis described as essential for a security regime—the desire on the part of great powers to create one—is equally true of a stable rivalry: They

> must prefer a more regulated environment to one in which all states behave individualistically. This means that all must be reasonably satisfied with the status quo and whatever alterations can be gained without resort to the use or threat of unlimited war, as compared with the risks and costs of less restrained competition.[2]

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[1] Kupchan has argued that the "unilateral accommodations" essential to begin a process of building a stable peace cannot be initiated if each member of a rivalry perceives the others as revisionist predators. In such cases, no state will be confident in the value or safety in offering such accommodations (Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 2, 5–6).

[2] Robert Jervis, "Security Regimes," *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Spring 1982, p. 360.

Several subcharacteristics can create a situation in which states have an implicit or explicit commitment to a mutually agreed status quo:[3]

- Each believes that many essential aspects of the international situation, such as the overall balance of power and influence, are sufficient (although not necessarily ideal) to achieve its vital national interests.
- Neither harbors such extreme revisionist intent that it seeks to overthrow major elements of the current system.
- Both remain committed to, and involved in, key institutions and processes that define the current order.
- Each displays a willingness to respect some limitations on the projection of its influence into areas on the periphery of the other. The idea of *spheres of influence* need not be part of every agreed status quo, but these agreements do typically reflect some mutual acknowledgment of national interests in neighboring territories.

A Resilient Equilibrium

The second essential quality of a stable rivalry is that it has a resilient equilibrium, an ability to absorb discontinuities and return to the mean rather than spiral out of control. In such a context, provocations tend to generate countervailing forces that return a system to a resilient mean rather than one in which small actions trigger escalatory cascades and the system is inherently unstable. One important related theoretical proposition is that the *rate* of perceived decline in a strategic relationship—just how fast a rivalry appears to be plummeting away from equilibrium—can have an additionally important effect on stability or instability.[4]

Several subcharacteristics typically contribute to such a tendency toward equilibrium:[5]

- The states involved in the rivalry demonstrate an ability to compromise and step back from escalation, even in crises.
- Each of the two states responds reliably and proportionally to provocations or opportunistic moves—to reduce the incentive for opportunistic gambits without allowing the action-reaction cycle to become volatile.
- Neither state overestimates the significance of minor moves.
- Each state is able to distinguish opportunistic or defensive actions from aggressive ones that signal a new offensive mindset.
- Each state is able to distinguish the acts of proxies, which may or may not have the approval of their sponsor, from those of the rival itself and to keep proxy aggression from causing discontinuous volatility in the primary rivalry.

If mutual acceptance of a shared status quo and a resilient equilibrium are the two essential qualities of a stable rivalry, the question is what policies and other factors tend to produce these qualities. We propose a framework that begins with national policies and contextual

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[3] We derived these characteristics from the historical and theoretical cases and literature reviewed for this research. Many examples appear in the specific case study chapters, but the source of this specific list is our judgment.

[4] Dean G. Pruitt, "Stability and Sudden Change in Interpersonal and International Affairs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March 1969, p. 33.

[5] We derived this set of characteristics from the historical and theoretical cases and literature we reviewed for this research.

factors, which together feed the perceptions that in turn fundamentally drive the stability or instability of strategic rivalries. As depicted in Figure 3.1 and described in the following sections, this framework consists of 21 factors, or variables, which include eight national policies, eight contextual factors, and five resulting perceptual factors.

National Policies That Affect the Stability of a Strategic Rivalry

The literature on strategic rivalries suggests several specific national security policies that tend to enhance or to undermine the two basic qualities of a stable rivalry. These policies are briefly reviewed in this section. The existing record does not allow a precise determination of the relative importance of these factors; in fact, their relative significance, and the degree to which they affect the stability of a rivalry, is likely to vary from case to case.

Military Capabilities

States that are confident in their security and feel minimal vulnerability will be more capable of compromise, more likely to be resilient amid the tension of crises, and more able to offer stability-enhancing concessions. One lesson from the literature is that a rivalry is more likely to be stable if the rivals deploy capabilities that underwrite their existential security in clear and obvious ways. Examples include several from the Cold War nuclear competition, when stability was a function of a second-strike capability; thus, when each side felt secure in its retaliatory capabilities, the stability of the overall rivalry was enhanced.[6] Many other aspects of the character of military capabilities can bear on a relationship, but we highlighted this specific aspect as a factor—the degree to which capabilities objectively and measurably threaten the existential security of the other side. This factor can be evident in various ways, from the type of systems deployed to the total number of military forces to their geographic posture.

As with many of these factors, there is a balance to be struck or a tipping point beyond which a state can upset the equilibrium and begin to cause instability. In this case, the tipping point is obvious: When capabilities to provide for one's own security threaten the existential security of the rival, the pursuit of self-defense capabilities has ceased to offer stability. That possibility points to the second policy variable.

Military Restraint

A related but distinct factor that emerges from the literature is the concept of military restraint—that is, using restraint in the deployment, posturing, and operation of military forces and capabilities to reassure the other side of defensive intent. The prior factor referred to the inherent qualities of military capabilities; this factor refers to the ways in which great powers employ and deploy them. An armored brigade may not be inherently offensive—but parked on the border of a rival, it reflects a lack of military restraint.[7]

The participants in a strategic rivalry can promote military doctrines and concepts that challenge the stabilizing characteristic of the first variable—the competitor's sense of essential

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[6] These conclusions are based on findings on perceived mutual security in Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, 2008, and Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly, 2013.

[7] By the use of the term *restraint* here, we do not mean broad-based retrenchment as a grand strategy, which is sometimes associated with that term.

security. First-strike nuclear doctrines; aggressive concepts of operations; and new capabilities, such as cyberattacks and hypersonic missiles that could theoretically give an aggressor the capacity to strike without warning and achieve partially disarming effects, all potentially signal an intent to take aggressive action and, in so doing, to destabilize a strategic rivalry.

Kupchan's work on the sources of strategic stability emphasizes these policies. He considers the policies that help countries resolve rivalries, not merely stabilize them, and create a context that "effectively eliminates the prospect of armed conflict."[8] His in-depth historical cases emphasize the importance of restraint—in terms of unilateral accommodations by the two sides and "reciprocal restraint" through formal steps to ease tensions and enhance transparency.

Acceptance of the Other Side's Legitimacy

The theoretical and empirical literature suggest that, in at least some cases, public signaling of the legitimacy of the other side in a rivalry—specifically, each side's acceptance of the other's governing system and regime—is important for stabilization.[9] The implicit message of such policies—which can take the form of formal diplomatic recognition to repeated diplomatic engagements to public recognition of the other side's vital interests—is that one or both sides in a rivalry intend neither to destroy the other in any existential sense nor to threaten its core interests.[10] Obviously, messages like these can be calculated for effect and, in some cases, could be designed to conceal efforts to build capabilities to pose just such a threat. Alone, signaling will not stabilize a rivalry—it must be combined with other variables, such as military restraint (discussed earlier) and the choice to compete in areas not viewed as essential by the other side (discussed later). But our review of the literature suggests that such signaling, especially when embodied in formal diplomatic measures or procedures, can play an important complementary role in determining whether a rivalry remains stable.[11]

Competition Only on Peripheral Issues

A common behavioral tool rivals in several historical cases used to stabilize a rivalry is to compete for advantage in areas that are peripheral rather than central, avoiding direct confrontations over interests the rival believes to be core or vital.[12] In the 19th century, this sometimes

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[8] Kupchan, 2010, pp. 2, 5–6.

[9] There are many possible ways of measuring legitimacy, but this factor focuses only on the narrow idea of accepting the legitimacy of the other's system and/or regime—that is to say, not seeking regime change, either explicitly or implicitly.

[10] This theme appears in Edward A. Kolodziej, "The Cold War as Cooperation," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 44, No. 7, April 1991. It is an important theme in many analyses of the work on the Vienna System; see Paul W. Schroeder, "The Nineteenth Century System: Balance of Power or Political Equilibrium?" *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, April 1989. Henry Kissinger emphasized this theme about the same period and beyond in *World Order*, New York: Penguin Books, 2014, pp. 9–31.

[11] This theme overlaps with some of the findings of the literature on democracy and conflict, which suggests that it is through a process of mutual acceptance of legitimacy and an ability to make mutually credible commitments that democracy tends to mitigate the incidence of conflict. See, for example, Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, and Lisa L. Martin, *Democratic Commitments: Legislatures and International Cooperation*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

[12] See James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, "A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post–Cold War Era," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992, and Bevan Sewell and Maria Ryan, eds., *Foreign Policy at the Periphery: The Shifting Margins of US International Relations Since World War II*, Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Ken-

took the form of competing over colonies rather than in major wars in the center of Europe. During the Cold War, it took the form of superpower advantage-seeking in the developing world rather than in the central theater of the confrontation, Europe.[13] A conscious choice to limit competition in this way can help stabilize a rivalry.

The story is not uncomplicated or linear, however. Competition that seems peripheral to one side in a rivalry can acquire a much more sinister cast to the other. Soviet adventurism around the world in the 1970s and 1980s might have been, by one definition, peripheral competition—but, when combined with Soviet ideology, it gave the impression of being the first steps of a much more ambitious plan.

Communication Channels

A major source of tension and instability in strategic rivalries is the deep mutual mistrust that can emerge, partly because of the lack of transparency about the other side's intentions and actions. Therefore, one prominent national policy that can boost the stability of a rivalry is the establishment of multiple means of communication and other structural mechanisms for some degree of transparency, all designed to reduce the degree of uncertainty about a rival's intentions.[14] These can take the form of regular leader-to-leader dialogues, established hotlines or other crisis communication lines, various forms of official meetings, and field-level ties between military forces and embassies.

Uncertainty, especially about the intentions of rivals or potential rivals, is one of the primary catalysts of insecurity and, thus, of security dilemmas and conflict in the international system.[15] Reducing the pernicious effects of uncertainty is important, perhaps essential, for stabilizing strategic rivalries. Mutually agreed channels for communication and transparency, from arms control agreement consultative bodies to crisis hotlines, can contribute to stability.

Accounting for the potential perceptions and misperceptions of one's adversaries in foreign policymaking could also help keep strategic competition stable by avoiding miscalculations and misunderstandings that boil over into conflict. History is replete with examples of inadvertent escalation occurring when one or both actors did not accurately assess the other's critical interests and thresholds.[16] An important subset of such foreign policy tools consists of

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tucky, 2017. Odd Arne Westad told the history of the peripheral competition in *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[13] There was clearly competition in that central realm—the mutual buildup of military forces. But by the early 1960s, it was apparent to both sides that the scope for advantage-seeking was strictly limited in these areas of core national interests because of the risk of escalation. The argument here is not that there was no competition over central areas but that the dominant number of actions and confrontations occurred over peripheral ones.

[14] Some literature on the causes of conflict has identified reliable communication channels as an important mitigating factor of conflict; see, for example, Han Dorussen and Hugh Ward, "Intergovernmental Organizations and the Kantian Peace: A Network Perspective," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 2, April 2008. More broadly on the role of contacts between communities, see Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957. For treatments of the value of communication links in particular, see Desmond Ball, "Improving Communications Links Between Moscow and Washington," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 28, No. 2, May 1991, and Avery Goldstein, "First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4, Spring 2013.

[15] See for example, David Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Autumn 2002.

[16] Examples include the Cuban Missile Crisis, the 1956 Suez Crisis, and the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

those that increase transparency and mutual awareness, reducing the inherent uncertainty in a rivalry and providing both sides with reliable warning of possible aggression.[17]

Personal Relationships

The existence of personal relationships at various levels, especially among national leaders, can help avoid misunderstandings and mitigate disagreements.[18] Our research into multiple cases indicates that many rivalries throughout history demonstrate the critical role of personal relationships, and the trust and understanding they can promote, as an important mechanism for moderating instability. This has been true since the inter-European relationships of the Congress of Vienna system to the various relationships between American presidents and Soviet leaders during the Cold War.

A good example is the 19th-century set of arrangements, formal and informal agreements, and personal relationships known as the *Concert of Europe*, in which many of the national leaders knew one another and came from similar classes, and thus had some innate sense that they shared many interests even when others were opposed. But perhaps the best recent example comes from the late Cold War, by which time U.S. and Soviet officials had built decades of experience—and, in many cases, relationships—that were repeatedly employed to dampen crises and avoid misunderstandings. Even in the heat of an enduring rivalry, such relationships can have important value.

Management of Allies and Proxies

This variable points to the role of third parties in stabilizing or destabilizing a competitive relationship between two primary rivals. The role of proxies and third parties in sparking conflict goes back to Thucydides and the role smaller Greek city-states played in bringing Athens and Sparta into conflict.[19] Our review of the literature reinforced the importance of this variable. From the standpoint of the primary rivals, the issue is the degree to which they can control the behavior of the third-party actors to reduce the potential for destabilization. Allies and proxies can influence the stability of a major-power rivalry in a number of ways: A major power can have difficulty controlling the actions of an ally or proxy that provoke escalation; one of

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[17] Robert Jervis, "From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation," in Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *Power and Conflict in the Age of Transparency*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 73.

[18] This factor is omnipresent in the memoirs of former senior officials; a notable example is the emphasis on personalities in the histories and memoirs of Henry Kissinger, including *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994. The role of individual relationships is stressed in Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2001; Todd Hall and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Personal Touch: Leaders' Impressions, Costly Signaling, and Assessments of Sincerity in International Affairs," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 3, September 2012; and Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014.

[19] The classic account is Thucydides; see Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, New York: Free Press, 1998. The role of allies in that war is discussed in Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*, New York: Doubleday, 1995, pp. 1–80. For more-recent examples, see Steven Metz, "Unruly Clients: The Trouble with Allies," *World Affairs*, Vol. 172, No. 4, March/April 2010; Erica D. Borghard, "Proxy War Can Have Dangerous Consequences," *Washington Post*, July 25, 2014; and Janice Gross Stein, "Proxy Wars: How Superpowers End Them: The Diplomacy of War Termination in the Middle East," *International Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Summer 1980. A related literature has examined the sources of alliance restraint; these works include Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008, and Gene Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany's Nuclear Ambitions," *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4, Spring 2015.

the rivals can attack a proxy of the other (perhaps expecting to get away with it); or one of the rivals can use a proxy to engage in belligerence that prompts a greater-than-expected response.

Creation of and Compliance with Norms and Rules

Shared rules and norms moderate competitive behavior. Some historical evidence suggests that creating norms can limit or bound strategic competition to acceptable parameters. Mutually accepted standards of behavior can mitigate the risks of misperception or inadvertent escalation.[20] Although the establishment of norms—for example, limiting or prohibiting the use of a certain weapon or a certain behavior—cannot eliminate the possibility that the norm will be violated, norms can be a powerful constraint.[21] This finding parallels some literature that suggests that countries with similar values and norms are less likely to engage in conflict.[22]

The well-established norm of nonuse of nuclear weapons has held for seven decades, even as nuclear weapon technology has proliferated and as nuclear-armed states have engaged in crisis escalation. International stability, defined as a lack of direct major-power war, has held for as long as the norm of nuclear nonuse has.[23] Meanwhile, arms control treaties have undergirded stability in major-power relations in the nuclear age, successfully heading off both the arms race and other forms of crisis instability.

Contextual Factors That Affect the Stability of a Strategic Rivalry

The contextual or environmental factors that affect the stability of a strategic rivalry can be technological, socioeconomic, political, or cultural. They range from the dominant military technologies in circulation to the balance of influence among the domestic actors in each nation.

Unlike the national policies surveyed earlier, which are endogenous to the rivals' formally chosen policies toward each other, the contextual factors are exogenous to the bilateral relationship. Some of them, such as the balance and effects of domestic interest groups, refer to developments within one or both rivals but in the form of emergent patterns rather than specifically chosen policies. By shaping the broader reality in which the rivals operate, these factors can

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[20] Libicki, 2012, p. xiii. For the general relationship between norms and stability, see Pruitt, 1969, pp. 30–31. The concept of implied or explicit rules governing regional security understandings is a theme in Charles A. Kupchan, "After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of a Stable Multipolarity," International Security, Vol. 23, No. 2, Fall 1998.

[21] There is a massive literature on the role of norms in creating stabilizing patterns in international relations. See, for example, Ann Florini, "The Evolution of International Norms," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3, September 1996; Michael D. Ward and Sheen Rajmaira, "Reciprocity and Norms in U.S.-Soviet Foreign Policy," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 36, No. 2, June 1992; Nina Tannenwald, "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use," *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 3, Summer 1999; Timothy M. Peterson and Leah Graham, "Shared Human Rights Norms and Military Conflict," *T Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 2, April 2011; and Renee de Nevers, "Imposing International Norms: Great Powers and Norm Enforcement," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring 2007.

[22] Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Power Positions: International Organizations, Social Networks, and Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 1, February 2006.

[23] A RAND report on escalation dynamics in cyberspace advocates for creating norms and rules around the use of offensive cyber capabilities as a way to maintain some level of stability in the rapidly evolving realm of major-power cyber competition (Libicki, 2012).

enhance or undermine the stability of that relationship. But, like the national policy variables, the relative effects of the contextual factors, and the way they interact to produce dynamic results, will be case-specific.[24]

Military Offense-Defense Balance

The offense-defense balance refers to the perceived degree of instability introduced by offensively dominant military capabilities. The preeminence of defensive capabilities is believed to be conducive to stability in a rivalry: If the balance is defense-dominant, a rivalry may theoretically be more stable because even dissatisfied powers will be deterred from taking aggressive actions. In terms of one of the two defining characteristics of stability we have used, for example—the resilience of a rivalry and its ability to return to an equilibrium in the wake of shocks—a defense-dominant relationship might underwrite the existence of such an equilibrium by tamping down temptations to conflict in a crisis.

The existence of certain military capabilities can create either offense-dominant or defense-dominant balances in a rivalry.[25] The level of offense versus defense dominance is one of the most deeply analyzed causes of war in recent international relations scholarship. "The virulence of the security dilemma is influenced by whether offensive weapons and strategies can be distinguished from defensive ones, and whether the offense is more potent than the defense."[26] The outcomes can be highly conditional—the relationship between allegedly offense-dominant capabilities and war or instability is not linear or constant, and the empirical research on the issue is somewhat mixed in its results. In some cases, however, an offense-dominant imbalance can threaten the equilibrium of a rivalry and send signals that one or both sides have lost a shared commitment to a status quo and seek to overturn the existing strategic balance.[27]

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[24] Another contextual factor that is sometimes offered as a variable determining stability is the power transition dynamic—described, for example, in Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. However, the empirical findings on this factor are mixed, and the overall theory is contested; see, for example, Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino, "Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory," *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2009. Moreover, this theory speaks to general causes of war, not the criteria for the stability of an established rivalry. We have not included a review of the literature on regime type for a similar reason: It speaks to correlational frequency of conflict among states, not the sources of stability in a rivalry. To the extent that the literature does nominate more-specific issues that may be relevant to stability—such as value alignment or governmental institution ties—they are captured in other factors here.

[25] See, for example, Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, "What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?" *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Spring 1998; Ted Hopf, "Polarity, The Offense Defense Balance, and War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 2, June 1991; Keir A. Lieber, "Grasping the Technological Peace: The Offense-Defense Balance and International Security," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Summer 2000; and James W. Davis, Bernard I. Finel, Stacie E. Goddard, Stephen Van Evera, Charles L. Glaser, and Chaim Kaufmann, "Taking Offense at Offense-Defense Theory," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1998.

[26] Robert Jervis, "From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation," *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 1985, p. 62.

[27] In this sense, the concept of offense-defense balance as we use it here is similar to, but distinct from, the formal international relations concept of offense-defense theory. This factor in the framework reflects a generalized version of first-strike or crisis stability—that neither side believes it has the potential to successfully initiate war because it possesses offensive capabilities with the capacity to cripple an adversary. A classic example, as noted in the text, is the role of missiles equipped with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs), which theoretically provide a first-strike capability. Criticisms of offense-defense theory focus on its claim, as Keir Lieber puts it, that "international conflict and war are more likely to occur when offensive operations have the advantage over defensive operations," a factor that is primarily determined by "the prevailing state of technology at any given time" (Keir Lieber, *War and the Engineers*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University

Certain classes of weapon systems can provide a theoretical first-strike capability that gives the offense an inherent advantage. In the nuclear realm, this was a constant concern. Initially, such capabilities as MIRVs created a situation in which each side had many more offensive weapons than defensive targets, which theoretically rendered both vulnerable to a first strike.

More recently, Russian and Chinese commentators have worried that such technologies as hypersonic weapons could provide a meaningful degree of conventional first-strike capability. Even if the intention of both sides is to sustain a stable balance, if they deploy capabilities that create an objectively destabilized balance—one favoring the offense, in which, despite the mutual possession of deterrent forces, one or both sides could potentially glimpse an opportunity to strike first—a rivalry can escalate to conflict.

Objective Costs of Aggression

Technologies and socioeconomic factors can raise the cost of aggressive action and reduce its potential benefits,[28] thus potentially increasing the stability of a rivalry by reducing the potential temptation to escalation. The relative significance of offensive and defensive military capabilities treated earlier is only one of several factors that help govern the perceived attractiveness—or infeasibility—of large-scale aggression. International relations theory has identified other critical variables that render large-scale aggression and the use of violence, more generally, a risky tool of statecraft with few obvious benefits. One of these variables, the level of interdependence between the rivals (and potentially between them and other major powers), is significant enough to be highlighted as an independent factor later. This section surveys four other factors that affect the perceived value and cost of aggressive action.

The first and most obvious example of a technological development of this type is the advent of nuclear weapons. In most large-scale conflict scenarios, nuclear weapons tend to raise the cost of potential aggressive action to self-defeating levels.

Yet nuclear arsenals are not always stabilizing. For one thing, they produce an unprecedented degree of vulnerability. When nuclear balances are unstable, the entire strategic rivalry will be as well—because no other considerations can mitigate the potential risk of a nuclear first strike if one side believes its forces to be vulnerable. For the stabilizing role of nuclear weapons to be in effect, each side must possess a survivable deterrent—and be confident in its possession of such a force. There is also a significant body of literature on the stability-instability paradox: When two countries have nuclear weapons, the probability of a direct war between them drops, but the probability of minor or indirect conflict increases.[29] Two good examples of this paradox are the various proxy wars funded by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and the low-level clashes between India and Pakistan along their border.

Press, 2005, pp. 1–2). Critics rightly argue that decisions for war stem from political judgments that often have little to do with the perceived balance between offensive and defensive forces. But the claim that underlies this single factor in the framework is more limited: that offense-dominant capabilities (including technologies) can create mutual fear, which contributes to destabilizing a strategic rivalry. It is only one variable, not a decisive one as offense-defense theory claims, and it need not produce war, but only exacerbate mutual fear.

[28] Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Winter 1993–1994, pp. 14–15.

[29] Robert Rauchhaus, "Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis: A Quantitative Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 2, April 2009.

A second factor affecting the perceived utility of the use of force is the deterrent strength of U.S. and allied forward presence around the world, which promises a bigger response than merely local defense in the event of aggression against certain countries. A third is the role of status and prestige regarding the territorial integrity norm; states risk being ostracized, as Iraq and Russia have discovered, if they display a consistent pattern of aggression. A fourth factor is the declining value—in a high-tech, service- and knowledge-based era—of territory itself. At one time, potentially aggressive or hegemonic states could perceive tremendous gains to national power from the acquisition of land and the agricultural capabilities; pools of labor; and, later, the industrial capacity it reflected. Today, however, national power is a function of qualities and capabilities largely unconnected to territory, including transferable human capital, high-tech industries reflecting innovation, and integration into global networks of production. Seizing land may have reputational, geopolitical, or status justifications, but it no longer carries any attraction for states interested in maximizing their power and influence.

Domestic Interest Groups' Influence

This factor refers to the constellation of domestic interests in a country and how these interests affect that country's perspective on the possible value (or risk) of aggression and other steps that would destabilize a rivalry.[30] States engaged in a rivalry are more likely to act in aggressive, volatile ways if their decisionmaking reflects a unified front of hostility to the rival. If the view is more fragmented and complex, the resulting nuance will tend to promote stability. This pattern emerges in many historical cases, which demonstrate a relatively consistent pattern of greater instability in the case of an unqualified negative image toward the rival across interest groups in the society, or the dominant groups shaping a nation's policies. During the Cold War, for example, periods of greater instability were generally correlated with periods of lesser complexity in how both sides viewed one another; a greater range of opinion—among, for example, groups in the United States favoring either greater or lesser confrontation with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)—correlated with periods of lower instability. A lack of domestic political cohesion could thereby prevent a state from marshalling sufficient support for radical action while also allowing the state's rival some degree of influence in its domestic affairs.

If the set of domestic actors—political parties, business lobbies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others—is divided on the question of upsetting the rivalry, it will tend to restrain instability. If the state is complex and open enough to allow some influence by the rival, and if each side possesses some influence on the society of the other, this cross-influence might also obstruct the formation of solid coalitions in favor of aggression.[31]

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[30] Scholarship that examines the role of domestic constituencies in affecting the likelihood of war includes Jack Snyder, "Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive, 1914 and 1984," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1984; Patrick J. McDonald, "Great Powers, Hierarchy, and Endogenous Regimes: Rethinking the Domestic Causes of Peace," *International Organization*, Vol. 69, No. 3, Summer 2015; Joe D. Hagan, "Domestic Political Systems and War Proneness," *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2, October 1994; Ross A. Miller, "Domestic Structures and the Diversionary Use of Force," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No. 3, August 1995; and Elizabeth A. Stanley, "Ending the Korean War: The Role of Domestic Coalition Shifts in Overcoming Obstacles to Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 1, July 2009.

[31] Pruitt, 1969, p. 30.

Prioritization of Status, Honor, and Prestige

Since the time of Thucydides, considerations of honor, pride, and prestige have been viewed as drivers of international competition and dyadic rivalries. Nations seek recognition and honor. They measure their standing relative to others. And they sometimes fight wars and undertake other major geopolitical activities largely for honor or prestige.[32] To the extent that one or both sides of a rivalry have significant "status dissatisfaction," as Jonathan Mercer has argued, either side can destabilize the relationship by taking aggressive actions to gain more prestige.[33] The result can be major wars fought for diaphanous principles of honor and status, which states have traditionally connected to long-term security.

Contestation over Resources

If two participants in a rivalry have competing resource claims or lack key resources and if each side fears that the other will gain a decisive degree of control over them, the result can destabilize a strategic relationship.[34] Examples have arisen in recent decades over oil and oil supplies, rare earth minerals, and water. It is not clear that this variable played a critical role in the Cold War or promises to play such a role today, but it has historically been associated with some degree of conflict and could pose a risk of destabilizing a strategic rivalry.

Existence of a Common Enemy

Some research on rivalries suggests that they can be moderated by a perception that both states involved face a common threat.[35] This makes sense, both intuitively and from the perspective of basic human ingroup-outgroup dynamics.

Interdependence

The literature on interdependence is extensive and has highlighted many ways in which it tends to dampen the routes to conflict.[36] The literature suggests multiple ways in which inter-

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[32] See, for example, R. P. Dore, "The Prestige Factor in International Affairs," *International Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1975; John Glaser, "Status, Prestige, Activism and the Illusion of American Decline," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Spring 2018; and Jonathan Mercer, "The Illusion of International Prestige," *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 4, Spring 2017, pp. 133–168.

[33] Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017.

[34] On the connection of resources to conflict broadly defined, see Jasper Humphries, "Resource Wars: Searching for a New Definition," *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 5, September 2012; Simon Dalby, "Environmental Insecurities: Geopolitics, Resources and Conflict," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 48, November 29, 2003; Vally Koubi, Gabriele Spilker, Tobias Böhmelt, and Thomas Bernauer, "Do Natural Resources Matter for Interstate and Intrastate Armed Conflict?" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 51, No. 2, March 2014; and Macartan Humphreys, "Natural Resources, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution: Uncovering the Mechanisms," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 4, August 2005.

[35] Pruitt, 1969, p. 30.

[36] See John R. Oneal and Bruce M. Russett, "The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950–1985," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2, January 1997; Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015; Susan M. McMillan, "Interdependence and Conflict," *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1, May 1997; and Eric Gartzke and Yonatan Lupu, "Trading on Preconceptions: Why World War I Was Not a Failure of Economic Interdependence," *International Security* Vol. 36, No. 4, Spring 2012. The literature is not universal in the causal direction of interdependence. For complex analyses, see Katherine Barbieri, "Economic Interdependence: A Path to Peace or a Source of Interstate Conflict?" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 33, No. 1, February 1996; Katherine Barbieri and Jack S. Levy, "Sleeping with the Enemy: The Impact of War on Trade," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July 1999; and Edward Mansfield and Brian M. Pollins, "The Study of Interdepen-

dependence has this effect, from creating material costs for war when trade networks and supply chains are disrupted to providing economic interest groups in both rivals with an incentive to avoid conflict.

To be clear, the evidence is not without qualifications: Significant levels of economic interdependence have not prevented some rivalries from descending into war, and some studies have uncovered limited ways in which interdependence can actually make conflict more likely. On the whole, however, rivalries can be tempered by a mutual sense that each side would lose something significant even if—indeed, especially if—it seriously damaged the other in a conflict.

Means to React Proportionally

Rivalries are kept stable not merely by accommodation but by each side broadcasting enough firmness and determination to respond to reduce the temptation on the other side for opportunistic *faits accomplis*. One form of this stability-through-strength dynamic emerges, as suggested earlier, in the form of basic deterrent power to reduce the attractiveness of aggression. Another factor that contributes to stability is the possession, by both sides, of a range of tools of statecraft to threaten credible responses to aggressive actions across the spectrum of geopolitics. Without such means, states are trapped in a dilemma of either overreacting or not reacting at all; one side in a rivalry, sensing that dilemma, might be tempted to act as a result.[37]

A leading example of such a dilemma emerges today in the form of gray-zone campaigns and the challenges of responding to them. If one member of a strategic rivalry undertakes a range of aggressive actions below the threshold of outright warfare and if the rival believes it has no meaningful ability to respond in that domain, the rival could perceive a need to escalate to safeguard its interests. The lack of proportionate response mechanisms could therefore destabilize a strategic rivalry by undermining the key characteristic of a resilient equilibrium.

Perceptual Factors That Affect the Stability of a Strategic Rivalry

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, the policy and contextual factors together produce a series of perceptual variables that shape the stability of a strategic rivalry. We are focused on the perceptions of the two rivals about the nature of their relationship and, in particular, each other's intentions. Policies and contextual dynamics have effects not primarily because of their objective *realities* but because they shape the *beliefs* of the two sides. Thus, perceptions are an intermediary category of factors that determine the effects of policy and context.

In some cases, we will refer in this section to general issues similar to those in the two earlier sections on dyadic and contextual factors. The critical difference is that the factors in this section refer to how each side in a rivalry *perceives* these factors independent of the reality.

Perception is a central component of how one state chooses to deal with another. Defensive neorealist Walt has emphasized that relying on relative power alone to understand why states choose to balance themselves against others is incomplete; rather, perceptions of the other, as influenced by each state's values, morals, and identities, govern whether or not one state sees

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dence and Conflict: Recent Advances, Open Questions, and Directions for Future Research," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 6, December 2001.

[37] Pruitt, 1969, p. 31.

another as threatening.[38] As Wendt observed, the Canadians assess U.S. military power differently from the Cubans, despite their similar structural positions.[39] Kupchan likewise contends that shared social orders, ethnicities, or religions help states achieve stable relations.[40]

Jervis and Rose have sought to adjust rigid structural approaches for understanding international politics to reflect the value of decisionmakers' perceptions.[41] Research on cognitive processes also shows that decisionmakers' beliefs and worldviews influence their policy orientations and policy choices.[42] Lebow used the term *cognitive closure* to describe the process by which people screen or selectively interpret new information to align with their preexisting beliefs.[43] This observation echoes Jervis' contention that people filter incoming information through a unique lens composed of biases, theories, and expectations.[44] Because people see what they expect to see, they tend to conceptualize incoming information in a way that confirms already held beliefs. If leaders already hold negative preconceptions of a certain actor, they are more likely to perceive that state's behavior as negative or threatening.

The international relations literature highlights several categories of perception that appear to be especially significant in governing the stability of a strategic relationship. These are described in the following subsections.

Perceived Revisionism

This factor is critical to stabilizing or destabilizing a strategic rivalry. If one side believes that the other interprets the rivalry in absolute and existential terms, it will view the entire context in the most threatening manner possible. Such perceptions can prompt overreactions to limited events or provocations and encourage one or both sides to invest in dangerous capabilities. Kupchan's historical case studies suggest that if one state perceives its rival as a predator that seeks its demise, mutual accommodations are impossible.[45] Jervis has similarly argued that, "if a state believes it is confronted by a Hitler, it will not seek a [security] regime."[46]

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[38] Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 21–26; Wendt, 1992, p. 396.

[39] Wendt, 1992, p. 397.

[40] Kupchan, 2010.

[41] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976; Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1, October 1998. See also Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995; Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996; Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998; William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993; and Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

[42] Robert Axelrod, ed., *Structure of Decision: The Cognitive Maps of Political Elites*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976; Michael D. Young, "Cognitive Mapping Meets Semantic Networks," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 40, No. 3, September 1996.

[43] Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, p. 101.

[44] Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," *World Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 3, April 1968, p. 455.

[45] Kupchan, 2010, p. 41.

[46] Jervis, 1982, p. 361.

Some rivalries reflect a collision of interests and objectives that becomes truly zero sum, so that one party's goals cannot be satisfied in any manner acceptable to the other. A prime example is the role of Germany and Japan in the 1930s: Both were militaristically revisionist states intent on territorial conquest and regional (if not global) domination, based in part on racialist theories of national superiority. Such objectives could not be rationalized with anything other than submission, and the rivalries involved were clearly headed for war.

Even during the Cold War, despite some very intense mutual threat perceptions in the earlier years, the United States and the Soviet Union eventually managed to avoid having their rivalry progress to such a level of irreconcilable hostility. Partly under the influence of the daunting lessons of such events as the Cuban Missile Crisis, they built a tacit agreement to conduct their rivalry at levels that did not threaten one another's existential survival.

Zero-sum conflicts can exist at the societal level and at that of government-determined national security strategies. Kupchan's historical survey of the origins of stable peace points to "compatible social orders" and "cultural commonality" as two critical variables that help determine whether such peace will emerge.[47] Thus, some of the factors that will help determine the existence of a zero-sum competition will reside below the level of national governments.

Perceived Ability to Defend Against Existential Threat

The less vulnerable a state feels, the less it will worry about exploitation and the more it will be open to compromise and cooperation.[48] To the extent that two states engaged in a rivalry retain an essential degree of confidence about their security and that neither believes that it is fatally vulnerable or that the strategic situation is about to turn against it in dramatic and irrevocable ways, the rivalry will be more stable. This factor is related to the degree of concern by one or both sides that war is likely: If each side feels comfortable in its security posture, the risk of war will usually be perceived to be lower, and the equilibrium of the rivalry will be stronger.[49]

Several traditions in international relations theory, as well as multiple historical examples, suggest that immediate security concerns can produce spirals of hostility and drive one or both members of a rivalry to take precipitous action.[50] Given the fundamental role of security as a state preference, some confidence on the part of each state in its safety is a precondition for other elements of stability. Several subcriteria typically contribute to this overall sense of security:

- Each state possesses a form of military capability that can guarantee its security.
- Neither state possesses a reliable means of imposing devastating harm on the other without consequence or retaliation.

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[47] Kupchan, 2010.

[48] Jervis, 2000, p. 69.

[49] Jervis, 2000, p. 63.

[50] The risk of security dilemmas and spirals of conflict is central to both realism and some of the theories which criticize it; as one example see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Winter 2000. On the general phenomenon, see Jennifer M. Lind and Thomas J. Christensen, "Spirals, Security, and Stability in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Spring 2000; and Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, October 1997.

- Neither state believes that the other is engaged in an urgent effort to undermine it as a regime or a society.
- Neither state perceives that the strategic relationship is so volatile that it is likely to collapse at any moment, thus potentially justifying preemptive actions.[51]
- Neither state believes that the balance of power is on the verge of a massive and dangerous shift.[52]

One implication is that any strategic rivalry will involve a constant interplay between one side countering the other's moves yet reassuring the other side about its survival.

Perceived Respect

This factor refers to the perception that the other party is a powerful, credible, and legitimate actor whose interests and perspectives must be taken seriously. This factor is, in some ways, the inverse of an intent to threaten the existential security of the other. At a certain point during the Cold War, for example, both sides came to see the other as an essentially permanent feature of the international landscape and were willing to signal various forms of recognition of the other's legitimacy and status through bilateral dialogues, formal diplomatic relations, bilateral arms control treaties, and more. Although these signals on their own cannot stabilize a rivalry—their effect can be undermined, for example, by the deployment of destabilizing military capabilities—they can play an important role in creating a perceptual foundation of stability, both by indicating that each side shares some conception of an agreed status quo and by enhancing the equilibrium of the arrangement.

Extreme Measures Seen as More Costly Than Beneficial

An important contributing factor to stability is the perception by both sides in a rivalry that extreme measures of various forms, such as large-scale aggressive warfare, promise such devastating costs that they are largely infeasible. States cannot believe that military aggression and expansion are their most viable, or only, routes to satisfying their security interests and must believe that "war and the individualistic pursuit of security" is "costly."[53] Resorting to extreme measures, including violence, is constrained by a widely accepted cost-benefit calculus that directs state preferences away from such strategies.

This factor describes a situation in which states perceive high costs and relatively small gains from large-scale violent actions. Given a combination of factors, such as nuclear weapons and the declining value of territory, such a situation can appear to be well established in terms of material factors. But nonmaterial preferences, including status and prestige, can sometimes distort the material calculus and provide hard-to-quantify value to the use of military force. This can produce rivals with a generally risk-averse attitude toward major conflict.[54]

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[51] On the risks of perceived vicious circles, see Pruitt, 1969, p. 32.

[52] The theoretical tradition of realism emphasizes the connection between an effective balance of power and international stability. See, for example, Richard K. Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1993, pp. 38–39.

[53] Jervis, 1982, pp. 361–362; Jervis, 2000, pp. 64–65.

[54] Robert Kuenne, "Conflict Management in Mature Rivalry," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 33, No. 3, September 1989, p. 555.

Enough Mutual Understanding to Avoid Disastrous Misperceptions

This final perceptual factor speaks to the degree to which each side understands the other's interests and perspectives and gains sufficient mutual understanding to manage the relationship effectively. There is a significant difference between rivalries in which neither side pays much attention to the perspectives or interests of the other and each operates in a deep level of ignorance about how it will react to specific actions and ones in which each side makes intense efforts to comprehend where the other is coming from as the basis for managing a stable relationship. This is a consistent feature of rivalries from the 19th century through the Cold War: Times when rivals appear to have stronger appreciation for one another's views, such as the early years of the Congress of Vienna system and certain periods of the Cold War, were associated with greater restraint and stability.[55] Such efforts can also imply a certain degree of empathy, with each rival coming to see how the other side is grappling with similar problems.

Quantifying Rivalries and Their Outcomes

To gain additional insights into what factors might stabilize or destabilize strategic rivalries, we assembled a list of real-world rivalries beginning in the year 1816. Using a much narrower conception of rivalry—strategic rivalries in which each of the two states regards the other as a potential military threat—we used existing quantitative data sets to see whether there was anything we could learn about the characteristics of these rivalries or their potential to escalate to war.[56] This analysis was not meant as a proxy for the qualitative case analysis in later chapters but as a potential complement that might provide greater context on how these cases fit into broader trends. We then coded for the presence of several additional variables of interest and reviewed the resulting patterns. Table 3.1 itemizes the set of cases we examined.

We first determined how many of the 39 cases escalated to war. Table 3.2 shows the sobering results: About three-quarters of the historical rivalries became involved in major war. The percentages changed dramatically in the nuclear era, though, with fewer than 20 percent of the rivalries involving an escalation to war.

We then examined temporal characteristics of the rivalries, as outlined in Tables 3.3 and 3.4. These tables highlight that many rivalries are long-lasting and that wars can emerge at various points after a rivalry has begun—very quickly or, more commonly, after two or more decades.

Next, we assessed whether these key rivalries became militarized and, if so, to what degree. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 summarize these findings. Table 3.5 indicates that there is a spectrum in the degree of militarization: Some rivalries display very low levels of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), in terms of the percentage of militarized years, and only three rivalries display MIDs in every year of the rivalry. The most common pattern is a mixed picture, with some years reflecting MIDs and some not. Table 3.6 suggests a similarly mixed pattern across a

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[55] A classic statement of the role of accurate perceptions of others' intent and its relation to conflict is Jervis, 1976.

[56] Thompson, 2001. Thompson identified rivalries from a qualitative investigation of whether the following criteria are met: "The actors in question must regard each other as (a) competitors, (b) the source of actual or latent threats that pose some possibility of becoming militarized, and (c) enemies" (Thompson, 2001, p. 560). In our analysis, we further restrict Thompson's rivalry list only to those involving at least one great power and with neither of the two states being more than twice as powerful as the other at the time the rivalry began, as operationalized by the National Material Capabilities data set (Singer, 1987).

Table 3.1
List of Key Rivalries, 1816 to 2010

Rivalry	Start Year	End Year
U.S.–UK	1816	1904
U.S.–France	1830	1871
U.S.–Spain	1816	1819
U.S.–Germany	1889	1918
U.S.–Germany	1933	1945
U.S.–USSR	1945	1989
U.S.–Russia	2007	Ongoing
U.S.–China	1949	1972
U.S.–China	1996	Ongoing
U.S.–Japan	1898	1945
UK–France	1816	1904
UK–Germany	1896	1918
UK–Germany	1934	1945
UK–Italy	1934	1945
UK–Russia/USSR	1816	1956
UK–China	1839	1900
UK–Japan	1932	1945
France–Germany	1816	1955
France–Austria-Hungary	1816	1918
France–Italy	1881	1940
France–Russia	1816	1894
France–China	1856	1900
Germany–Poland	1918	1939
Prussia–Austria-Hungary	1816	1870
Germany–Russia/USSR	1890	1945
Germany–China	1897	1900
Poland–Russia	1918	1939
Austria-Hungary–Italy	1847	1918
Austria-Hungary–Russia	1816	1918
Austria-Hungary–Ottoman Empire	1816	1908
Italy–Ottoman Empire/Turkey	1884	1943
Russia–Ottoman Empire	1816	1918
Russia/USSR–China	1816	1949

Table 3.1—Continued

Rivalry	Start Year	End Year
USSR–China	1958	1989
Russia/USSR–Japan	1894	1945
China–Taiwan	1949	Ongoing
China–Japan	1873	1945
China–Japan	1996	Ongoing
China–India	1948	Ongoing

NOTES: Rivalries from Thompson, 2001. We identified key rivalries by selecting those between major powers (as identified by "State System Membership List, v2016," 2017) or those between states that both had at least one-half the aggregate capabilities of the weakest major power in the Correlates of War list, as determined by the National Material Capabilities data set (J. David Singer, "Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material Capabilities of States, 1816–1985," *International Interactions*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1987).

Table 3.2
Frequency with Which Key Rivalries Escalated to War

	Rivalries That	Number of Rivalries	Percentage
Overall	Escalated to war	28	72
	Did not escalate to war	11	28
Excluding five ongoing rivalries[a]	Escalated to war	26	76
	Did not escalate to war	8	24
Rivalries before 1946	Escalated to war	25	78
	Did not escalate to war	7	22
Rivalries after 1945	Escalated to war	1	17
	Did not escalate to war	5	83

NOTE: Escalated to war includes any incidence of interstate war between the two states during the rivalry period in question. For example, the United States and China have two periods of rivalry, 1949–1972 and 1996 to present. The first period qualifies as having escalated because of the Korean War (1950–1953), while the second period does not.

[a] As of 2010.

Table 3.3
Duration of Key Rivalries

	1–10 Years	11–20 Years	21–50 Years	51–100 Years	>101 Years
Rivalries not ongoing in 2010	4	4	9	11	6

SOURCE: Derived from Glenn Palmer, Vito d'Orazio, Michael Kenwick, and Matthew Lane, "The MID4 Dataset, 2002–2010: Procedures, Coding Rules and Description," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 32, No. 2, April 2015.

Table 3.4
Years from Key Rivalry Initiation to War

	1–5 Years	6–10 Years	11–20 Years	21–50 Years	>51 Years
Rivalries that escalated to war	6	3	3	11	5

SOURCE: Derived from Palmer et al., 2015.

NOTE: Years are from the first year of the rivalry period to the first subsequent recorded year of interstate war.

Table 3.5
Militarization of Key Rivalries

	0–10% of Years	11–20% of Years	21–50% of Years	51–99% of Years	100% of Years
Rivalries experiencing any MIDs in	8	9	12	7	3

SOURCE: Derived from Palmer et al., 2015.

NOTE: Data reflect the percentage of rivalry years in which MIDs occurred.

Table 3.6
Intensity of Militarization of Key Rivalries

	0–0.1 MIDs Per Year	0.1–0.2 MIDs Per Year	0.2–0.5 MIDs Per Year	0.5–1.0 MIDs Per Year	>1 MID Per Year
Mean number of MIDs per year	7	8	12	7	5
Mean number of high-intensity MIDs per year	12	7	10	7	3

SOURCE: Derived from Palmer et al., 2015.

NOTE: Data reflect the mean number of MIDs per year across each rivalry period. High-intensity MIDs are those involving some use of force, including and up to interstate war (which for our purposes we define as a 4 or 5 on the MID data Hostility Level variable).

spectrum of intensity of MIDs. Rivalries vary widely in frequency with which they experience both MIDs and high-intensity MIDs, with some rivalries experiencing these MIDs annually, and others more intermittently.

The statistical analyses to this point have focused on the characteristics and militarization of rivalries themselves. As an exploratory analysis, we also investigated the relationships between several potential explanations for which rivalries tend to become more militarized. In this exploration, we highlight four variables that are frequently cited in the international relations literature as being highly correlated with wars between states in general: the balance of capabilities between states, the incidence of territorial claims between states, the degree of economic interdependence between states, and the regime types of the states.[57]

The first of these investigations focuses on the balance of capabilities between the rivals. As Table 3.7 suggests, the result is a very mixed picture: Rivalries can occur among competitors with equal, slightly unequal, or significantly unequal levels of national power. This data set includes countries that are already counted as great powers, for the most part, and so these

[57] The centrality of these variables is emphasized in the review of the interstate conflict literature conducted in Stephen Watts, Jennifer Kavanagh, Bryan Frederick, Tova C. Norlen, Angela O'Mahony, Phoenix Voorhies, and Thomas S. Szayna, *Understanding Conflict Trends: A Review of the Social Science Literature on the Causes of Conflict*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1063/1-A, 2017.

Table 3.7
Mean Balance of Capabilities Between Key Rivalries

	Relatively Even (0.5–0.6)	Some Imbalance (0.6–0.75)	Decisive Imbalance (0.75–1.0)
Number of rivalries	12	19	8
Rivalries that escalated to war (not ongoing in 2010)	7	14	5
Rivalries that did not escalate to war (not ongoing in 2010)	4	4	0
Rivalries ongoing (in 2010)	U.S.–China	China–India	U.S.–Russia China–Japan China–Taiwan

SOURCE: Capabilities calculated using the National Material Capabilities data set (Singer, 1987).

NOTE: Balance of capabilities reflects the more powerful state's share of the combined capabilities of the pair. A 0.5 would therefore reflect perfect equality, a 1.0 perfect inequality.

power differences exist within a discrete range. They do reinforce the point made in Chapter Two that a strict equivalence of power is not a necessary component of a rivalry.

We then examined the case set for evidence of territorial contestation, given that some theories of rivalry point to this form of dispute as the foundational variable governing interstate rivalry. Table 3.8 displays the resulting data. As it suggests, there is some connection between rivalries and competing territorial claims—but it is not a 1:1 relationship. There are nearly as many rivalries that involved *no* territorial claims (eight) as ones that involved persistent territorial claims (nine)—and, in fact, a higher proportion of the rivalries *without* such claims led to war.

We then tested the set of rivalries for the degree of economic interdependence between the competitors and its relationship to war. As Table 3.9 suggests, the results do not suggest clear patterns. For about one-third of the rivalries, there are insufficient data to adequately assess the level of interdependence. The resulting numbers do not seem to support robust conclusions. To the extent that they are suggestive, they paint a complex picture: Five of the six rivalries that have thus far ended for which significant levels of the interdependence *did* exist resulted in war.

Finally, Table 3.10 evaluates regime differences as possible sources of warfare between the rivalries: Did it matter if the contestants were democracies, anocracies, or autocracies? The results suggest that the relationship between regime type and conflict outcomes is anything but linear. In fact, the only clear pattern that can be observed, albeit from a small number of cases, is that democratic rivals do not appear to escalate to war against one another.[58]

This exploration of the quantitative patterns in rivalry data identified few consistent relationships between the factors examined and the stability—measured here only as the onset of war—of strategic rivalries. If there is a general lesson to be derived from this exercise, it is to emphasize that rivalries have historically tended to be quite diverse and not to consistently conform to universal patterns. Although emphasizing the danger of rivalries and the frequency with which they escalate to war overall, this admittedly limited examination did not identify any promising signposts or predictors for identifying which rivalries are more likely to lead to war and which are more likely to remain stable.

[58] Of note, this limited set of democratic rivals that do not go to war includes two cases in which one of the states, Germany, ceased to become democratic, then later did go to war with its rival.

Table 3.8
Territorial Claims Between Key Rivalries

	No Claims	Intermittent Claims	Frequent Claims	Consistent Claims
In percentage of years		1–20	21–90	91–100
All territorial claims				
Number of rivalries	8	6	16	9
Rivalries that escalated to war (not ongoing in 2010)	5	5	13	3
Rivalries that did not escalate to war (not ongoing in 2010)	1	1	3	3
Rivalries ongoing (in 2010)	U.S.–China U.S.–Russia	—	—	China–Taiwan China–India China–Japan
Higher-salience claims				
Number of rivalries	12	8	12	7
Rivalries that escalated to war (not ongoing in 2010)	6	7	11	2
Rivalries that did not escalate to war (not ongoing in 2010)	3	1	1	3
Rivalries ongoing (in 2010)	U.S.–China U.S.–Russia China-Japan	—	—	China–Taiwan China–India

SOURCE: Territorial claim data from Bryan A.Frederick, Paul R. Hensel, and Christopher Macaulay, "The Issue Correlates of War Territorial Claims Data, 1816–2011," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 54, No. 1, January 2017.

NOTES: Data calculate the percentage of rivalry years in which two states were involved in a territorial claim against one another. Higher-salience claims are identified as those having a 7 or higher on the 12-point salience scale.

Table 3.9
Economic Interdependence Between Key Rivalries

	Very Little (0–0.01%)	Some (0.01%–0.1%)	Substantial (>0.1%)	Insufficient Data
Number of rivalries	7	12	6	14
Rivalries that escalated to war (not ongoing in 2010)	7	9	5	10
Rivalries that did not escalate to war (not ongoing in 2010)	0	3	1	4
Rivalries ongoing (in 2010)	—	—	All 5	—

SOURCES: Trade data from Katherine Barbieri and Omar M. G. Keshk, "Correlates of War Project Trade Data Set Codebook," Vers. 4.0, 2016; gross domestic product (GDP) data from Maddison Project Database, version 2013.

NOTES: Economic interdependence was calculated by dividing the value of bilateral trade between the two states by each state's GDP, then taking the lower of these two numbers. That is, the metric assesses the importance of trade in the dyad to the least-constrained state. Data in the table reflect mean values across the rivalry period.

Table 3.10
Regime Differences Between Key Rivalries, 1816–2010

Rivalry	Both Democracies	Both Anocracies	Both Autocracies	Mixed
U.S.–UK	1880–1904			1816–1879
U.S.–France	1848–1850			1830–1847 1851–1871
U.S.–Spain				1816–1898
U.S.–Germany				1889–1918
U.S.–Germany				1933–1945
U.S.–USSR				1945–1989
U.S.–Russia				2007–ongoing
U.S.–China				1949–1972
U.S.–China				1996–ongoing
U.S.–Japan				1898–1945
UK–France	1880–1904	1816–1847 1851 1869–1875		1848–1850 1852–1868 1876–1879
UK–Germany				1896–1918
UK–Germany				1934–1945
UK–Italy				1934–1945
UK–Russia/USSR				1816–1956
UK–China				1839–1900
UK–Japan				1932–1945
France–Germany	1919–1932	1869–1875	1852–1868 1940–1943	1816–1851 1876–1918 1944–1955
France–Austria-Hungary		1869–1875	1852–1860	1816–1851 1861–1868 1876–1918
France–Italy			1940	1881–1939
France–Russia			1852–1868	1816–1851 1869–1894
France–China			1852–1868	1860–1861, 1869–1900
Germany–Poland	1919–1925		1935–1938	1918–1934 1939
Prussia–Austria-Hungary		1869–1870	1816–1860	1861–1868
Germany–Russia/USSR		1917–1918	1933–1944	1890–1916 1919–1932 1945
Germany–China				1897–1900

Table 3.10—Continued

Rivalry	Both Democracies	Both Anocracies	Both Autocracies	Mixed
Poland–Russia			1935–1938	1918–1934 1939
Austria-Hungary–Italy		1862–1918	1847–1860	1861
Austria-Hungary–Russia		1917–1918	1816–1860	1861–1916
Austria-Hungary–Ottoman Empire		1876, 1908	1816–1860	1861–1875 1877–1907
Italy–Ottoman Empire/Turkey		1908–1922	1925–1942	1884–1907 1923–1924 1943
Russia–Ottoman Empire		1917	1816–1907	1908–1916
Russia/USSR–China		1917–1921	1816–1910 1949	1911–1916 1922–1948
USSR–China			1958–1988	1989
Russia/USSR–Japan		1917–1921		1894–1916 1922–1945
China–Taiwan			1949–1986	1987–ongoing
China–Japan		1911–1936		1873–1910 1937–1945
China–Japan				1996–ongoing
China–India				1948–ongoing
% years in which warfare occurred	0	11	6	6

SOURCE: Data on regime types from the Polity IV project (Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jaggers, "Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2002," 2002). Regime types were identified from the Polity IV variable, ranging from –10 to +10. Democracies are identified as those with a +6 or higher score; autocracies, those with a –6 or lower score; and anocracies, those with scores between –5 and +5.

NOTE: Periods listed in red are those in which war occurred between the states in at least one year.

Organization of Case Studies

The framework outlined here—of 21 factors affecting the stability of strategic rivalries—and summarized in Figure 3.1 serves as the basis for the following case studies in two ways. In Chapters Four and Six, we approach the historical case studies as chronological narratives rather than dividing them into separate considerations of each of the 21 variables. At various points within these narratives, we call out the lessons and implications relative to the determinative factors in the framework.

This report focuses on the requirements of stabilizing great-power rivalries. The great powers involved in such relationships always have more objectives than simply ensuring stability; they want, for example, to prevail in these competitions, a goal whose demands often trade off against stability. This is certainly true of the United States, China, and Russia today, which seek to gain relative advantage in addition to avoiding conflict. We therefore focus on the requirements for achieving one of what will be several U.S. goals in the current rivalries.

In the Cold War case in Chapter Six, however, we assess the relevance of every one of the 21 variables: eight national policy factors, eight contextual factors, and five perceptual factors. Those that are marginal receive only brief descriptions, while those that are significant in affecting the stability of the Cold War rivalry are addressed in detail. For the emerging U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China rivalries discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight, we again consider all 21 variables. For these two ongoing cases, we want to be sure not to overlook some factors that seemed less salient from a historical standpoint yet might still be crucial to the emerging rivalries. Because these two cases refer to current events, they are then more predictive about future developments in both cases—part of the purpose of the research—suggesting what our analysis would indicate for the future of U.S.-China and U.S.-Russia rivalries.

On the basis of the historical and Cold War cases, we reevaluate the significance of the 21 proposed variables in the framework in Chapter Nine. Not all the factors turn out to be equally important in governing the stability of a rivalry, so our concluding assessment offers a streamlined framework that narrows the critical variables to a smaller number. In the concluding chapter, we also pose the ultimate question: Given what our historical and empirical analyses suggest are the most important factors governing the stability of a strategic rivalry, what should the United States and the U.S. Army do to enhance the stability of the U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China rivalries?

CHAPTER FOUR

Case Study: The Anglo-German Rivalry, 1871–1913

The unification of Germany following the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 fundamentally altered the European state system. Germany was now the dominant state in terms of military and population size on the Continent, supplanting France. For years, British strategy had called for ensuring that no single state could come to dominate Europe and thereby threaten Britain's security, as Napoleon had done more than a half century before. The greater power and capabilities of the newly unified Germany could have represented such a threat to Britain, and the two states did begin to compete over commercial and colonial issues. However, for many years, antagonism in the Anglo-German relationship was quite limited. The two countries had close political and dynastic ties, and German policy largely respected British prerogatives and security concerns, treating Britain as a potential counterweight to France, given the Anglo-French rivalries over numerous colonial issues. It was not until near the end of the 19th century that the Anglo-German rivalry took on a more antagonistic tone and was marked by numerous crises and fears of war. Far from a simple story about a rising power threatening an established one, then, the history of the Anglo-German rivalry illustrates the importance of policy choices and perceptions for understanding how competition between states can be managed with stability, or not.

This chapter first provides an overview of the three main phases of the British-German relationship following unification. The first phase briefly covers the years 1871 to 1889, when Germany under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had relatively few disagreements with Britain, and those that occurred were managed without fundamental disruption to the relationship. The second phase covers the years 1890 to 1904, when—led by the new Kaiser Wilhelm II—a series of German policy choices to challenge British prerogatives fundamentally altered the nature of the relationship more directly and dramatically increased perceptions of threat on both sides, increasing the risk of conflict. The third phase, from 1905 to 1913, saw the hardening of opposing alliance blocs, in which antagonism between the two states came to be assumed. Although war was not necessarily seen as inevitable, the risk of conflict was clearly higher, and efforts to return the relationship to a less antagonistic footing were ineffective.

Following this overview, the chapter summarizes the factors that promoted stability and instability in the competition between Britain and Germany. Overall, this case suggests that changes in key perceptions between the rivals of the extent to which the adversary is revisionist and has the capacity to pose an existential security threat can markedly affect the stability of their competition. Other factors, such as the role of misperceptions and respect for one another's legitimacy, did not figure as prominently in this case.

Competition but Limited Hostility, 1871–1889

The first two decades following German unification saw generally constructive relations between Britain and Germany. Although the two states had emerging points of commercial and colonial tension, any issues that developed did not derail the broader relationship. Britain and Germany continued to opportunistically cooperate and compete globally and in Europe as the rapidly changing arrangements of other great powers dictated.

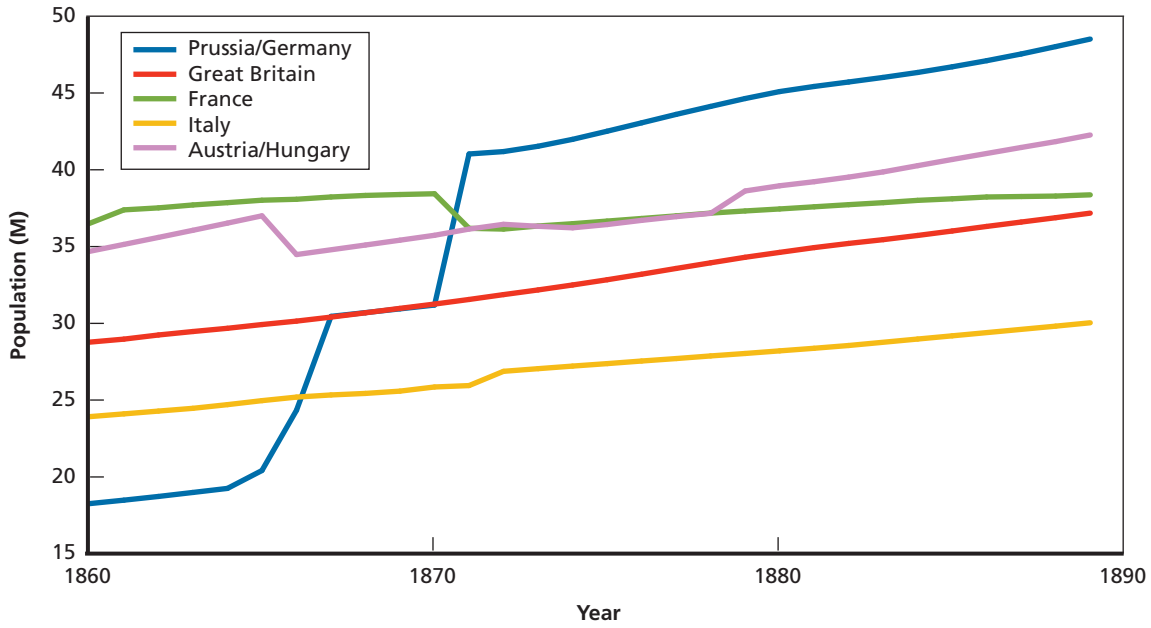
Economic Context

German unification had left that country in a commanding position on the European continent. As shown in Figure 4.1, Prussian consolidation of the numerous smaller German states under its rule and the acquisition of Alsace-Lorraine from France in 1871 had dramatically increased Germany's population and territory.

After unification, German industrialization also gradually cut into Britain's once-commanding lead, as shown in Figure 4.2, establishing Germany as the greatest potential economic and industrial rival to Britain.

Although these trends clearly established Germany as a state with the potential to be concerning to Britain, German growth occurred firmly within the British-led international economic system for many years, in ways that were beneficial to both. Britain and her colonies were the primary destinations for German exports in this period, just as Germany was generally the second largest market for British exports, after the United States.[1] There was, to be sure, an emerging commercial rivalry between the two states as Germany industrialized and

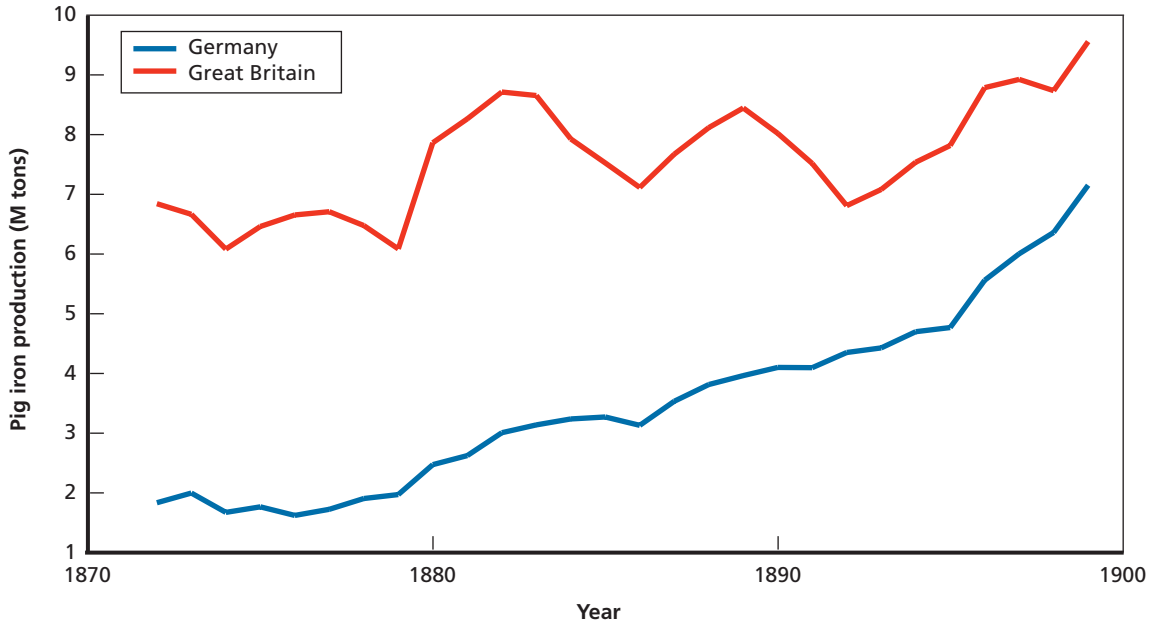
Figure 4.1
Population of European Great Powers, 1860–1889



SOURCE: Singer, 1987.

[1] Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914*, Ashfield Press, 1980, pp. 45–46.

Figure 4.2
British and German Iron Production, 1872–1899



SOURCE: Singer, 1987.

began to compete more directly with higher-end British manufacturers, but, in this period, German and British industries remained relatively complementary.[2]

Geopolitical Context

Beyond the mutually beneficial economic arrangements in this period, Britain and Germany were more likely to cooperate on geopolitical issues than to be in conflict. Both states were more concerned about France and Russia at this time. Britain had numerous colonial rivalries with France (over Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa) and Russia (over the Middle East, Afghanistan, and China), while Germany feared French revanchism and Russian activism in the Balkans, which could bring Russia into conflict with German ally Austria-Hungary.[3] Bismarck, therefore, sought temporary alignments with Britain to counterbalance these other states. In pursuit of its own interests, Britain was happy to oblige, although Britain maintained its long-term policy of avoiding formalized alliances to preserve its freedom of action.[4] Although alliances among the other great powers in this period shifted frequently, the most prominent arrangement was the Three Emperors' League between Germany, Austria, and Russia, which ran formally from 1873 to 1878 and 1881 to 1884, in addition to a period when the bilateral alliance between Germany and Austria was supplemented by a secret "reinsurance treaty"

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2 Kennedy, 1980, p. 46.

3 Kennedy, 1980, pp. 160–161; John Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism and the German Problem 1865–1925*, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 1994, p. 66.

4 Kennedy, 1980, pp. 77–79.

between Germany and Russia from 1887 to 1890.[5] For much of this period, this arrangement left France isolated, in keeping with German aims.[6]

Policies and Perceptions

Bismarck was acutely aware of the potential for other states to see Germany as threatening and to cooperate to balance against it; therefore, he worked assiduously to forestall such a coalition through the complex alliance system noted earlier.[7] Explaining the limits of further German interest in territorial expansion in Europe, he stated, "we are satisfied with our own boundaries."[8] British officials were predisposed to take Germany at its word. Relations between the elites of the two countries had historically been close. Queen Victoria's eldest daughter had married Kaiser Wilhelm I's son—the future Frederick III—in 1859, making the queen the grandmother of the future Kaiser Wilhelm II.[9] There were numerous educational and cultural links between the elites of the two countries, such that the two states were most often seen as "natural allies." This impression declined, however, as this period wore on and as the German government became increasingly authoritarian.[10]

Further reducing the potential for tensions, Germany generally avoided involvement in the scramble for colonies that other states undertook in this period. The exception to this came in 1884, when, for domestic political reasons, Germany acquired colonies in South West Africa, East Africa, and the South Pacific. This expansion, however, was done with the acquiescence and even outward encouragement of Great Britain, which had already deemed the territories to be of limited commercial value.[11]

Despite Germany's growing power, there were relatively few signs of instability in Anglo-German relations in this period. Germany argued that British interests were sufficiently compatible with its own to allow the formation of a formal alliance, which it offered in 1889.[12] The British turned the offer down over concerns about the loss of diplomatic flexibility that such an arrangement would represent, including a potentially increased risk of conflict with France and Russia, and growing unease over the motives and trustworthiness of Bismarck.[13]

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5 The treaty provided for German neutrality in the event of an Austrian attack on Russia and Russian neutrality in the event of a French attack on Germany (Lowe, 1994, pp. 40, 54–58).

6 William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960, pp. 3–4.

7 In addition, Bismarck sought to marginalize liberal parties ahead of key elections and to produce a potential future source of tension with Britain to allow him to better control Crown Prince Frederick, who was next in line for the throne and whom Bismarck assumed to be overly pro-British in his orientation and preferences. Frederick later died, after just 90 days as kaiser, giving way to Wilhelm II. See Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War*, New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1991, pp. 88–89; Lowe, 1994, pp. 95–100.

8 Sydney Whitman, "Bismarck," *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 97, No. 582, 1898, p. 969.

9 John Röhl, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Concise Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 3.

10 Thomas Weber, *Our Friend "The Enemy": Elite Education in Britain and Germany Before World War I*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 73 and 119–120.

11 Massie, 1991, pp. 87–89.

12 Kennedy, 1980, p. 190.

13 Kennedy, 1980, pp. 190–193.

The German Challenge, 1890–1904

The overall stability of the Anglo-German relationship began to change in 1888 following the death of Kaiser Wilhelm I, followed shortly thereafter by the death of his successor Frederick III, and Wilhelm II's subsequent ascension to the throne. Following the new kaiser's dismissal of Bismarck in 1890, Germany began to pursue a substantially more erratic and aggressive foreign policy. Although the change was not immediate, the newly aggressive German policy—combined with the effects of a series of diplomatic crises, many of them exacerbated by Wilhelm II's impulsiveness and personal insecurity—gradually brought Germany into more frequent and serious conflict with Britain and strengthened perceptions on each side that its strategic goals and security were no longer compatible with those of the other.

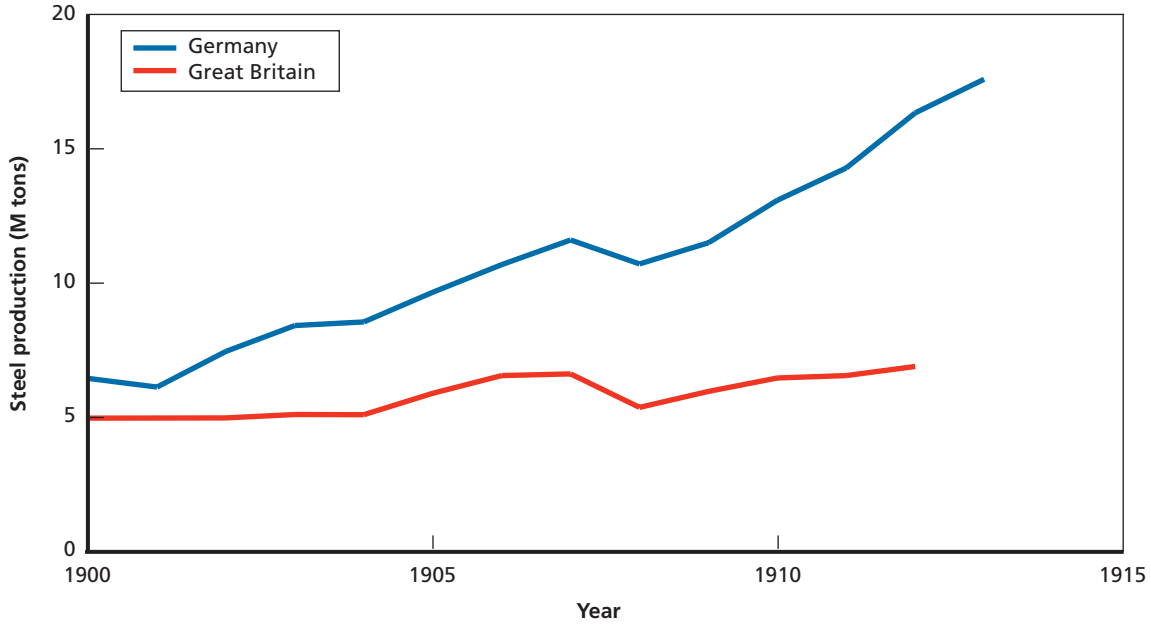
Economic Context

German economic expansion accelerated in this period. As shown earlier in Figure 4.2, Germany's production in iron had already approached that of Britain by 1900. In the years thereafter, as shown in Figure 4.3, German production in steel accelerated to a commanding position.

This rapidly increasing industrial capacity constituted a necessary, although by no means sufficient, condition for Germany to threaten British preeminence and security. Germany's steel industry enabled it to rapidly build a fleet of battleships, which Britain saw as a direct threat.

Germany's expanding economy and population also created strong incentives for it to pursue a more aggressive colonial policy, as Germany did in its *Weltpolitik* policy after 1897,

Figure 4.3
British and German Steel Production, 1900–1913



SOURCE: Singer, 1987.

whether or not this might lead to increased tensions with Britain or other powers.[14] Many German leaders, moreover, were convinced that their growing economic power justified a larger German colonial empire, even if it had to be taken by force from the states that had already largely partitioned the globe.[15] These feelings were not universal. Liberal and socialist politicians in both Germany and Britain argued that continued growth within the current international economic system was not only possible but preferable.[16] Germany, after all, had experienced this rapid growth in a British-led economic order in which Britain and its colonies were vital economic partners. Moreover, pursuing a more robust colonial policy would consume resources that could be spent on domestic programs.[17] This status quo perspective was not, however, the view of Kaiser Wilhelm II or his closest advisers, who viewed colonial expansion as something close to a necessity, both for reasons of prestige and for domestic politics—that is, to ensure the continued popularity of the conservative parties and his monarchy.[18] Public opinion later followed suit, and German leaders felt increasingly unable to compromise on colonial issues once public sentiment became aroused.[19] Building on the colonies acquired in 1884 that were largely in Africa, Germany secured additional territories in China and the South Pacific.[20] The German push for colonies led to increased tensions over some issues; nevertheless, the Anglo-German colonial competition was also marked by frequent businesslike compromises, and it likely played a lesser role in the overall deterioration of the relationship than did other factors.[21]

Trade between the two states continued to accelerate in this period; by 1905, British imports from Germany had doubled since 1890, while British exports to Germany increased more slowly, in the face of greater German protectionism, but still grew by more than 50 percent.[22] The overall economic relationship remained highly beneficial to both sides, but German industrialization and advances into such industries as industrial equipment and chemicals meant that British and German firms were now often one another's key competitors.[23] These firms and industries were then incentivized to push for tariffs to protect their businesses, which injected an additional element of tension into the bilateral relationship.[24]

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14 Massie, 1991, pp. 135–137; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 223–229.

15 Kennedy, 1980, pp. 310–311.

16 Kennedy, 1980, p. 306.

17 Massie, 1991, pp. 134–136.

18 Massie, 1991, pp. 134–135; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy Before 1914," *Central European History*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 1973, pp. 18–19.

19 Kennedy, 1980, p. 209.

20 Langer, 1960, pp. 449–450, 619–621.

21 For example, the 1890 Heligoland-Zanzibar exchange settled a number of outstanding British-German disputes in Africa in return for granting Germany the North Sea island of Heligoland (David R. Gillard, "Salisbury's African Policy and the Heligoland Offer of 1890," *English Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 297, 1960, p. 632; Jan Rüger, "Revisiting the Anglo-German Antagonism," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 83, No. 3, September 2011, p. 607; Kennedy, 1980, p. 410).

22 Kennedy, 1980, p. 293.

23 John C. Brown, "Imperfect Competition and Anglo-German Trade Rivalry: Markets for Cotton Textiles Before 1914," *Journal of Economic History,* Vol. 55, No. 3, 1995, pp. 494–495; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 295–296.

24 Kennedy, 1980, pp. 296–300.

Geopolitical Context

Under Bismarck, Germany's foreign policy had been designed to prevent a coalition of great powers forming against it and, in particular, to avoid a two-front war, with Russia aligning with a revisionist France.[25] Yet shortly after his dismissal, this was precisely what Germany faced. Germany had earlier maintained a loose alliance with Russia, notwithstanding the tensions this created for the more durable alliance with Austria-Hungary (as Austria and Russia had numerous contrasting interests in the Balkans). The final expression of this German-Russian understanding was the secret reinsurance treaty, which, as noted earlier, stipulated that Russia would not attack Germany in the event of a French attack, just as Germany would not attack Russia in the event of an Austrian attack.[26] The treaty had a fixed term and was up for renewal in 1890. Wilhelm initially personally guaranteed the Russian ambassador that the treaty would be renewed but was later persuaded that the risks of the treaty becoming public and damaging Germany's relations with Austria were too high, and Germany refused to renew it.[27] Russia, in turn, feared being isolated and soon began pursuing closer relations with France, resulting in a general accord to align their foreign policies by 1891 and, following contentious negotiations, a formal Franco-Russian alliance by 1894.[28]

This Franco-Russian alliance, between two states with colonial interests in often sharp conflict with those of Britain, increased the potential value of Anglo-German cooperation. Indeed, a formal alliance between Britain and Germany was explored between 1897 and 1901.[29] However, German policies and behavior in this period ultimately achieved the opposite effect. They convinced British leaders that, while France and Russia might have had conflicting colonial interests with Britain, it was only Germany that posed an existential risk to British security in the home islands. This assessment eventually contributed, along with colonial and commercial factors, to Britain's decision to settle its outstanding colonial disputes with France and Russia to enable an entente first with France, in 1904, and then with Russia, in 1907.[30]

Policies and Perceptions

Underlying the shift toward more frequent crises in relations between Britain and Germany and the overall deterioration of the geopolitical environment from Germany's perspective was the dramatic change in governance in Germany that accompanied the dismissal of Bismarck and the consolidation of personalized rule by the new kaiser, Wilhelm II. Under Bismarck, authority had been concentrated in his chancellorship and the government, with the kaiser playing a largely advisory or ceremonial role. With Bismarck's departure, power increasingly shifted from the government and the bureaucracy to the new kaiser, who claimed a divine mandate and personalized leadership of Germany in a manner that caused some observers to

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[25] Josef Joffe, "'Bismarck' or 'Britain'? Toward an American Grand Strategy After Bipolarity," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Spring 1995, pp. 106–108; Kennedy, 1980, p. 165.

[26] Massie, 1991, p. 82.

[27] Massie, 1991, pp. 113–115.

[28] Langer, 1960, pp. 20–24, 33–36.

[29] Kennedy, 1980, p. 233.

[30] Lowe, 1994, pp. 123, 132; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 266–267.

question his sanity.[31] This division of power, combined with the personality and unreliability of Wilhelm, led to a series of avoidable crises in foreign affairs.

The first of these crises occurred, in a sign of the imperial age, over events in southern Africa, particularly the Jameson Raid of 1895. British efforts to consolidate control over southern Africa had previously conflicted with the desires of segments of the Dutch-origin Boer community to maintain their autonomy, including their desire to maintain slavery in the face of British efforts to abolish it.[32] These tensions had led to an earlier war between the Boers and the British, which resulted in the 1881 Pretoria Convention, which preserved local autonomy for the Boers but gave Britain control over foreign affairs.[33] The discovery of gold in Boer territory in 1886 and the large increase in British migrant workers who flocked to it gave British and southern African officials, including Cecil Rhodes, a strong incentive to strengthen British control. This led to the Jameson raid, a paramilitary incursion into Boer territory loosely approved by local British and southern African officials, but without the apparent knowledge of London.[34] The raid failed spectacularly, and the parties responsible were shipped to London for trial.[35]

However, in the immediate aftermath of the raid, Wilhelm sent a telegram to Boer leader Paul Kruger congratulating him on his victory.[36] Germany had maintained close political and economic links with the Boers, and Wilhelm had reacted to news of the raid with fury, demanding that Germany send Britain a clear signal of German displeasure.[37] Despite the objections of most other senior German officials, who feared it could lead to war, the kaiser insisted that the telegram include provocative language implying that Germany recognized the Boer republics as independent and that Germany might be willing to militarily assist them in fighting the British.[38] The telegram—once it was confirmed as representing actual German policy rather than a hastily conceived, emotional reaction—generated an angry response in London and sharply increased British feelings of hostility toward Germany.[39] Several observers have since credited the episode as a turning point in relations between the two states, when public animosity became increasingly entrenched, in part because, particularly in Britain, it seemed to represent a betrayal of a previously friendly power.[40]

Similar issues came to the fore once again between 1899 and 1902, when, through a lengthy war, Britain finally succeeded in securing control over the Boer republics, which had

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31 Röhl, 2014, pp. 54, 57, 58.

32 Massie, 1991, p. 216.

33 South African History Online, "The Convention of Pretoria, 'Convention' for the Settlement of the Transvaal Territory, August 3, 1881," webpage, undated.

34 Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War,* London: Hachette UK, 2015, pp. 2–5; Massie, 1991, pp. 218–219.

35 Pakenham, 2015, pp. 4, 21.

36 Langer, 1960, p. 237.

37 Röhl, 2014, p. 75.

38 Langer, 1960, p. 235; Massie, 1991, p. 221.

39 Massie, 1991, pp. 224–226; Langer, 1960, pp. 240–242.

40 Massie, 1991, p. 231; Langer, 1960, pp. 243–244.

been heavily armed with weapons purchased from Germany.[41] The war led to numerous protests of British behavior throughout Europe, although official German policy was more restrained.[42] German officials were concerned that an overly aggressive stance, combined with increased naval spending, might have pushed Britain into open hostility or war.[43] British observers were nonetheless struck by the popular vitriol directed against Britain in Germany during the Boer war, which German politicians—rather than helping provoke—now struggled to contain.[44]

Although colonial issues, such as those involving the Boers, helped sour relations between Britain and Germany, it was the growth of the German naval program that put the two powers most firmly on an adversarial footing. Historically, while preeminent on land, the German military had maintained only a relatively modest naval fleet. Germany's substantial overseas merchant fleet relied largely on British protection and ports for its operation.[45] Under the direction of Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, Germany changed course. Following the passage of the First Naval Law in 1898, Germany began to build a large number of capital ships, focusing on battleships.[46] This building accelerated dramatically after the Second Naval Law in 1900, when these ships were slated to be produced in numbers and with armaments sufficient to directly challenge British naval supremacy in the North Sea, long the ultimate guarantee of British security.[47]

German had several motivations for this naval construction, including a more robust colonial expansion, an unwillingness to rely on continued British acquiescence for achieving this expansion, and national pride and status.[48] Tirpitz's ultimate goal, though, was to have the ability to directly threaten British security in the event of a war between the two states, which he viewed as inevitable.[49] Even if the British fleet proved to be victorious in such a struggle, it would be sufficiently weakened, in Tirpitz's calculations, to leave Britain vulnerable to attack from France or Russia.[50] The risk of such an outcome, it was hoped, would force Britain into a political accommodation with Germany. Instead, of course, quite the opposite occurred: Now perceiving the need to concentrate on a threat from Germany, Britain decided to reconcile with France and Russia.[51]

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41 Langer, 1960, p. 651; Massie, 1991, pp. 271–275; Evans, *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815–1914*, New York: Penguin Books, 2016, pp. 660–661.

42 Pakenham, 2015, pp. 249–250, 253, 388; Langer, 1960, p. 652; Kennedy, 1980, p. 240.

43 Kennedy, 1980, p. 240.

44 Steffen Bender, *Der Burenkrieg und die deutschsprachige Presse: Wahrnehmung und Deutung zwischen Bureneuphorie und Anglophobie 1899–1902 [The Boer War and the German-Language Press: Perception and Interpretation Between Boer Euphoria and Anglophobia 1899–1902]*, Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2009, pp. 252–253; Kennedy 1980, p. 246.

45 Massie, 1991, p. xxiv.

46 Massie, 1991, pp. 172–179.

47 Langer, 1960, p. 655.

48 Kennedy, 1980, pp. 223–224.

49 Kennedy, 1980, p. 224; Paul M. Kennedy, "Tirpitz, England and the Second Navy Law of 1900: A Strategical Critique," *Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1970, pp. 38–40.

50 Kennedy, 1970, p. 35; Alan John Percivale Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. 408–409; Rolf Hobson, *Imperialism at Sea: Naval Strategic Thought, the Ideology of Sea Power, and the Tirpitz Plan, 1875–1914*, Vol. 25, Boston: Brill, 2002, pp. 236–237.

51 Langer, 1960, p. 656; Massie, 1991, p. 181.

The British had a strong reaction to the German naval buildup. It greatly increased British perceptions that Germany had had aggressive intent toward Britain from as early as 1902.[52] The heavy battleships being constructed were not useful as a long-range fleet to protect colonial interests and instead seemed geared precisely toward winning a battle against Britain in the North Sea.[53] The British responded by increasing their own investments in naval construction and by relocating a much larger share of their fleet to the home waters to maintain the local naval superiority on which British security was predicated.[54]

The German naval program was essential in convincing both the British government and the British public of the hostility of German intentions and encouraging Britain to abandon its long-standing policy of diplomatic isolation.[55] The Anglo-French Entente of 1904, wherein the two states largely settled their colonial disputes that had previously been the source of greatest friction in their relationship, was motivated in part by the British assessment that Germany now represented a more pressing threat to its security than did traditional rival France.[56]

A Brittle Peace, 1905–1913

After 1905, the instability of the Anglo-German relationship increased as the two states frequently confronted crises that appeared to involve heightened risks of war. Bilateral issues, such as the ongoing naval arms race, contributed heavily to this instability and the perceptions of insecurity on both sides but so too did the increasingly inflexible alliance relationships to which both states had bound themselves. Crises in which there were no directly opposed Anglo-German interests now carried with them the potential for war between the two states because both had concluded that there no longer were genuine prospects for rapprochement.

Economic Context

Economic trends after 1905 largely continued those from the prior period. Germany's economic growth, urbanization, and industrialization continued, as did its shift toward producing more advanced goods.[57] Britain was also growing in this period, only less rapidly.[58] The result, then, was a situation in which Germany, with its larger population, was catching up to and, in some fields, overtaking Britain. Figure 4.4 offers one comparison between the two states, showing the two countries' relative global share of capabilities across a combination of metrics,

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[52] Kennedy, 1980, pp. 247–248; Matthew S. Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat 1901–1914: Admiralty Plans to Protect British Trade in a War Against Germany*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 44.

[53] Massie, 1991, pp. 184–185; William Mulligan, *The Origins of the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 191.

[54] Kennedy, 1980, pp. 251–252.

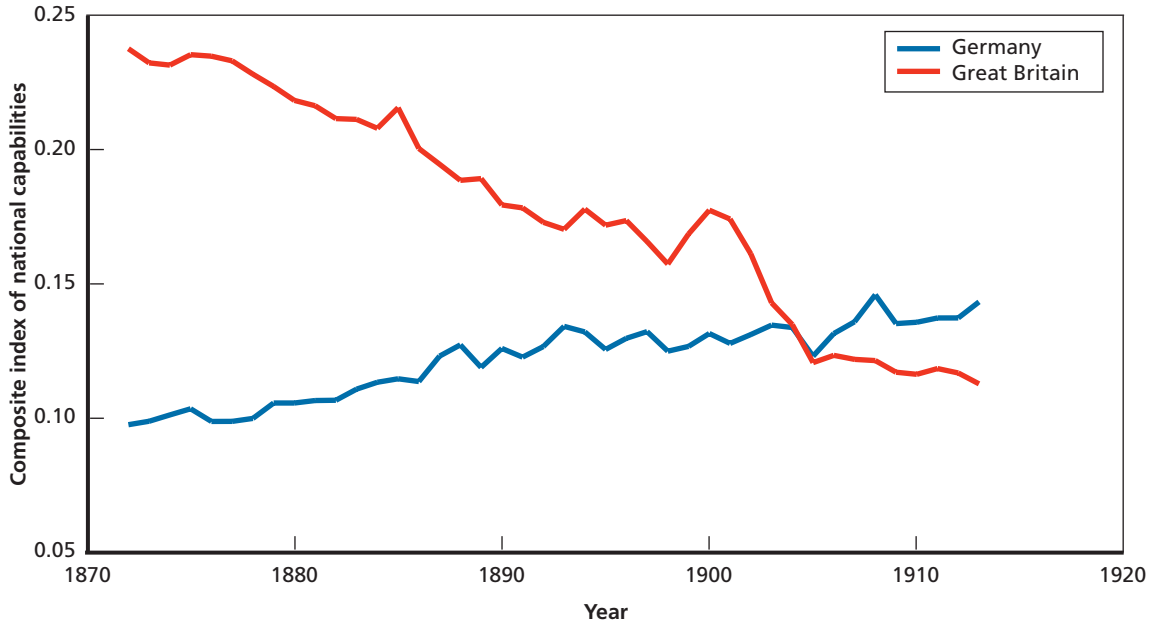
[55] Kennedy, 1980, p. 255.

[56] The entente was also motivated by concerns that the increasing risk of conflict between French-ally Russia and British-ally Japan in the Far East could lead Britain and France into unwanted direct conflict themselves (Kennedy, 1980, pp. 266–269; Taylor, 1954, p. 404).

[57] Kennedy, 1980, pp. 291–293.

[58] Kennedy, 1980, pp. 291–293.

Figure 4.4
National Capabilities of Germany and Britain, Composite Index, 1871–1913



SOURCE: Singer, 1987.

including population size, iron and steel production, and military expenditures.[59] Although this figure shows a steep British decline, it is important to emphasize that this is only a relative decline; Britain could not maintain its previously commanding position on the world stage in the face of more-rapid growth from such states as Germany and the United States.

In the context of this shift in economic and military power, trade continued to grow robustly between Britain and Germany. British imports from Germany increased dramatically from 1905 to 1913, from £53.8 million to £80.4 million.[60] Indeed, this made Britain Germany's largest export market in 1913.[61] Both states were also highly dependent on foreign trade more generally. Trade was equal to roughly 38 percent of Germany's gross national product and 52 percent of Britain's prior to 1914.[62] Although there was an economic dimension to the Anglo-German rivalry in this period, with firms in the two states increasingly competing for markets in higher-end industrial goods, both states were certainly benefiting greatly from the economic relationship with one another, and the overall effects of the economic dimension of the rivalry were, at worst, mixed.[63]

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[59] Specifically, the metrics summarized in this index include total population size, total urban population size, iron and steel production, primary energy consumption, military expenditures, and military personnel size.

[60] Kennedy, 1980, p. 293.

[61] Paul A. Papayoanou, "Interdependence, Institutions, and the Balance of Power: Britain, Germany, and World War I," *International Security,* Vol. 20, No. 4, Spring 1996, p. 55.

[62] Papayoanou, 1996, p. 54.

[63] Mulligan, 2010, p. 191; Papayoanou, 1996, p. 55; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 299, 305; Rüger, 2011, p. 607.

Geopolitical Context

Following the Anglo-French Entente of 1904, the most notable geopolitical realignment in this period was the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907. Negotiations between Britain and Russia had to overcome numerous obstacles, including Britain's alliance with Japan (which had just defeated Russia in a limited war in 1905); the Dogger Bank incident, in which Russian ships had fired on British fishing vessels, mistaking them for Japanese torpedo boats (despite being in the North Sea); and German efforts to secure an alliance with Russia.[64] In the end, Russia's defeat in its war with Japan, along with a domestic revolution in 1905, weakened Russia and encouraged it to seek accommodation with Britain.[65] Doing so enabled Russia to build on its alliance with France, on which Russia was now heavily financially dependent rather than ally with a Germany that it viewed as untrustworthy.[66] For Britain, an understanding with Russia allowed the favorable settlement of colonial disputes in Afghanistan, Persia, and Tibet and secured a sufficient counterweight to German power in Europe.[67]

The result was the establishment of two distinct alignments in Europe, with the Triple Entente of Britain, France, and Russia clearly established as an anti-German coalition.[68] In turn, this situation made Germany heavily dependent on its sole ally, Austria-Hungary, reducing its diplomatic flexibility. This led Germany to give Austria what amounted to unconditional support in the Balkans—and in its dealings with Serbia in particular; if Austria had abandoned the alliance, Germany would have been entirely isolated.[69] Meanwhile, having settled its disputes with Britain, Russia could concentrate on its ongoing disputes with Austria in the Balkans.[70]

With the major states now increasingly locked into opposing blocs and with clearly unresolved disputes between these blocs, the overall stability of the state system in Europe became increasingly precarious. The potential for a localized crisis to spread throughout the system had greatly increased. In part because of security concerns about one another, Britain and Germany had committed themselves to this arrangement without retaining an influence over their less-powerful allies that could have prevented the escalation of disputes that did not directly concern them. The potential for conflict between Britain and Germany was now a function of not only the disputes they might have with one another but also those involving any of their allies. Exacerbating this risk, in the event of any European war, German military planners had

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64 Sidney B. Fay, "The Kaiser's Secret Negotiations with the Tsar, 1904–1905," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, October 1918, p. 60; Lowe, 1994, pp. 136–139; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 271–272.

65 Lowe, 1994, p. 137; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 284–285.

66 Lowe, 1994, p. 137; Kennedy, 1980, p. 284.

67 Ludwig Dehio, *The Precarious Balance: Four Centuries of the European Power Struggle*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962, pp. 236–237; Lowe, 1994, pp. 136–138; Massie, 1991, pp. 597, 599; Kennedy, 1980, p. 441.

68 It should be noted, however, that the Triple Entente did not immediately become a full military alliance. In the 1905 Morocco crisis, for example, Britain clearly did not consider itself to be militarily committed to France's defense, and French officials worried that announcing a full military alliance might trigger a German attack. The two states did begin military consultations in 1906 that became increasingly close, but as late as 1913, Britain was still formally insisting that it retained its freedom of action and was not necessarily committed to assisting France in the event of a German attack (Massie, 1991, pp. 360–362; K. M. Wilson, "To the Western Front: British War Plans and the 'Military Entente' with France Before the First World War," *British Journal of International Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 2, 1977, pp. 152–154).

69 Massie, 1991, pp. 606–607; Kennedy, 1980, p. 442.

70 Kennedy, 1980, p. 442.

decided to attack France and Belgium first, even if the conflict was initially with Russia and even if hostilities had not yet begun with France. This ensured escalation of the conflict and the involvement of Britain.[71] This was, as history would show, an unstable arrangement.

Policies and Perceptions

This period saw a number of dangerous crises involving Britain, Germany, and the other European powers. These crises became more frequent and at higher risk of escalation than in prior periods because of the structural economic and geopolitical factors and because of rising perceptions of the aggressive intent of each side. Most notably, Kaiser Wilhelm II was increasingly perceived (both in Britain and among many elites in Germany) to be unstable, belligerent, and immature.[72] Throughout 1908 and 1909, he frequently berated British officials both in private and in newspaper interviews, threatening war, hardening elite British perceptions that Germany could not be trusted.[73] Admiral von Tirpitz threatened to resign if the kaiser did not moderate his behavior. Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow was likewise deeply angered and, along with other officials, questioned whether the kaiser was, in fact, sane.[74]

The naval arms race between the two states, begun in earnest in the earlier period, continued to accelerate after 1905. German battleship construction increased further with each of the updated Navy Laws in 1906, 1908, and 1912.[75] In Britain, meanwhile, naval construction ramped up dramatically. In 1906, Britain produced the first dreadnought, a battleship with substantially increased range, firepower, and speed designed to make earlier vessels obsolete.[76] Moreover, Britain built the ship in only 12 months, compared to 31 months for the previous most rapidly built battleship.[77] Thereafter, the increased British investment in naval construction and commitments to station a greater share of its fleet in its home waters ensured that Britain would retain its dominance in the North Sea.[78] The arms race continued, and final efforts to agree on naval limitations in 1912 were ineffective.[79] By the end of this period, Brit-

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71 Kennedy, 1980, p. 445; Massie, 1991, p. 895.

72 Röhl, 2014, pp. 95–97; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Politics," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, No. 2/3, May–June 1990, pp. 290–291; Kennedy, 1980, p. 457.

73 Ralph R. Menning and Carol Bresnahan Menning, "'Baseless Allegations': Wilhelm II and the Hale Interview of 1908," *Central European History*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 1983, pp. 369–370, 373–374, 379; Röhl, 2014, pp. 95–97. It is worth noting, however, that popular perceptions of Wilhelm in Britain were considerably more mixed in this period, when he was sometimes viewed as a brake on even more belligerent impulses within the German government (Lothar Reinermann, "Fleet Street and the Kaiser: British Public Opinion and Wilhelm II," *German History,* Vol. 26, No. 4, October 2008, pp. 476–480).

74 Röhl, 2014, pp. 95–96; Mommsen, 1990, pp. 290–291.

75 Massie, 1991, p. 183.

76 Massie, 1991, pp. 470–477.

77 Massie, 1991, p. 482.

78 By 1914, Britain retained a lead in *Dreadnought*-class ships of 29 to Germany's 17. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, p. 85; John H. Maurer, "The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry and Informal Arms Control, 1912–1914," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 36, No. 2, June 1992, p. 284.

79 Richard Langhorne, "VII. The Naval Question in Anglo-German Relations, 1912–1914," *Historical Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2, June 1971, pp. 360–361.

ain had decisively won the naval arms race.[80] Although this likely reduced Britain's immediate sense of insecurity by 1914, the process of securing this outcome had cemented perceptions of German aggressive intent and underlined the necessity of preventing Germany from gaining hegemony over the Continent.

Numerous particular crises occurred in this period, but this narrative will highlight three as most worth exploring because of their heightened risks of escalation: the 1905 Morocco Crisis, the 1908 Bosnia Crisis, and the 1911 Agadir Crisis.

France, which had long sought to incorporate Morocco into its North African empire, pressured the sultan to accept a de facto French takeover of the country in 1905.[81] However, Morocco's independent status—as stipulated under the 1880 Madrid Treaty to which Britain, Germany, and other European powers were party—could not, in principle, be changed without consultation among the signatories.[82] Germany had signaled in 1904 that it had no objection to an expanded French role but later reversed course after France failed to consult with Germany as required by the Madrid Treaty and amid growing fears that the Entente Cordiale between France and Britain amounted to an encirclement of Germany.[83] Chancellor Bülow and Political Secretary Friedrich von Holstein intended to provoke a crisis over Morocco to humiliate France and drive a wedge between her and Britain.[84] For these reasons, Germany threatened France with war if Germany's demands for an internationalization of Morocco were not met. Germany succeeded in forcing both the resignation of French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé and the assembly of an international conference on Morocco's future.[85] However, at this conference, Britain, concerned over German belligerence, resolutely supported the French.[86] Although a mixed solution to control over Morocco was agreed to, giving France a privileged position but preventing a full protectorate and giving Germany special commercial rights, the overall effect of the conference was to strengthen the ties between Britain and France and to convince both that German intentions were aggressive and needed to be opposed.[87]

The Bosnia crisis of 1908 involved Britain and Germany only indirectly but illustrates the instability and danger of the alliance system to which the two had bound themselves. Austria-Hungary had administered Bosnia-Herzegovina, still under nominal Turkish sovereignty, since 1878. But in 1908, Austria-Hungary moved to formally annex the territory.[88] The move was

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[80] Ferguson, 1999, p. 85. During the World War I, other than a limited number of skirmishes, the majority of the German surface fleet remained blockaded in German ports out of fear of losing a direct engagement with the British fleet (Robert K. Massie, *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany and the Winning of the Great War at Sea*, Random House, 2007, p. 503).

[81] Lowe, 1994, p. 166.

[82] Massie, 1991, p. 352.

[83] Massie, 1991, pp. 354–355.

[84] Germany also sought to remove Delcassé to prevent French mediation of the war between Japan and Russia, which, if resolved, Germany feared would ease tensions between Russia and Britain and pave the way for a Triple Entente, as did indeed later occur, in 1907. Lowe, 1994, pp. 167–168; Massie, 1991, p. 354; Röhl, 2014, p. 89; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 276–277.

[85] Röhl, 2014, pp. 89–90; Lowe, 1994, p. 167; Massie, 1991, pp. 361–362.

[86] Kennedy, 1980, p. 277; Massie, 1991, pp. 363–367.

[87] Kennedy, 1980, p. 277; Massie, 1991, p. 367.

[88] Ralph R. Menning, "Dress Rehearsal for 1914? Germany, the Franco- Russian Alliance, and the Bosnian Crisis of 1909," *Journal of the Historical Society,* Vol. 12, No. 1, March 2012, p. 3.

made independently of Germany, but when Serbia and her ally Russia objected, Germany fully backed Austrian threats to attack Serbia.[89] The German government felt it had no choice but to support Austria or face diplomatic isolation if their alliance soured.[90] Russia, faced with a war for which she was not prepared so soon after her defeat in the 1904–1905 war with Japan, and unsure of either French or British support, backed down and accepted the Austrian annexation of Bosnia.[91] However, the episode greatly angered Russia, which resolved to better prepare for war with Germany and Austria and not yield a second time in the Balkans.[92]

In 1911, when France again moved to increase its control over northern Morocco, contravening the earlier international agreement, Germany responded by sending two gunships to the southern Moroccan port of Agadir, ostensibly to protect German business interests that were not yet present but in reality as a show of force to leverage concessions from France.[93] In subsequent negotiations, German Foreign Secretary Alfred von Kiderlen-Waechter demanded substantial compensation for accepting French control over Morocco, beyond what France was willing to give. In fact, Germany's initial demands were for the entirety of the French Congo.[94] In separate discussions with Britain, Germany initially refused to explain its ultimate objectives, which led to British concerns that Germany might have been threatening war with France or at least German annexation of part of Morocco.[95] These concerns led Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George, later Prime Minister, who had previously been known as a relatively pro-German pacifist, to give a public speech that underlined Britain's willingness to go to war to protect her interests, which Germany, in turn, perceived as an aggressive provocation.[96] Fearing a German attack, Britain went so far as to put its fleet on a heightened state of alert.[97] In the end, Germany backed down and accepted more-limited territorial concessions in the French Congo in return for acquiescing to the French position in Morocco.[98]

These crises represent a series of exchanges whereby Britain and Germany found themselves implicitly threatening one another with war over issues related to their allies and the balance of power in Europe but only indirectly affecting their own national security.[99] Rela-

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[89] Although Austria had informed Bülow of its plans to annex Bosnia, Kaiser Wilhelm had not been informed. Röhl, 2014, p. 121; Massie, 1991, p. 607.

[90] Massie, 1991, p. 606; Kennedy, 1980, p. 445; Röhl, 2014, p. 122.

[91] M. B. Cooper, "British Policy in the Balkans, 1908–9," *Historical Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1964, pp. 274–275; Lowe, 1994, p. 187.

[92] Menning, 2012, pp. 20–21; Massie, 1991, p. 608.

[93] Germany had assumed that such a show was necessary to extract concessions from the French and overcome British objections; in fact, something closer to the opposite was true. Britain had not opposed France's granting concessions elsewhere, and France had already accepted the necessity of offering concessions before the German warships arrived (Lowe, 1994, pp. 177, 179).

[94] Keith Wilson, "The Agadir Crisis, the Mansion House Speech, and the Double-Edgedness of Agreements," *Historical Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1972, pp. 516–517; Lowe, 1994, p. 177.

[95] Massie, 1991, pp. 730–731.

[96] Massie, 1991, pp. 732–733; Wilson, 1972, pp. 517–519.

[97] Lowe, 1994, p. 179.

[98] Massie, 1991, pp. 740–741.

[99] Kennedy, 1980, pp. 448–449.

tions between the two states did improve somewhat from 1911 to 1913, and Britain and Germany largely cooperated in bringing about settlements to the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913.[100] However, the overall perceptions of the two states as adversaries, and therefore the necessity of remaining committed to their conflicting sets of alliances to ensure their own security, had by then hardened. The risk of war in future European crises continued to boil and finally exploded in 1914.

Figure 4.5 summarizes the overall chronology of these three periods.

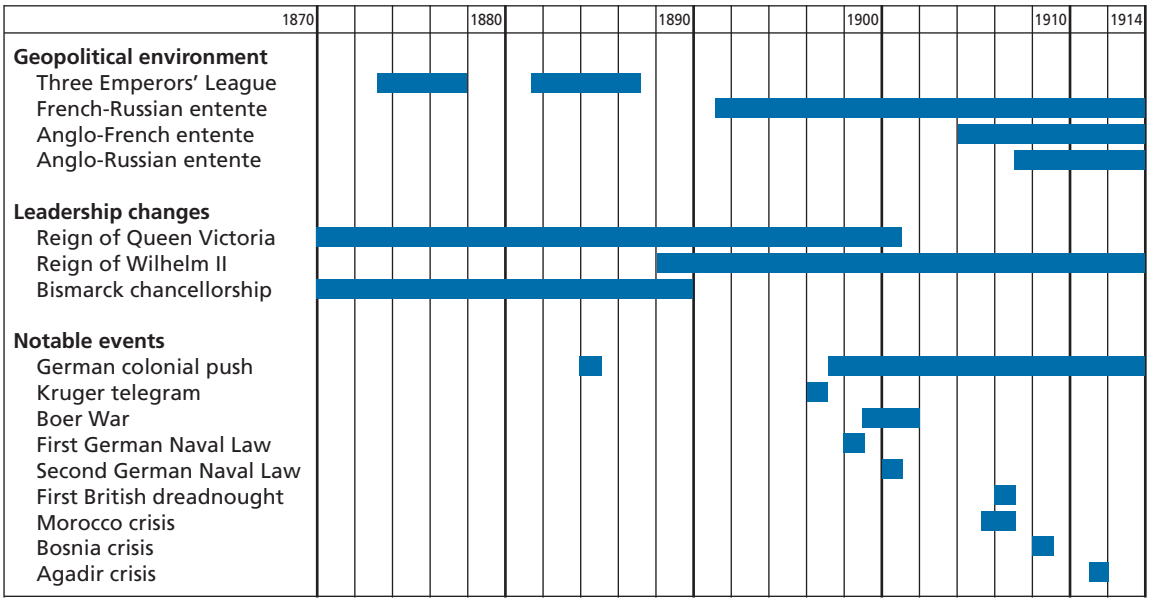
Factors That Promoted Stable and Unstable Competition

The Anglo-German rivalry provides a rich case for analyzing the framework developed in Chapter Three. The stability of the competition between Britain and Germany varied over time, and detailed information is available about the reactions of each side to the actions and policies of the other that drove these variations. Our analysis highlights some aspects of our framework as being particularly important in this case, such as the perception of threat and revisionism, while providing somewhat less evidence for others, such as the importance of misperception.

Changes in Stability over Time

The stability of the Anglo-German rivalry generally declined from a competitive but relatively businesslike approach in the 1870 and 1880s to a period punctuated by dramatic crises and fears of war in the years preceding 1914. With regard to the first dimension of the framework—the mutual acceptance of a clearly understood status quo—the key shift toward

Figure 4.5
Summary Chronology of Anglo-German Competition, 1871–1913



[100] Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Detente and Deterrence: Anglo-German Relations, 1911–1914," *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Fall 1986, pp. 126, 129–130.

instability occurred around the turn of the century. The German decisions after 1897 to pursue a greatly enhanced naval construction program focusing on battleships at the same time as it began to pursue a more robust colonial expansion policy likely indicate the key moment when Germany decided not to continue to acquiesce to the British-dominated status quo but instead to challenge it, even if the results might lead to war.[101] From this point on, there was no longer mutual acceptance of the current international order. Certain aspects of this shift had begun earlier, after the dismissal of Bismarck; British (and German) observers were frequently taken aback by Wilhelm's disregard for established rules for handling disputes.[102] Even after 1897, each side made attempts to reach revised agreements on the terms of competition between the two states, most explicitly in the various attempts at naval limitation treaties.[103] None of these efforts bore fruit, although the two sides had more or less settled into an informal balance on the naval question by roughly 1912, which likely did somewhat enhance this dimension of the stability of the rivalry from 1912 to 1913.[104]

However, on the second dimension of stability in our framework—resilience and the ability to weather shocks and return to the mean—the Anglo-German competition was likely at its worst by 1913. The earlier periods had seen much greater resilience in the relationship. Despite frequent disagreements, some quite vitriolic, Britain and Germany had maintained a multifaceted relationship, as shown by frequent efforts to explore a mutual alliance (as late as 1901) and close personal and dynastic relations between elites in the two countries.[105] In the earlier periods, ample opportunities had remained for returning relations to a constructive track after a crisis. But geopolitical developments, particularly the ententes that Britain negotiated with France in 1904 and Russia in 1907, substantially weakened this equilibrium. Partly out of fear of one another, both Britain and Germany strengthened their relationships with and reliance on other powers, creating a competing set of alliance blocs. These blocs, in turn, both magnified the potential for small disputes unrelated to the direct interests of either Britain or Germany to lead to war between them and limited their own freedom of action to build more-constructive relations with one another without risk of being perceived as abandoning their allies. Rather than a shock absorber, these alliances functioned as an accelerant, ensuring repeated opportunities for antagonism and direct conflict between the two states with less ability to deescalate. On this dimension, the stability of the Anglo-German competition was near its nadir by 1913.

Policy and Contextual Variables That Affected Stability

The preceding sections highlighted events and actions that align with several policy and contextual variables identified in the framework as affecting the stability of a strategic rivalry. In terms of policies, the restraint—or lack thereof—in the deployment of key military capabilities stands out as a key factor, most especially in the form of German's ambition to build a navy capable of threatening Britain's. This was arguably the most existentially threatening capability Germany could pursue and served as a leading mechanism of destabilizing the relationship.

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[101] Kennedy, 1980, p. 224; Kennedy, 1970, pp. 38–40.

[102] Röhl, 2014, pp. 54, 57, 58; Langer, 1960, p. 793.

[103] Langhorne, 1971, pp. 360–361; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 418–419, 451–452.

[104] Ferguson, 1999, p. 85.

[105] Particularly until the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. Kennedy, 1980, pp. 233, 243–245; Massie, 1991, pp. 304–308.

Moreover, Germany also developed military doctrines that emphasized the offensive—indeed, so did many of the great powers of the era[106]—and these joined with specific capabilities to exacerbate mutual fears and undermine stability. All powers chose to compete vigorously in peripheral areas, and the race for colonies became an important spur to rivalries. The role of relationships was intermittently stabilizing; Germany and Great Britain had strong historical ties among ruling families and governing elites, and this mitigated the intensity of the rivalry at times. This case also emphasizes the importance of the ability to control allies and proxies: At various moments, Germany was either not able to take such action or unwilling to do so. The intersection of aggressive allies and proxies and competitive great powers made for a combustible mix.

These policy factors were joined by several contextual factors mentioned earlier. Various military capabilities and doctrines conspired to affect the perceived offense-defense balance and create a situation in which many governments believed that, if war loomed, it was essential to mobilize, and attack, first. Germany in general, and certain German leaders in particular, displayed an ambition to achieve certain status measures that fueled German ambitions and made it more difficult to sustain a stable competition with Britain.

Perceptions and Conditions That Affected Stability

In many ways, however, it is the perceptual variables highlighted in the framework that proved especially critical in determining stability in the relationship—often, as the framework suggests, with the policy and contextual variables serving as inputs to the perceptions. Overall, the three historical periods show generally high levels of stability in the Anglo-German rivalry from 1871 to 1889; more mixed, but declining, levels from 1890 to 1904; and generally low levels from 1905 to 1913. Which of the five key perceptual factors from our framework seem to be most closely related to these changes, and what underlying conditions and policies most affected these perceptions? We summarize our findings related to the five perceptual factors:

1. *The degree to which one rival sees the other as intent on overthrowing its political system and the international order.* British perceptions of German revisionism accelerated dramatically in the 1901–1902 period, when interpretations that the German naval program was intended to directly threaten the security of the British Isles began to harden.[107] Although the construction program (and the *Weltpolitik* push for German colonial expansion) had begun several years earlier, it took until this period for the details of the vessels being constructed and the manner in which they were to be employed (both signs that they were to be used to fight the British fleet in the North Sea) to become widely understood.[108] This threat encouraged Britain to reorient its foreign policy, seeking a rapprochement with France and abandoning the traditional British policy of neutrality in European affairs.[109] This perception was asymmetric: Britain's lack of sizable

[106] For a classic treatment of this issue, see Snyder, 1984, pp. 108–146.

[107] These perceptions were also affected by the rampant, public anti-British sentiment in Germany during the Boer War (Kennedy, 1980, pp. 245–250; Massie, 1991, pp. 184–185).

[108] Massie, 1991, p. 185.

[109] As discussed earlier, other factors were also important in British incentives to pursue the entente with France, including a fear that a Russian-Japanese war could lead to a conflict between Britain and France absent such an understanding (Kennedy, 1980, pp. 266–269; Taylor, 1954, p. 404).

ground forces meant that it posed no existential military threat to Germany. However, there was a growing perception in Germany that the British naval advantage inherently rendered Germany susceptible to pressure over colonial issues, and key German policymakers desired to be no longer subject to that pressure against pursuing an expansionist policy.[110]

2. *Confidence that one rival has the ability to counter potential aggression from the other.* British perceptions of the threat that Germany posed were driven by both the immediate capabilities Germany could bring to bear and the potential capabilities of a Germany that succeeded in establishing its hegemony over continental Europe. British security relied entirely on its naval supremacy because its land forces were minimal. Both sides recognized that these forces were no match for the German Army, meaning any invasion that crossed the English Channel would likely be successful.[111] For years, Britain had fought to maintain a *two-power* standard, such that its navy was larger than the next two largest navies combined, to ensure that Britain could defeat a naval attack by any plausible combination of adversaries.[112] Rising German industrial capacity and shipbuilding capabilities, demonstrated after the first two Naval Laws in 1898 and 1900, threatened this calculus. Even while Britain proved able to respond to this German shipbuilding challenge with an increased program of its own, it retained a strong incentive to ensure that Germany would not gain control over other industrial centers in Europe that would have enabled Germany to eventually exceed British shipbuilding capacity. Both the German shipbuilding program and the more general threat to the European balance of power that German policy represented came to be viewed as existential threats to British security.[113] There was no parallel concern in Germany regarding British capabilities, given the imbalance in ground forces. Although it did remain concerned about the damage the British fleet could do in the event of a conflict, Germany's existential concerns were motivated more by the fear of encirclement by land powers Russia and France (although this eased after Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905) or the fear that abandonment by its ally, Austria-Hungary, might leave Germany fighting a war against multiple powers on its own.[114]
3. *Respect for the other as a powerful, credible, essentially legitimate adversary.* This perceptual factor was less in evidence in this case. Despite their rivalry, Germany continued to view Britain as a respected adversary. Indeed, Kaiser Wilhelm II was an admirer of the British Navy, of which he had been made an honorary admiral by his grandmother, Queen Victoria.[115] German officials largely viewed Britain as a worthy competitor to be emulated and then overcome. Meanwhile, Britain was, in the 1870s and 1880s, supportive of a rising Germany, even encouraging her colonial program.[116] Although there were concerns after 1890 regarding Wilhelm's anticonstitutional, personalized gover-

[110] Hobson, 2002, pp. 236–237; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 224–225, 416–417.

[111] Massie, 1991, pp. xxi–xxv.

[112] Massie, 1991, p. 184.

[113] Massie, 1991, pp. 184–185; Kennedy, 1980, pp. 246–248.

[114] Kennedy, 1980, p. 442; Massie, 1991, pp. 606–607.

[115] Massie, 1991, p. 108.

[116] Massie, 1991, pp. 87–89.

nance and concerns over how German goals might conflict with British interests in the colonial realm, questions of the essential legitimacy of the two states and their regimes were not key factors in the deterioration of the relationship.

4. *Extreme measures seen as more costly than beneficial.* As the rivalry wore on, Germany became increasingly willing to risk war to achieve its goals, in a manner surprising to the other powers. Particularly in the later crises, such as those in Morocco or Bosnia, Germany was comfortable threatening to resort to force to solve relatively second-order concerns.[117] Even earlier, such as in the aftermath of the 1896 Kruger telegram, Wilhelm had demonstrated a willingness to use force if his concerns were not addressed.[118] By contrast, Britain, as the status quo power, was far less willing to risk war for aggressive ends but was willing to risk war in defense of the status quo, with regard to both the naval balance and the colonial realm. In this period, then, neither state saw war as an extreme measure per se but rather a continuation of geopolitics. Neither was willing to long forgo too much advantage or to risk too much of its security to avoid war.
5. *Enough mutual understanding to avoid disastrous misperceptions.* There were certainly some misperceptions in the Anglo-German competition that fueled mistrust and led to erroneous calculations, but this does not appear to have been as important a driver of instability as other factors. Wilhelm had close, personal relationships with the British royal family, and the elites in both countries were generally well-apprised of one another's perceptions, both because of direct exchanges and because of the frequent use of the press to express official sentiments and perceptions.[119] Sometimes, misperceptions did play an important, destabilizing role. Germany often assumed, for example, that Britain would be more hostile to its interests than was the case in reality, such as during the 1911 Agadir crisis.[120] Germany also failed to appreciate that British perceptions of the threat posed by the German navy might prompt Britain to reconcile its colonial conflicts with France and Russia to concentrate on its rivalry with Germany, although this was more a failure of German analysis and strategic thinking than a misperception per se.[121] For their part, British officials often seemed unsure what to make of emotional outbursts from Wilhelm or the unpredictable German policy that resulted.[122] It also took Britain some time to properly perceive the intent of Tirpitz's naval buildup as being directed at Britain.[123] For the most part, though, the key crises and instability in the relationship came from correctly perceived differences in interests and goals between the two states.

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[117] Röhl, 2014, pp. 89–90; Lowe, 1994, pp. 167, 177, 179.

[118] After the Jameson raid, Wilhelm's advisers cautioned him that German involvement could lead to war with Britain, and he responded cavalierly: "Yes, but only on land." (Matthew S. Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa 1893–99: The Transformation of German Colonial Policy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p. 90; Röhl, 2014, p. 75).

[119] Kennedy, 1980, pp. 365–366.

[120] Lowe, 1994, pp. 177, 179.

[121] Kennedy, 1980, p. 417.

[122] This was, however, an accurate reflection of the internal chaos of much German policymaking during the reign of Wilhelm II (Massie, 1991, pp. 224–226; Röhl, 2014, pp. 54–58, 95–97).

[123] Whereas Tirpitz's key decisions to target the fleet at Britain were made in 1897, British perceptions of the German naval program did not reflect this change until roughly 1902 (Kennedy, 1980, pp. 224, 251–252).

Overall, the Anglo-German case study provides strong support for the proposition that the top two perceptions of the adversary as fundamentally revisionist and as threatening to existential security are closely correlated with levels of stability in the competition. When each rival is perceived as having both the intent and the capability to threaten the existence of the other, it should not be surprising if the competition between them becomes unstable. States would be taking tremendous risks to treat such a situation as "business as usual" and should be highly incentivized to change it, even at the risk of war. It is perhaps unsurprising that this case also provides evidence of a correlation between instability and a perception that extreme measures are no longer viewed as overly costly. But the latter relationship might not be causal: Instead, the acceptance of extreme measures could be driven by the perception that at least one state has both the intention and the capacity to threaten the existential security of the other. In such a situation, a willingness to resort to extreme measures would be understandable.

The other two perceptions, whether the adversary was viewed as legitimate and whether there was sufficient mutual understanding to avoid misperceptions, were not as clearly associated with the changes in stability in the Anglo-German rivalry. Although this is a single historical case, we can perhaps say that misperception is not a necessary condition for a decline in stability when the interests and policies of the rivals are so strongly opposed. Misperception might be a more crucial factor when the clash of interests is less acute. The importance of perceived legitimacy, meanwhile, is likely to depend on both the domestic and international political environments. In this case, both sides viewed one another as essentially legitimate governments, but even if they had not, the perceptions of external actors regarding the legitimacy of the states simply did not have that much potential to undermine or threaten regime security. For states less well-developed than Britain or Germany, or in an international environment where international opinion had more power and salience, one could find a different result.

Implications for Today

The Anglo-German rivalry, pitting a rising Germany against a declining Britain, is frequently cited as a relevant case for understanding international politics today, often casting the United States in the role of Britain and China in the role of Germany.[124] There are lessons to be drawn from this case, but we should be cautious about drawing exact parallels. Many important aspects of the Anglo-German rivalry feel dated, such as the complex personal, dynastic links between the two monarchies and the concern over the status gained from far-flung colonial possessions that helped motivate Germany to expand its naval program.

In other aspects, however, we do find relevant insights. The most central of these relates to the dangers for all great powers of threatening the existential security of another. Signaling both the intent and capability to undermine another state's security should be expected to trigger a destabilizing reaction that could increase the risk of war. The nature of this destabilizing reaction can vary, but this case shows that it can involve unexpected and historically unprecedented behavior on the part of the rival. German decisionmakers were convinced that Britain

[124] Fareed Zakaria, "The Future of American Power: How America Can Survive the Rise of the Rest," *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 2008; Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015; John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2010, pp. 381–396.

would never reconcile with its colonial rivals, France and Russia, and would never dramatically reduce its overseas naval presence to defend the home islands, key assumptions that made the success of a German naval challenge seem plausible. Facing the German threat, however, Britain took steps to safeguard its existential security, and Germany decisively lost the naval arms race and disastrously drove Britain into the arms of Germany's most dangerous Continental rivals.

Rather than being applicable only for the rising or declining power, these lessons are likely to hold for all states. In the current environment, such states as China and Russia should be mindful that their assumptions about U.S. policies and limitations might not hold in the event that they develop capabilities and demonstrate the intent to threaten U.S. existential security. Similarly, as the current most powerful state in the international system, the United States should understand the danger of threatening other states and how they could react unexpectedly. For example, concerned about U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion into its perceived sphere of influence and U.S. support for "color revolutions" in nearby states, Russia has frequently challenged U.S. assumptions about its likely behavior through its illegal annexation of Crimea and interference in U.S. elections.

States should therefore be cautious about the military capabilities they build and the aggressive intent they can signal to undermine state or regime security. Vulnerable states are likely to be extremely sensitive to perceptions of aggressive intent, and it can be difficult for these states to walk back threats or professions of hostility after issuing them. Stable competition between rivals requires a degree of diplomatic, political, and military restraint when the capacity exists to threaten one another's existential security.

CHAPTER FIVE

Case Study: The Sino–Soviet/Russian Rivalry, 1950–2001

In the aftermath of World War II, relative status considerations injected instability into Sino-Soviet relations. Although formally allied from 1950 to 1979, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) competed with each other over status, initially within the alliance. Ever since the 1950 signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty, China had been profoundly dissatisfied with its junior-partner status relative to the Soviet Union. Chinese frustrations with the asymmetric nature of the alliance were made worse when facing the reality of a big brother that was a fellow communist country espousing—at least in theory—egalitarian principles. By the end of the 1950s, the rivalry expanded beyond the confines of the alliance to direct competition over the leadership of the international communist movement. The Chinese side behaved in a revisionist manner and directly challenged the Soviets' ideological preeminence in the socialist world, while—ironically—accusing the Soviets of ideological revisionism.

Chinese dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union was not immediately apparent. From 1950 to 1956, few overt disagreements were aired between the two sides, which were harboring low perceptions of threat vis-à-vis each other. They engaged in actions and adopted policies to build communication channels and expand trust, giving their relationship an appearance of stability.

But in a February 1956 speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), then–CPSU General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced the practices of his predecessor Joseph Stalin and announced a new foreign policy for the Soviet Union: peaceful coexistence with the West.[1] The speech and its proposed policy changes gave the Chinese leadership an opportunity to publicly voice its disenchantment with the USSR and openly challenge Soviet ideological preeminence. After Khrushchev's "secret speech," it would take almost 50 years for the Sino-Russian rivalry to come to an end. From 1950 to 2001, Sino-Soviet relations came full circle,[2] starting with the alliance treaty signed in February 1950 by Stalin and Chairman Mao Zedong and ending with the signing of a new friendship treaty in July 2001 between presidents Vladimir Putin and Jiang Zemin.

Between these bookends of low mutual-threat perceptions, Sino-Soviet relations evolved from a simmering rivalry enveloped in the appearance of cordial relations until 1956 to an unstable competition and a direct violent conflict on the border in 1969. China and the Soviet

[1] Priscilla Roberts, Steven I. Levine, Péter Vámos, Deborah Kaple, Jeremy Friedman, Douglas A. Stiffler, and Lorenz Lüthi, "Forum: Mao, Khrushchev, and China's Split with the USSR: Perspectives on the Sino-Soviet Split," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2010, p. 124.

[2] Elizabeth Wishnick, *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001, p. 3.

Union remained mired in the unstable competition for almost two decades, from 1969 to 1989, only to gradually transition to a stable competition starting in 1989, with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing. From 1989 to 2001, the competition not only stabilized but also started to wind down, ending in 2001 in the absence of mutual threat perceptions. At the height of the rivalry, from 1966 to 1985, the actions of each side were influenced by the perception of the other as being revisionist or challenging the status of the other within the communist movement and as posing a significant (albeit not existential) threat to the other's security.[3]

Each side respected the other and perceived it as a credible adversary, and neither side was trying to engage in regime change against the other, but they questioned each other's ideological legitimacy within the communist movement.[4] The competition for leadership of the socialist world translated into a competition for allies and ended up, by the mid-1960s, as a symbol of the two countries' competition for status in the international system. Hence, this case indicates that changes in threat perception affect the stability of a rivalry—the perception of the other side as posing a significant threat to one's security, challenging one's ideological legitimacy, and thus threatening the collapse of one's ideological system. Furthermore, evidence from this case shows that such a rivalry is bound to end in the absence of mutual threat perceptions.

To chart the key policies and factors behind the Sino-Soviet rivalry, this chapter divides the period into four phases corresponding to degrees of relative stability or instability: (1) incipient competition from 1950 to 1956, (2) increasingly unstable competition from 1956 to the 1969 border conflict, (3) unstable competition from 1969 to 1989, and (4) stable competition from 1989 to 2001, when Russia and China signed its new friendship treaty that ended the rivalry. The concluding section sums up the determinative factors discussed in the prior sections and draws lessons about what could lead to greater or lesser instability in a strategic competition.

According to this report's definition of stability, agreement on a shared status quo and the resilience of the relationship to shocks, the Sino-Soviet relationship was never stable. Almost immediately after the signing of the alliance in 1950, there were fundamental disagreements about the relative roles of the two communist powers in the global revolutionary movement. The armed conflict in 1969 was merely the culmination of more than a decade of increasingly fraught relations. Although the conflict did not go hot again, the relationship was certainly not stable until the moves toward normalization in the late 1980s. From then until the signing of the 2001 treaty, when we consider the rivalry itself to have ended, there was a period of stable rivalry with ever greater agreement on rules of the road and demonstrated ability to avoid derailment because of shocks. This is thus a case of instability (to varying degrees) in the first three periods, followed by more stable rivalry in the fourth. This chapter is primarily about explaining why the rivalry was unstable and why it transitioned to stability.

This analysis relies on a blend of primary and secondary sources in English, including English translations of Russian and Chinese sources. The primary sources include declassified U.S. government documents related to the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict, which were made

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[3] The large territorial size of both countries, combined with the imbalances in population size and nuclear arsenals (what the Soviets lacked in population, they compensated for in their nuclear arsenal, while the reverse was true for the Chinese), meant that each side posed a significant but not an existential threat to the security of the other.

[4] For the Sino-Soviet case, we adapt the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter Three to incorporate the issue of ideological legitimacy. In this case, the rejection of the other side's legitimacy does not concern the other side's *regime* but rather the other side's *ideology* within both the communist movement and the international system.

publicly available as part of the National Security Archive initiative, and declassified intelligence reports related to the treatment of Soviet and other foreign diplomats in China and to two sieges of the Soviet embassy there in 1967 during the Cultural Revolution; the latter reports were made available by the Central Intelligence Agency on its website. The secondary sources include scholarly articles and books written by Russian, Chinese, and Western academics using their field and archival research in China, Russia, former Warsaw Pact countries, Mongolia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other places of relevance to the study of Sino-Soviet relations. Working papers published by the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars have also informed this analytical effort.

Incipient Competition, 1950–1956

Historical Context

The 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance was planted on shaky ground. In 1945, Stalin had concluded an alliance treaty with China's Kuomintang government,[5] the rival faction to the eventually victorious Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the Chinese civil war.[6] During the second phase of that war (1946–1950), Stalin played an ambivalent role vis-à-vis the CCP and its leader, Mao. In spite of the common ideological ties and the expectation that the Soviet Union would become a natural ally to Mao and the CCP in the civil war, Stalin alternated between his support for the Kuomintang and the CCP. Stalin's attitude is explained by the fact that, on the one hand, he did not expect the CCP to win, and on the other hand, he was more interested in promoting Soviet geopolitical interests in China than in contributing to the battlefield victory of the CCP and its cause.[7]

Mao's multiple requests—starting in 1947—to meet with Stalin were heeded only when it became clear that the CCP had defeated the Kuomintang and when Mao declared the formation of the PRC in September 1949 and formed a new government in Beijing a month later.[8] Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were also intensifying during this time,[9] and they influenced Stalin's calculations regarding his future relationship with the PRC.

Mao nursed a resentment toward all Soviet leaders, from Stalin to Leonid Brezhnev, because of the junior status they had attributed to China. Mao's resentment had long-lasting implications for the evolution and stability of relations between the two countries. Mao

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5 Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967*, Vol. 33, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 6; Wishnick, 2001, p. 26.

6 The Chinese civil war lasted from 1927 to 1950, with the conflict being divided into two major periods: (1) 1927 to 1937, and (2) 1946 to 1950. For details on the second part of the war, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, New York: Basic Books, 2017, pp. 140–147.

7 Jeanne Lorraine Wilson, *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era*, Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004, p. 17; Niu Jun, "The Origins of the Sino-Soviet Alliance" in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945–1963*, Washington, D.C. and Stanford, Calif.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 47–74.

8 Westad, 2017, p. 143.

9 Radchenko, 2009, pp. 3, 6.

embarked on his first trip to Moscow on December 6, 1949. During his meeting with Stalin, Mao pledged China's commitment to the Soviet path. According to Mao, China was "leaning to one side—the Soviet side."[10] Mao's two-month trip to the Soviet Union concluded with the alliance treaty signing in February 1950.[11]

Khrushchev's February 1956 speech at the Twentieth Party Congress shifted the countries toward open rivalry, representing a turning point in Sino-Soviet relations. Beyond announcing a new Soviet foreign policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the West, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's crimes. Together, these shifts opened a door (or at least a viable pretext) for the Chinese to publicly distance themselves from the USSR.

Determinative Factors

Low mutual-threat perceptions from 1950 to 1956 prevented the simmering rivalry between China and the USSR from breaking into the open, with the two countries maintaining cordial relations and reaffirming their mutual friendship in public.[12] The stabilizing factors during this period were the perceived common enemy that the United States and the capitalist world represented; the establishment of communication channels and confidence-building measures (CBMs) signaling acceptance of one another's legitimacy; and China's low economic and military capabilities vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The latter aspect, however, underscored China's lower status, which, in combination with the poor personal relationships between Chinese and Soviet leaders, instilled a rivalry that would grow only deeper.

Perceived Common Enemy

Mao had originally proposed the formation of the Sino-Soviet alliance, fearing U.S. actions against the Chinese revolution.[13] Stalin's first reaction had been to decline the proposal, only to revisit it in January 1950 and sign the treaty the following month. Initially, Stalin had feared that, by signing an alliance treaty with Mao, the Soviet Union would lose some of the privileges it had received from the 1945 alliance treaty it had signed with the Kuomintang.[14] But in the end, witnessing the decline in Soviet-American relations, and unaware of Mao's own anxieties regarding the United States, Stalin's fear of a Sino-American rapprochement overcame his concerns regarding potential territorial losses from a new treaty.[15]

Establishment of Communication Channels and CBMs Signaling Acceptance of One Another's Legitimacy

Assuming power after Stalin's death in 1953, Khrushchev traveled to Beijing in 1954 with the aim of strengthening Sino-Soviet relations.[16] He undertook a number of CBMs meant to signal

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[10] Zhihua Shen and Danhui Li, *After Leaning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011, pp. 3–15.

[11] Sean M. Turner, "'A Rather Climactic Period': The Sino–Soviet Dispute and Perceptions of the China Threat in the Kennedy Administration," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2011, p. 263.

[12] Wishnick, 2001, p. 27.

[13] Westad, 2017, p. 143.

[14] Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 31.

[15] Radchenko, 2009, p. 7.

[16] Westad, 2017, pp. 196, 237.

Soviet acceptance of China's legitimacy in the international system, in the communist world, and as an ally of the Soviet Union. He withdrew Soviet troops from China's Port Arthur. He followed through on a number of concessions that Stalin had granted on paper in 1950 but had been very slow to implement.[17] By sending economic aid to China and increasing the number of Soviet advisers from 400 (at the time of Stalin's death) to several thousand,[18] Khrushchev signaled his support for China's development and industrialization.

The Chinese acceptance of aid and of Soviet advisers also signaled a Chinese acceptance of Soviet legitimacy. However, Chinese acceptance of Soviet support was driven mainly by pragmatic considerations and was based on the need to rebuild China's economy after two decades of warfare.[19] Still, Khrushchev's 1954 trip to Beijing, the presence of Soviet advisers, the provision of Soviet economic aid to China, and the exchange of representatives from each country to attend one another's Community Party congresses did consolidate communication channels and act as CBMs, ultimately lowering mutual threat perceptions.

Imbalance in Economic and Military Capabilities

Although the Soviet Union had tested its first nuclear weapon in 1949, China's economic and military capabilities lagged well behind. In the early 1950s, China was isolated in the international arena, excluded from the United Nations (UN), unrecognized by many countries, and acting as the "USSR's chief lieutenant in Asia, fighting the UN forces in Korea and aiding the struggle of Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh against the French in Vietnam."[20] By the end of the war in Korea in 1953, China had incurred almost 800,000 casualties, and it was economically drained "after almost twenty years of continuous warfare."[21] What China had hoped would be a partnership of equals with the Soviet Union ended up being a highly asymmetric relationship.[22] This discrepancy translated not just into the lower status that the Chinese resented but also into an imbalance in the cost of war,[23] with war being more costly and unsustainable for China than for the USSR. The Soviet possession of nuclear weapons helped temporarily stabilize the rivalry but did so because China lacked the means to react proportionally in the economic and military spheres.

Poor and Deteriorating Personal Relationships Between Leaders

Regardless of the extant stabilizing policies between China and the USSR, the personal relationships between the leaders of the two countries had been injecting destabilizing undertones into the relations between the countries themselves. From 1950 to 1953, the relationship between Mao and Stalin was plagued by resentment on Mao's side and disdain on Stalin's. After 1953, Mao's relationship with Khrushchev turned out to be significantly worse than the

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17 Wishnick, 2001, p. 27.

18 Radchenko, 2009, p. 10.

19 Westad, 2017, p. 233.

20 Jeremy Scott Friedman, *Shadow Cold War : The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015, p. 27.

21 Westad, 2017, p. 233.

22 Radchenko, 2009, p. 9.

23 Roberts et al., 2010, p. 137.

one with Stalin,[24] with the rivalry between Khrushchev and Mao deteriorating later in the decade.[25]

To summarize this phase, Soviet possession of nuclear weapons and the imbalance of conventional military forces in the Soviets' favor were counterbalanced by the CBMs the USSR undertook vis-à-vis China, while the Chinese refrained from openly challenging the USSR or its legitimacy during this period. On this basis, Sino-Soviet relations were relatively stable, with both sides acquiescing to form an alliance out of fear of U.S. meddling in the context of mounting Cold War tensions. The (apparent) acceptance of one another's legitimacy, the communication channels, the CBMs, the presence of Soviet nuclear weapons, and the high costs of war for China were all factors contributing to the stability of Sino-Soviet relations and containing the rivalry. Two elements, however, were pointing the relationship toward open rivalry after 1956: the poor relationships between the Soviet and Chinese leaders and the Chinese frustrations with their junior status in the Sino-Soviet alliance.

Increasingly Unstable Competition, 1956–1969

Historical Context

Khrushchev's February 1956 speech promoting peaceful coexistence with the West and de-Stalinization marked the beginning of the end for the Sino-Soviet alliance and the starting point for the gradual intensification of unstable rivalry between the two sides.[26] Although the 1950 alliance treaty was not formally abolished, Sino-Soviet cooperation waned after 1956, while tensions increased in parallel, culminating with the 1969 border conflict.

Although, initially, the Chinese leadership did not openly contradict Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence foreign policy and de-Stalinization approach to internal affairs, the Chinese did deliver a secret memorandum to the Soviet leaders in 1957 expressing their disagreement with the new foreign policy doctrine.[27] Moreover, the newly articulated Soviet policies provided Mao with the ideological ammunition he needed to justify the promotion of his personal ambitions and the rise in China's status within the communist bloc (in that order). After Stalin's death and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's policies, Mao—in his quest for status in the international arena—laid claim to the leadership of the communist world by depicting China as the only true promoter of the revolutionary goals of Marxism-Leninism, in contrast to the Soviet Union, [28] which had become overnight a revisionist power that had sold out to the West.

Aware of China's economic backwardness, especially compared with the Soviet Union, Mao in 1958 launched China onto an economic reform program "intended to turn China into an industrialized power in a few years."[29] The so-called Great Leap Forward ended up having

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[24] Westad, 2017, pp. 12, 31.

[25] Friedman, 2015, p. 51.

[26] Friedman, 2015, p. 25; Westad, 2017, pp. 198–199.

[27] Friedman, 2015, pp. 27–28.

[28] Nicholas Khoo, "Breaking the Ring of Encirclement: The Sino-Soviet Rift and Chinese Policy Toward Vietnam, 1964–1968," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Winter 2010, p. 10; Radchenko, 2009, p. 11.

[29] Radchenko, 2009, p. 12.

disastrous economic and human consequences for the country,[30] with approximately 40 million Chinese dying of starvation and overwork while implementing Mao's economic schemes.[31]

During this period, Sino-Soviet relations gradually deteriorated. Soviet attempts to mend fences with China in the late 1950s and early 1960s remained largely unsuccessful. With the deterioration in relations and increasing instability in the rivalry between the two countries, the USSR declared its "neutrality" regarding a Sino-Indian border war in 1959; Khrushchev withdrew the Soviet experts and advisers from China in 1960; the Chinese tested their first nuclear bomb in 1964; and the increase in Sino-Soviet border skirmishes culminated in the 1969 border conflict, which left the USSR contemplating a surgical strike against Chinese nuclear facilities and the use of tactical nuclear weapons against any Chinese forces entering Soviet territory.[32] The rivalry between the two states became increasingly manifest in their competition over allies in the Third World, especially in East Asia and on the African continent and did not leave the countries in the Eastern European communist bloc untouched, which initially had been aligned with the USSR. All these events fueled a spiral of instability, with each new policy or event further deepening the instability of the rivalry.

As mutual threat perceptions—especially Soviet perceptions of China posing a military threat—intensified throughout the 1960s,[33] the March 1969 border confrontations between Soviet and Chinese troops represented only the culminating event of more than a decade of pervasive instability plaguing the competition between the two countries. The border between China and the USSR was one of the longest in the world, stretching for some 4,150 miles (approximately 7,100 km),[34] and it had never been properly demarcated, constituting a point of friction between the two countries since the 19th century.[35] Since then, skirmishes on both sides of the border had remained prevalent. In the 1960s, both China and the USSR made deliberate choices to politicize the skirmishes in the context of the rising tensions between them.

Determinative Factors

The deepening instability in the Sino-Soviet rivalry was the combined product of several policies and contextual factors, which intensified mutual threat perceptions: (1) policies that signaled a lack of acceptance of one another's ideological legitimacy; (2) the deteriorating personal relationships between the national leaders, which were directly linked to (3) Mao's status considerations regarding the leadership of the communist movement and China's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union; (4) policies that limited CBMs or closed communication channels between the two countries; (5) the increased competition over allies in one another's spheres of influence, such as East Asia and Eastern Europe and on the African continent; (6) China's acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1964, which altered the perceived value and cost of aggression;

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30 Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia, "Jockeying for Leadership: Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1961–July 1964," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Winter 2014, p. 38.

31 Westad, 2017, p. 243.

32 See Westad, 2017, p. 247, and Lyle J. Goldstein, "Do Nascent WMD Arsenals Deter? The Sino-Soviet Crisis of 1969," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 118, No. 1, Spring 2003, p. 57.

33 Wishnick, 2001, p. 6.

34 Wishnick, 2001, p. 24; Wilson, 2004, p. 43.

35 Wilson, 2004, p. 43.

(7) domestic political interests; and (8) the existence of a common enemy, the United States, which served as only a brake on the Sino-Soviet hostilities.

Many of these determinative policies and events were deeply interrelated and influenced one another, contributing to the Soviet perceptions of Chinese revisionism within the communist movement and the international system; to mutual perceptions that the other side posed a major threat to security; and to the high reciprocal perceptions of the rival challenging one's ideological legitimacy. In this light, the violent conflict that started in March 1969 between two nuclear powers on the Sino-Soviet border was a symptom, rather than the cause, of their deteriorating relations. Nonetheless, we will discuss the militarization of the border as a ninth key factor.

Lack of Acceptance of One Another's Ideological Legitimacy

Although the Chinese initially refrained from openly criticizing Khrushchev's 1956 speech and his new foreign policy doctrine, their criticism of his leadership of the communist bloc and of the revisionist policies of the Soviet Union grew gradually louder in the second half of the 1950s, signaling the lack of Chinese acceptance of the USSR's ideological legitimacy. Mao was now openly challenging Khrushchev's and the Soviet Union's leadership and legitimacy not only within the Sino-Soviet alliance but within the entire communist bloc and beyond, including the USSR's allies in the Third World. By questioning Khrushchev's leadership of the socialist movement, Mao attempted to present himself (and China) as the "true revolutionary" and the "ideologically pure" alternative to "Soviet revisionism."[36]

In the aftermath of the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the Chinese became openly and unabashedly critical of Khrushchev's foreign policy. Instead of turning a blind eye to the miscalculation of the Soviet leadership, they amplified and exaggerated the ills of peaceful coexistence, and accused Khrushchev of betraying the national liberation struggle of countries in the Third World. [37] Mao's reaction was based not only on his "self-image as a great revolutionary" but also on his sheer contempt of Khrushchev.[38]

Reciprocal delegitimizing campaigns continued throughout the 1960s, with Chinese propaganda accusing the Soviet leadership of having abandoned the revolutionary principles of Marxism-Leninism,[39] even of having "restored capitalism in the USSR."[40] In response, the Soviets engaged in anti-Chinese propaganda of their own. Beginning in 1967, they sponsored yearly conferences, known as Interkit (or China International), in which Soviet allies from the socialist bloc met to discuss the Chinese threat and to coordinate anti-Chinese propaganda.[41]

Deteriorating Personal Relationships Between the National Leaders

The direct personal rivalry between Mao and Khrushchev for the leadership of the communist bloc resulted in an increasingly unstable rivalry between the two countries. "Mao, more

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[36] Turner, 2011, p. 267.

[37] Li and Xia, 2014, pp. 44–45.

[38] Radchenko, 2009, pp. 25, 42.

[39] Li and Xia, 2014, p. 26.

[40] Radchenko, 2009, p. 16.

[41] James G. Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Péter Vámos, and David Wolff, *The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project, 2011, p. 8.

than any other individual, was responsible for the breakdown of relations with the Soviets."[42] Khrushchev correctly assessed the situation and saw things for what they were: not ideological differences undermining the Sino-Soviet alliance, but Mao's attempt to unseat Khrushchev from the leadership of the communist movement.[43]

When Khrushchev fell from power in October 1964, the rivalry between China and the Soviet Union persisted. The new Soviet leadership of Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin blamed the worsening of Sino-Soviet relations on Khrushchev's leadership style and believed that they could improve relations with China.[44] Therefore, in November 1964, the Soviets received in Moscow a Chinese delegation led by Zhou Enlai, who presented a list of "impossible preconditions for any improvement in relations."[45] In one more attempt to mend fences with the Chinese, Kosygin traveled to Beijing in February 1965, but Mao rejected his attempt to facilitate a rapprochement with China in light of his concerns with China's lower status in the alliance.[46]

Status Considerations

Status considerations on both sides intensified mutual threat perceptions, further deepening the instability of the rivalry. Although Mao profoundly resented China's junior-partner role in the Sino-Soviet alliance,[47] the Soviet leadership resented the resulting Chinese actions aimed at weakening the international standing of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's resentment was based on the inherent disparity in status and capabilities between China and the Soviet Union,[48] with the Soviets being "the first to have a socialist revolution, to industrialize, to defeat Germany, and to launch a rocket into space. The USSR provided a nuclear umbrella for the socialist camp and aided national liberation struggles."[49]

After Khrushchev's removal from power—and on gaining a better understanding of the underlying dynamics of Sino-Soviet relations and of China's ambitions—the new Soviet leadership under Brezhnev and Kosygin opted for a policy of containment toward China.[50] In support of this policy and of defeating Chinese incursions into Soviet territory, the Soviet leaders, starting in 1965, almost doubled the number of military troops massed on the border.[51]

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[42] Radchenko, 2009, pp. 17–18.

[43] Vladislav Zubok, "The Soviet Union and China in the 1980s: Reconciliation and Divorce," *Cold War History*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2017, p. 122.

[44] Lorenz M. Lüthi, "Restoring Chaos to History: Sino-Soviet-American Relations, 1969," *China Quarterly*, Vol. 210, June 2012, p. 380.

[45] Wishnick, 2001, p. 29.

[46] Li and Xia, 2014, pp. 56–57.

[47] Radchenko, 2009, p. 18.

[48] Roberts et al., 2010, p. 137.

[49] Radchenko, 2009, p. 20.

[50] Radchenko, 2009, p. 21.

[51] George C. Denney, Jr., "USSR/China: Soviet and Chinese Forces Clash on the Ussuri River," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Director of Intelligence and Research, National Archives Record Group 59, 1969.

Policies that Limited CBMs or Closed Communication Channels

During the 1959 Sino-Indian war, China perceived Soviet neutrality as de facto siding with India and betraying a friend in need.[52] The episode tainted Chinese perceptions of Soviet foreign policy and eroded Chinese confidence in the Soviet Union.[53] In China's eyes, the USSR was increasingly coming across as duplicitous and closer to Western interests than to those of the communist world.

With mounting Chinese criticism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Soviets became increasingly sensitive to the Chinese attitude toward them. They decided to pull Soviet advisers out of China and to stop providing economic and technical aid in support of its industrialization. The recall of Soviet experts and the reductions in aid harmed China, which was experiencing the disastrous effects of the Great Leap Forward.[54] In another propaganda coup against the Soviet Union, Mao blamed Khrushchev for deliberately sabotaging the Great Leap Forward and Chinese economic development by withdrawing the advisers and aid when he did.[55] These withdrawals marked the beginning of closed communication channels and the gradual end to the CBMs initiated in the early 1950s. By 1966, China stopped sending representatives to the CPSU Congress, marking the official split between the two communist parties.[56]

Competition over Allies in One Another's Spheres of Influence

The instability of the rivalry was further accentuated when China attempted to drive a wedge between the USSR and its allies in Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Africa. During the 1960s, China competed with the USSR over allies in all three regions, directly interfering into the USSR's traditional sphere of influence. In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile crisis, with the Soviet position in the communist world weakened, North Korea, North Vietnam, and the Japanese Communist Party switched sides and joined China.[57] In Eastern Europe, China made efforts to win over East Germany (the German Democratic Republic [GDR]), Hungary, and Poland. Albania had already split with the Soviets,[58] while Romania's Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej took advantage of the Sino-Soviet divisions to distance himself from Moscow.[59]

Chinese propaganda framing Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence as a Soviet "sellout to the West" at the expense of the Third World found very receptive ears in the former colonies across Africa.[60] Many decolonizing states in Africa were embracing a revolutionary road as part of their independence movements, and Chinese propaganda ended up creating problems for Khrushchev in the Third World. In the second half of the 1960s, events in Africa were being perceived to go in China's favor.[61] However, the newly formed African states had to focus on

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52 Y[ang] Kuisong, The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2000, p. 23; Li and Xia, 2014, p. 46.

53 Friedman, 2015, p. 43; Radchenko, 2009, p. 27.

54 Roberts et al., 2010, p. 123.

55 Li and Xia, 2014, p. 38; Radchenko, 2009, p. 14.

56 Wishnick, 2001, p. 7.

57 Li and Xia, 2014, p. 51.

58 Li and Xia, 2014, p. 33.

59 Hershberg et al., 2011, p. 9.

60 Radchenko, 2009, p. 20.

61 Friedman, 2015, p. 56.

economic reconstruction soon after proclaiming their independence, and the USSR had more to offer than China did in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward and during the Cultural Revolution.[62] This reality was not lost on the Soviets, who responded to Chinese propaganda in two ways: (1) with propaganda of their own and (2) by pointing out that the battles for national liberation in the Third World were being fought with Soviet weapons and materiel, Soviet funding, and sometimes even with Soviet soldiers, with the Chinese bringing nothing to the table except for a lot of ideological and revolutionary talk.

China's Acquisition of Nuclear Weapons

China raised its status internationally and within the communist movement when it tested its first atomic bomb in 1964. For Mao, the acquisition of nuclear weapons had been a matter of status ever since the 1950s, when he first attempted to persuade the Soviets to help China build the bomb. The Soviets had been reluctant to do so because of Mao's perceived militancy and their perception that China would not be a responsible nuclear power.[63] However, by 1957, Khrushchev reluctantly agreed to supply China with a prototype nuclear weapon, which was never delivered.[64] The Soviets reneged on their pledge in the context of the 1959 Sino-Indian border war that China had initiated.[65] Fearing future Chinese aggression in the region, the Soviets withdrew their support for the Chinese nuclear program.

By that point, however, the USSR had already transferred enough technology and know-how to the Chinese to enable them to produce their own bomb in 1964. Chinese capabilities remained rather rudimentary during the 1960s, lacking a second-strike capability.[66] Although a nuclear China did not pose an existential threat to the USSR, which had a more-developed nuclear program and possessed second-strike capabilities, the Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons did not have a stabilizing effect on the competition, either. On the contrary, by the fall of 1969, amid rising border tensions with the USSR, the Chinese genuinely feared either the outbreak of conventional war with the USSR or the use of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons against China.

Domestic Politics and Rivalries

In China, Mao used the existence of a domestic contender for power within the Communist Party—Liu Shaoqi[67]—to embark on policies that further destabilized the rivalry with the Soviet Union. In Mao's own words, "there was a connection between revisionism at home and abroad."[68] By portraying Liu Shaoqi and other domestic rivals as ideologically aligned with Soviet revisionism and by ramping up rhetoric and propaganda against Soviet revisionism, Mao aimed to discredit his domestic rivals while simultaneously worsening the already ailing Sino-Soviet relations.[69]

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62 Friedman, 2015, p. 59.

63 Khoo, 2010, p. 12.

64 William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle': The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–64," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Winter 2000–2001, p. 58.

65 Goldstein, 2003, p. 57.

66 Goldstein, 2003, pp. 70–71.

67 Radchenko, 2009, p. 47.

68 Westad, 2017, p. 250.

69 Roberts et al., 2010, p. 127.

The internal turmoil generated during the Cultural Revolution further destabilized the Sino-Soviet rivalry. Mao's anti-Soviet propaganda messages that were spread internally during the Cultural Revolution instigated China's Red Guards to lay siege to the Soviet embassy in Beijing twice in 1967 and to attack Soviet and foreign diplomatic cars when driving across town in Beijing.[70] Simultaneously, the Chinese were engaging in provocative behavior on Soviet soil. Chinese students visiting Lenin's mausoleum in fall 1966 started to read out loud from Mao's "Little Red Book" in front of Lenin's tomb, disrupting the access of other visitors. Soviet guards forcibly removed the students. Chinese media portrayed the incident in a very unfavorable light for the Soviet Union, exacerbating hatred against the USSR and its diplomatic representatives in China.

Existence of a Common Ideological Enemy

As the episodes we have described illustrate, the United States played little to no role in the fracture of the Sino-Soviet alliance, the emergence of the Sino-Soviet rivalry, or the stabilization of competition between the two countries. The presence of the United States as a common ideological enemy only delayed the open breakdown in relations, for fear of the security implications. Both sides—but especially China—refrained from an official public Sino-Soviet split for fear that such a separation would leave them vulnerable to a U.S. attack.[71]

Militarization of the Border—and the 1969 Border War

After 1965, the Soviet policy of containment toward China resulted in massive troop deployments to militarize the poorly delineated Sino-Soviet border.[72] This containment policy coincided with an escalation in military tensions related to the Sino-Soviet border dispute.[73] Mutual perceptions of threat started to prevail in the second half of the 1960s. In its 1966 signing of a mutual defense treaty with Mongolia,[74] the USSR acknowledged China as a threat.[75] After 1967, the USSR deployed troops in Mongolia,[76] increasing Chinese perceptions of the Soviet threat. The number of troops that both sides mobilized on the border increased.[77] Following the 1964 breakdown in talks about the demarcation of the border,[78] the number of border skirmishes quadrupled, from 1,000 in the January 1960 to October 1964 period to 4,189 from October 1964 to March 1969,[79] culminating in 1969 with violent confrontations taking place between March and September.

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[70] Wishnick, 2001, pp. 29–30; Central Intelligence Agency, *Mao's Red Guard Diplomacy: 1967*, Langley, Va., 1968, pp. 12, 15.

[71] Turner, 2011, p. 265; Radchenko, 2009, p. 49.

[72] Wishnick, 2001, p. 3.

[73] Kuisong, 2000, p. 23.

[74] Mongolia and the USSR: Friendship Treaty, Ulan Bator, January 15, 1986.

[75] Kuisong, 2000, p. 24.

[76] Hershberg et al., 2011, p. 11.

[77] For details regarding Soviet militarization of the border, see Allen S. Whiting, "Sino-Soviet Hostilities and Implications for U.S. Policy," National Security Archive, George Washington University, August 16, 1969, p. 2.

[78] Central Intelligence Agency, "Weekly Review," May 16, 1969, p. 6.

[79] Khoo, 2010, p. 13.

China's initiation of the clashes at Zhenbao Island in March 1969 confirmed Soviet fears of Chinese military expansionism. The Soviets responded by further militarizing their side of the border, to which China reciprocated. In a very short time, the conflict unintentionally escalated, with the Chinese side perceiving a high risk of war with the USSR breaking out.[80] On September 11, 1969, Kosygin and Zhou Enlai met at Beijing airport to discuss an end to the violence. During the meeting, both sides agreed to engage in border talks and not to use conventional military and nuclear forces against one another.[81] However, the Chinese side remained highly skeptical of Soviet intentions and on high alert during fall and winter 1969. The Chinese feared the outbreak of war with the USSR,[82] including a possible Soviet nuclear strike,[83] at any moment.

The 1969 war scare was considered "unprecedented in the history of the People's Republic of China,"[84] with August 1969 accounts of Beijing residents digging up underground tunnels in preparation for an aerial or nuclear Soviet strike.[85] The closing line of a June 1969 intelligence note, issued by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, summarized very well the Chinese perceptions and thinking that drove the dynamics of the 1969 border conflict: "The experience of the Korean War shows, however, that Peking is extremely sensitive to the presence of hostile forces on its borders and credible threats to its integrity, and is capable of reacting even when faced by superior power."[86] A Chinese military report issued in the summer of 1969 revealed China's assessment of the Soviet threat as posing a higher threat to China than to the United States. The report also acknowledged that both superpowers "hated China because of its successful Communism and the gains of its Cultural Revolution."[87]

To summarize this phase, Sino-Soviet tensions increased from 1956 until 1969 as the rivalry moved beyond reciprocal propaganda attacks and minor border skirmishes to a full-blown violent confrontation initiated by the Chinese.[88] China's quest for status precluded the success of consecutive Soviet overtures for rapprochement. The Chinese development of a nuclear capability, the mutual challenges to one another's ideological legitimacy, the gradual closing of communication channels between the two sides, the competition for allies in one another's spheres of influence, and the military buildup on the border are some of the policies and factors that affected the mutual threat perceptions and the stability of the rivalry between China and the Soviet Union. These factors were interrelated and acted in tandem to

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80 Kuisong, 2000, p. 22.

81 Kuisong, 2000, p. 39.

82 Kuisong, 2000, pp. 22, 39.

83 Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Communist China: War Fears and Domestic Politics," intelligence note, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, September 18, 1969, p. 1.

84 Kuisong, 2000, p. 41.

85 Westad, 2017, p. 255; Wishnick, 2001, p. 36.

86 Thomas L. Hughes, "Communist China: Peking Inflates Soviet War Threat," intelligence note to the Secretary of State, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Director of Intelligence and Research, June 3, 1969, p. 4.

87 Westad, 2017, p. 4

88 William Burr, "Sino-American Relations, 1969: The Sino-Soviet Border War and Steps Towards *Rapprochement*," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 3, April 2001, pp. 80–81.

increase Soviet perceptions of Chinese revisionism and to heighten mutually perceived threats to security.

Unstable Competition, 1969–1989

Historical Context

The 1969 border conflict ended in September with the meeting between Kosygin and Zhou Enlai, who decided to pursue border talks between the two countries. The first round of talks opened in Beijing in October 1969,[89] but the result was inconclusive. For the following decade, border talks would remain inconclusive (but served as rare channels of open communication between the rivals). After the 1969 border conflict, the Soviet attitude toward China hardened,[90] and the Sino-Soviet rivalry remained unstable for at least another 15 years.[91]

One unintended consequence of the 1969 border war was the rapprochement between China and the United States, with President Richard Nixon traveling to China in February 1972.[92] Also during this period, the United States and the Soviet Union experienced a détente in their relations.[93] During the 1970s, both China and the Soviet Union were more likely to perceive each other, rather than the United States, as a direct threat to security.[94]

Mao's death in 1976 did not result in a discernable improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, as the Soviets would have hoped. With the accession to power of Deng Xiaoping and his adoption of economic policies opening up the Chinese economy,[95] the CCP was no longer in a position to accuse the Soviet Union of revisionism and of peaceful coexistence with the West. But even if tensions in the rivalry seemed to subside once China abandoned its claim to leadership of the communist movement, they mounted again in December 1978 when Vietnam invaded Cambodia. With Soviet assistance, Vietnam removed the Khmer Rouge, which China considered to be an ally, from power.[96] The Soviet support for Vietnam during the war with Cambodia exacerbated Chinese fears of Soviet encirclement and contributed to the perpetuation of the unstable rivalry.[97] The situation only worsened when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979,[98] confirming Chinese fears of Soviet military expansionism.

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89 Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, "Sino-Soviet Border Talks: Problems and Prospects," Langley, Va.: Office of Current Intelligence, November 10, 1969, p. 1.

90 Wishnick, 2001, p. 11.

91 In 1985, Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the CPSU, and his impact on Sino-Soviet relations will be discussed at the end of this subsection (Wishnick, 2001, p. 9).

92 Kuisong, 2000, pp. 21, 48; Roberts et al., 2010, p. 127.

93 Westad, 2017, pp. 475–476.

94 Hershberg et al., 2011, p. 21.

95 Martin Albers and Zhong Zhong Chen, "Socialism Capitalism and Sino-European Relations in the Deng Xiaoping Era, 1978–1992," *Cold War History*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2017.

96 Hershberg et al., 2011, p. 23; Westad, 2017, p. 491.

97 Alsu Tagirova, "Soviet Public Diplomacy in China: 'Small Steps' Towards Bilateral Rapprochement (1978–1985)," *Cold War History*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2017, p. 412.

98 Westad, 2017, p. 495.

As the Soviet economy stagnated and declined in the early 1980s,[99] resulting in a chronic shortage of basic consumer goods, Brezhnev gave a speech in Tashkent in March 1982.[100] In the speech, he recognized China's claim to Taiwan. He stated that the Soviet Union was not a threat to China and made explicit the Soviet desire to normalize bilateral relations between the two countries. The Chinese remained skeptical of Soviet intentions, responding that "Moscow's sincerity would be judged by its actions around the world and not by its words."[101]

The 1985 transition in Soviet leadership, with Gorbachev becoming the new General Secretary of the CPSU, marked the beginning of a thaw in relations between China and the Soviet Union, for the first time in almost three decades.[102] (In the years following the 1969 border war, both countries aimed to prevent the outbreak of another violent conflict between them, and each side tried at various points to normalize relations.[103] But neither side registered any success on this front until Gorbachev's 1985 rise to power.) Relations did not stabilize until the Beijing summit in May 1989, when Gorbachev visited China; but from 1985 to 1989, the rivalry seemed to be put temporarily on the back burner, while both sides focused on domestic economic and political reforms. Gorbachev's 1989 trip to Beijing represented a turning point in the Sino-Soviet rivalry, with relations between the two countries stabilizing beyond that point.

Determinative Factors

From the end of the border conflict in September 1969 to Gorbachev's visit to Beijing in May 1989, instability in the rivalry between China and the Soviet Union persisted to varying degrees.[104] The destabilizing factors during this period were (1) the status considerations on both sides, combined with policies signaling the lack of acceptance of one another's ideological legitimacy; (2) closed communication channels; (3) military buildups; and (4) the presence of nuclear weapons. Acting in an interrelated manner, these factors heightened Soviet perceptions of the Chinese side as revisionist, drove mutual perceptions of the other side as posing a significant threat to one's security, and prolonged the rivalry's instability. Yet two other determinative factors had countervailing effects during this period: (5) leadership changes and their impacts on personal relationships, and (6) the return of CBMs.

Status Considerations Combined with the Lack of Acceptance of One Another's Ideological Legitimacy

Mutual attempts to delegitimize one another were part of the larger Chinese quest for status and Mao's appraisal "that China should become a superpower and the determination of Soviet leadership to prevent it."[105] China and the Soviet Union continued to engage in reciprocal propaganda to undermine one another's ideological legitimacy. However, after 1969, Chinese anti-

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[99] Westad, 2017, p. 527.

[100] Zubok, 2017, p. 123.

[101] Tagirova, 2017, p. 416.

[102] Wilson, 2004, p. 21.

[103] Wishnick, 2001, p. 12.

[104] Wishnick, 2001, p. 7.

[105] Radchenko, 2009, p. 16.

Soviet propaganda focused on the danger of Soviet military expansionism and imperialism, portraying the Soviet military buildup on the border as chauvinistic and as a threat to China.

Closed Communication Channels and Lack of CBMs

After 1969, few communication channels were left open between the rivals, while CBMs were also almost nonexistent during this period. The border talks represented the only open medium of communication and interaction between Chinese and Soviet officials, with very few official visits or exchanges taking place from 1969 to 1979. After the 1967 sieges of the Soviet embassy in Beijing, the attacks on Soviet diplomats during the Cultural Revolution, and the 1969 Chinese-initiated border conflict,[106] diplomatic exchanges between the two countries remained minimal.

Military Buildups

After September 1969, both China and the Soviet Union continued their military buildups on the border, and each country perceived the other as its direct enemy—instead of the United States or Japan, with which both countries had engaged in détente. From 1969 to 1973, the USSR tripled the number of troops it had mobilized on the border in 1965, and almost all Soviet divisions deployed on the border had tactical nuclear weapons at their disposal.[107] In spite of their nuclear weapons, the Soviets felt vulnerable to Chinese military attacks because of the large size of the Chinese population and the anticipated difficulties in maintaining open lines of communications with the area in case of a military attack.[108] The Soviet military posture was essentially maintained at the highest level up until the Soviet Union's collapse, when the Sino-Soviet border districts had about twice as many Soviet troops, tanks, and artillery systems as the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany had at the same time.[109]

Presence of Nuclear Weapons

After 1969, nuclear weapons continued to fail to have a stabilizing effect on the rivalry. The militarization of the border persisted despite the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides. The lack of a stabilizing effect of nuclear weapons on the Sino-Soviet rivalry can be explained not only by the lack of Chinese second-strike capabilities, the imbalance in the nuclear arsenal between the two countries, and the still rudimentary quality of Chinese nuclear weapons relative to those of the USSR but also by the imbalance in population size in China's favor and the large geographical areas of both countries.[110]

Leadership Changes and Their Effects on Personal Relationships Among Leaders

The leadership transitions that China and the Soviet Union experienced sequentially from 1976 to 1985 affected the stability of the rivalry. After Mao's death in 1976, the ensuing struggle for power left the Chinese leadership temporarily divided. In the end, Deng emerged

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[106] Kuisong, 2000, p. 21.

[107] Wishnick, 2001, p. 30.

[108] Wishnick, 2001, p. 31.

[109] For instance, in 1990, the Trans-Baikal Military District had 260,000 troops; 3,100 tanks; 3,900 artillery systems; and about 200 helicopters. The Far Eastern Military District had about 370,000 troops; 6,000 tanks; 5,800 artillery systems; and 300 helicopters (Vasiliy B. Kashin, "The Sum Total of All Fears," *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January–March 2013).

[110] Goldstein, 2003, p. 70.

as the winner, and he shifted China's orientation inward. Continuing Mao's quest to improve China's status in the world, Deng focused on promoting economic development instead of prioritizing Chinese leadership of the communist movement.[111] In the early 1980s, the USSR's leadership was also dysfunctional and in disarray under an old and ailing Brezhnev who, by the end of his rule, was automatically signing communiqués put in front of him by his aides.[112] Parallel to the changes China experienced with Deng's accession to power, the Soviet Union after 1985 under the leadership of Gorbachev embarked on a path of political and economic reforms—*perestroika* and *glasnost*—designed to prevent the decline of the USSR. The internal turbulences occurring during the sequential transitions in Chinese and Soviet leaderships from 1976 to 1985 made it difficult for both Chinese and Soviet leaders to forge personal relationships conducive to a rapprochement between the two countries.

However, Gorbachev's 1985 rise to General Secretary of the CPSU marked the beginning of the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations.[113] Between 1985 and 1989, both China and the Soviet Union took small steps toward rapprochement; at the same time, each remained cautious and suspicious of the intentions of the other. But their simultaneous focus on domestic matters, together with the end of the proclaimed ideological competition between them and the cessation of challenges to each other's ideological legitimacy, reduced threat perceptions on both sides, facilitating the normalization in relations.

Return of CBMs

The decisive turning point in the relationship was Gorbachev's trip to Beijing in May 1989 to attend the first Sino-Soviet summit organized after the 1969 border conflict. The visit took place in the same broad time period as the Tiananmen Square protests, which had taken place only a few days before Gorbachev arrived in Beijing. Gorbachev refrained from critiquing his Chinese hosts for their handling of the protests and publicly maintained a neutral position, given the now-traditional Soviet statement that the Soviet Union would not interfere in the domestic matters of other countries, with the protests being an internal Chinese matter.[114] The Chinese appreciated Gorbachev's restraint during and after the Tiananmen Square events and took the Soviet restraint as a sign of bona fides toward the stabilization of the Sino-Soviet rivalry. At the meeting, Gorbachev and Deng agreed to "close the past and open the future,"[115] moving Sino-Soviet relations into a new era of stable competition.

To summarize this phase, the rivalry between China and the Soviet Union remained unstable from 1969 to 1985. The instability was rooted in status considerations, which were closely linked with signaling a lack of acceptance of one another's ideological legitimacy; the militarization of the border and the military buildups by both sides,[116] which heightened their mutual threat perceptions; the absence of communication channels and CBMs; and an imbalance in the quantity and quality of nuclear arsenals between the two countries. From 1979 to 1989, successive changes in the Chinese and Soviet leaderships resulted in policies that opened

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[111] Wilson, 2004, p. 9; Zubok, 2017, p. 122.

[112] Westad, 2017, p. 527.

[113] Wishnick, 2001, p. 188.

[114] Wilson, 2004, p. 22.

[115] Wishnick, 2001, p. 23.

[116] Hershberg et al., 2011, p. 2.

both countries to the world, with small, gradual steps being taken toward rapprochement. These steps attenuated mutual threat perceptions, with the Sino-Soviet rivalry transitioning into a new phase of stable competition.

Stable Competition, 1989–2001

Historical Context

After Gorbachev's 1989 trip to Beijing, relations with China started to improve. The rivalry between the two countries gradually shifted from unstable to stable, culminating in 2001 with the signing of The Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, which marked the end of their rivalry.

The stabilization of relations between China and the Soviet Union came in the context of the end of the Cold War, with the Soviet Union on the losing side of the confrontation. Hence, after the December 1991 dismemberment of the USSR,[117] with 15 newly independent states taking its place, two phenomena occurred simultaneously that had stabilizing effects on the Sino-Soviet rivalry: (1) the rise of China as an economic and military power and (2) the precipitous economic and military decline of the newly formed Russian Federation.

At the helm of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev. Initially, the Chinese leadership was not happy with this change and with Yeltsin's abandonment of communist ideology in favor of democracy and Western values.[118] But as he grew disillusioned with the West in 1992–1993,[119] and with economic liberalization and privatization backfiring domestically, he turned toward China, realizing the importance of stabilizing and consolidating relations with his largest neighbor.[120] The economic decline also motivated Russian acquiescence to demarcate the border and to resolve this decades-long issue between the two countries.

From 1989 to 2001, the bilateral relationship strengthened steadily through three stages:

1. Reconciliation (1989–1993): In 1992, the Sino-Russian summit concluded with the signing of a joint declaration setting the tone for future interactions. According to the declaration, Russia and China regarded "each other as friends" and "agreed not to enter into any alliances against each other."[121]
2. Constructive partnership (1993–1996): In September 1994,[122] during Jiang's trip to Moscow—the first of a Chinese president since 1957—Russia and China signed an agreement demarcating the western part of their border and agreed not to "target each

[117] Westad, 2017, pp. 614–615.

[118] Wilson, 2004, p. 9; Wishnick, 2001, p. 122. Although initially China was unhappy with Boris Yeltsin and his initial anticommunist stance, the Chinese leadership were rooting for him to win his election by 1996 because they were familiar with his modus operandi and had been able to reach an accommodation with him and his administration.

[119] Wishnick, 2001, p. 18.

[120] Wishnick, 2001, p. 189.

[121] Wishnick, 2001, p. 124.

[122] Wilson, 2004, p. 6.

other with nuclear weapons and to non-first-use of nuclear weapons against each other," thus raising the status of their relationship to that of a "constructive partnership."[123]

3. Strategic partnership (1996–2001):[124] At the April 1996 Sino-Russian summit, the bilateral relationship was upgraded to a "strategic partnership,"[125] with the two countries "cooperating in matters of strategy," including the transition to a multipolar system.[126]

In July 2001, the two countries decided to upgrade and elevate their strategic partnership and signed the Sino-Russian Friendship Treaty, formalizing the end of their rivalry.[127]

Determinative Factors

From 1989 to 2001, relations between China and the Soviet Union (Russia after 1991) shifted from unstable to stable competition. Policies and measures undertaken on both sides, over the course of more than a decade of interaction, gradually consolidated the stability of Sino-Russian relations, moving them from reconciliation in 1989 to a dissolution of the rivalry in 2001. The determinative factors contributing to the stabilization of the rivalry included (1) the opening of communication channels; (2) the presence of CBMs; (3) the economic dependence of the Russian military-industrial complex on sales to China; (4) the resolution of prior status considerations; and (5) the existence of a common enemy, the United States. The three key mutual threat perceptions—of the adversary as revisionist, as posing a significant threat to security, and as challenging ideological legitimacy—gradually disappeared. With the disappearance of these perceptions, the rivalry between China and Russia ended.

Opening of Communication Channels

Communication channels between China and the Soviet Union were officially reopened with the May 1989 Sino-Soviet summit in Beijing. The joint statement issued at the end of the meeting outlined the agreement between the countries on a number of international issues, including their mutual aversion to hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.[128] Bilateral border talks (related to the demilitarization of the border)[129] and high-level visits and exchanges between Chinese and Russian officials proliferated after 1989, facilitating communication between the two sides. The countries cooperated closely in different international fora, such as the UN Security Council. At Gorbachev's initiative, the border between China and the Soviet Union was opened in 1989 to facilitate contact between the Soviet and Chinese peoples. In May 1991, the USSR and China signed an agreement—ratified by both countries' legislative bodies in February 1992—in which they "legally established their eastern border."[130]

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[123] Wishnick, 2001, p. 126.

[124] Wishnick, 2001, p. 121.

[125] Wilson, 2004, p. 6.

[126] Wishnick, 2001, p. 129.

[127] According to Wilson, 2004, p. 36: "While the treaty did not bind the two states together in a formal alliance, it did impose certain conditions on their interactions with third parties. Article 8 specified that 'neither party will participate in any alliance or bloc which damages the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of the other party.'"

[128] Wilson, 2004, p. 144.

[129] Wilson, 2004, p. 3.

[130] Wishnick, 2001, p. 122.

Presence of CBMs

The CBMs included the removal of troops from the border area, the demilitarization of the border, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.[131] The latter, in particular, influenced Chinese perceptions of the threat of Soviet military expansionism. By November 1992, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, together with China and Russia, agreed to CBMs "within 100 km from the border,"[132] and two accords were signed among the five states in 1996 and 1997. These *five-party agreements* created the first multilateral arms control regime in Asia. The regime was integral to the process of transforming what was once an arena of military confrontation into a zone of cooperation among the security forces of neighboring states. The 1996 and 1997 agreements acted as important CBMs and reduced threat perceptions between China and Russia. The 1996 agreement focused on avoiding armed conflict in the border region and increasing military decision times by means of notifications, restraints, information exchanges, and other CBMs among the militaries of the signatories, which came to be known as the Shanghai Five.[133] Having settled on the CBMs, the five parties moved on to talks related to reductions of forces. The final agreement—"On the Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces in the Border Area"—was signed in Moscow on April 24, 1997, and became known as the Moscow Agreement. The treaty allowed for two sensitive zones in and around the cities of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk, which were exempt from inspections but still subject to the reduction and notification provisions.

Furthermore, after 1991, Russian sales and licensing of military technology to China assuaged Chinese fears of Russian expansionism. From 1992 to 1994, 97 percent of Chinese weapons were purchased from Russia.[134] (The sales and transfers of military equipment and technology from Russia to China were not the result of close military cooperation between the two countries, however, but were purely economic transactions that were advantageous to both sides.)

Russian Economic Dependence on Military Sales to China

Trade between Russia and China remained low during the 1990s, despite statements and efforts from both sides to raise it to $20 billion per year. Trade between the two countries had never again reached the levels preceding the 1969 breakup in Sino-Soviet relations.[135] Hence, economic interdependence did not play a role in the Sino-Russian rapprochement, but the moribund Russian military-industrial complex did rely heavily on arms sales to China to stay afloat.[136] These sales also acted as CBMs between the two rivals and placated Chinese fears of Russian expansionism.

Resolution of Status Considerations

China's status considerations vis-à-vis the Soviet Union were resolved with the USSR losing the Cold War and disintegrating into 15 independent states. In the new post–Cold War geopoliti-

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[131] Zubok, 2017, p. 136.

[132] Wishnick, 2001, p. 123.

[133] Wilson, 2004, p. 31.

[134] Wishnick, 2001, p. 144.

[135] Wilson, 2004, pp. 61–67, 70–71.

[136] Wishnick, 2001, p. 188; Wilson, 2004, pp. 32–33, 94.

cal context, China was no longer the junior partner in the relationship and felt secure enough in its position vis-à-vis the Russian Federation to manage Russian great-power sensibilities and not remind Russia that it was now the junior partner.[137] The Russian leaders did not need to be reminded of their country's inferior status to China. The worsening economic situation in the Russian Federation, including the 1998 ruble crisis, made Russian leaders very much aware that Russia needed a stable, peaceful relationship with China. Because of Russia's military power and residual global role, this factor has not yet prompted the relationship to become unstable but could do so over time if China's relative status in the relationship continues to grow.

Existence of a Common Enemy

In the new geopolitical environment of the 1990s and in the absence of their old ideological dividing lines, Russia and China actively promoted the concept of *multipolarity*.[138] By promoting a multipolar world, they sought to erode the legitimacy of the United States as the sole superpower atop the unipolar system that had emerged at the end of the Cold War. Common opposition to U.S. unipolarity became a unifying factor in Russian-Chinese relations after 1991.[139] Both Russia and China watched the eastward expansion of NATO warily; in 1999, they voiced their opposition to NATO intervention in Yugoslavia.[140]

Remaining Frictions and Outstanding Concerns

From 1989 to 2001, Chinese immigration to the Russian Far East—although highly exaggerated for domestic political reasons—remained the only major point of friction between Russia and China.[141] Russian fears of Chinese government–sanctioned expansion across the border led to rising xenophobia in the region,[142] the suspension of free-visa travel of Chinese to Russia,[143] the deportation of Chinese residents (particularly the illegal ones) living in the border regions,[144] and general concern about Chinese economic and military involvement in the Russian Far East. However, the tensions associated with Chinese immigration to the Russian Far East were sufficiently placated by the CBMs and other aspects of interaction—the opening and maintenance of communication channels, the favorable resolution of Chinese status concerns vis-à-vis Russia, and the existence of a common enemy in the United States—to allow the signing of the 2001 treaty and the end of the Sino-Russian rivalry.

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[137] Wilson, 2004, pp. 10–11.

[138] Wishnick, 2001, p. 131.

[139] Wishnick, 2001, pp. 121,131.

[140] Wishnick, 2001, pp. 148–149; Wilson, 2004, pp. 12–13.

[141] For more details on Chinese migration to the Russian Far East and its impact on Sino-Russian relations, see Wilson, 2004, pp. 122–128.

[142] Wishnick, 2001, p. 154; Wilson, 2004, p. 9.

[143] Wilson, 2004, p. 125.

[144] Wishnick, 2001, p. 169.

Factors That Promoted Stable and Unstable Competition

From 1950 to 2001, relations between China and the Soviet Union/Russia came full circle,[145] starting with the 1950 signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty and ending with the 2001 signing of a new friendship treaty that ended their rivalry and reaffirmed their ties. This is a story of a very unstable rivalry eventually stabilizing and finally transforming to such an extent that it no longer qualified as a rivalry. The relationship went through several stages: (1) incipient rivalry from 1950 to 1956; (2) increasingly unstable rivalry from 1956 through 1969, culminating in the 1969 border conflict; (3) unstable rivalry from 1969 to 1989, characterized by few diplomatic and economic exchanges, sporadic unsuccessful attempts to improve relations in the 1970s and early 1980s, and a gradual thaw in relations from 1985 to 1989 under Gorbachev, which led to (4) increasingly stable rivalry from May 1989, when Gorbachev attended the Sino-Soviet summit in Beijing, until the 2001 signing of a new alliance treaty between the two countries. From 1989 to 2001, Sino-Soviet relations continually stabilized, resulting in the settlement of border disputes, the gradual stabilization of competition, and the end of the rivalry. The poorly demarcated border between the states was less a cause of conflict than a symptom of larger political tensions that were often motivated by competition for the status of leader of the communist world and for status in the international system.

Status considerations, especially on the Chinese side, represented the most significant driver of instability. Chinese status considerations influenced mutual threat perceptions and initiated a security dilemma. The relationship stabilized once China achieved not an equal but a dominant status in the dyadic relationship, once the threat perceptions decreased on both sides. These shifts took place over several decades amid the parallel increase in Chinese economic and military capabilities and decline in Russian economic and military might. Although Mao was long gone, the Chinese quest for status in world politics outlived him and persisted throughout the 1980s, and the Russian-Chinese rivalry became stable only when China's need to dominate and surpass Russia in world affairs was satisfied—*and* once both sides stopped perceiving one another as revisionist, as posing a significant threat to one another's security, and as challenging one another's ideological legitimacy.

Factors Critical to the Stability of the Rivalry

The discussion in this chapter has highlighted many factors from the framework offered in Chapter Three that proved important to the stability of the Sino-Soviet rivalry. The chapter has already identified them clearly; here, we review the basic factors:

- perception (or lack thereof) of a common enemy
- open or closed communication channels
- pride, prestige, and status considerations related to relative position, especially in the communist world
- lack of acceptance of each other's legitimacy in a specific way—in terms of ideological legitimacy
- strong or weak personal relationships
- competition over spheres of influence

[145] Wishnick, 2001, p. 3.

- the perceived value or cost of aggression, specifically related to China's acquisition of nuclear weapons
- the shifting role of domestic political interests.

These factors changed over time, both in their intensity and whether they exercised a positive or negative effect on stability. In some cases, communication channels were strong, in some cases not; the status-based rivalry in the communist bloc was at times severe and at times mild. But the case generally illustrates that these factors had a significant effect on stability in this rivalry.

Implications for Current Competitions

The ebb and flow of Sino-Soviet relations has implications for current-day U.S. competitions involving China and Russia along four lines: (1) status considerations, (2) national leader ambitions (which are closely related to status considerations), (3) domestic political divisions and rivalries, and (4) changes in threat perceptions.

First, considerations of status—especially relative status—represent some of the most important factors in determining whether a rivalry is stable or unstable. China and the Soviet Union were extremely sensitive to their relative status, with Chinese great-power ambitions driving much of the instability in their relationship from the 1950s to the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union lost the Cold War and ceased to exist as a political entity. Status considerations surpassed ideological ones and even drove an ideological wedge between the two countries, with China presenting itself as the true inheritor of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist principles and portraying the Soviet Union as a revisionist power that had sold out to the West. The importance of status for both China and Russia is likely to drive their individual relationships with the United States and to influence the stability of both the current and future Sino-American and Russo-American competitions.

Second, although positive relationships between national leaders in the Sino-Russian case had little effect on the stability of the rivalry and were subservient to status considerations, a competitive or negative relationship between the national leaders exacerbated the instability of the rivalry. Their personal ambitions and personal quest for status translated into policies and measures—such as the acquisition of nuclear capabilities—that further destabilized the rivalry and increased tensions. In the present-day rivalries of both countries with the United States, there are similar dynamics, with political decisions made on behalf of Russia and China actually serving the personal quests for status of presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping.

Third, Chinese domestic political divisions were redirected externally and had a negative effect on the relation with the Soviet Union. Chairman Mao's attempts to consolidate power in China and to eliminate his rivals in the Communist Party translated into increased anti-Soviet propaganda and actions, injecting instability into the rivalry. On the other hand, Russian domestic political divisions had less impact externally and on the stability of the rivalry.

Fourth, mutual threat perceptions acted as an intermediary mechanism, provoked by status considerations, policies, and actions. Changes in mutual threat perceptions drove not only the level of stability within the rivalry but the absence or presence of the rivalry itself. When mutual threat perceptions were absent or very low, the rivalry was either absent or kept at a simmer. With the exacerbation in mutual threat perceptions associated with status revisionism, challenges to ideological legitimacy, and state security, the rivalry not only intensified but became unstable. When threat perceptions reverted to lower levels after 1989, the compe-

tition gradually stabilized, waned, and ultimately dissipated. The implication for current-day rivalries is that changes in threat perceptions are likely to have similar effects on the level of stability of competitive relationships, including on the existence of the rivalries themselves.

To summarize, status considerations at both the national and individual levels were the key drivers of instability in the Sino-Russian rivalry, directly affecting mutual threat perceptions. Status considerations are closely related to a number of other factors and policies that affect mutual threat perceptions and rivalry stability: acceptance of one another's legitimacy, competition on peripheral matters, perceived cost of aggression, and identification of a common enemy. These factors and policies can be present either independently or in tandem with status considerations; when they act in combination with the latter, the effects on mutual threat perceptions and the resulting intensity of a competition often become accentuated.

CHAPTER SIX

Case Study: The Cold War, 1947–1989

To help understand the stability of the Cold War strategic rivalry, we employed the theoretical framework of variables outlined in Chapter Three (see Figure 3.1). We grouped the analysis into three sections: one examining the eight national policies the participants adopted; one examining three of the eight contextual factors (as we will explain later, the Cold War case analysis suggested that several of these factors were less relevant to this period); and, finally, a shorter section evaluating the implications for and effects of the national policies and contextual factors on the five perceptual factors, which, according to this framework, are the immediate factors that lead to stability or instability.

Our approach to this case therefore differs from the previous ones: Although each of the older historical cases was presented as a largely chronological narrative with lessons at the end, we approached the Cold War more formally through the lens of the framework and assessed each variable independently. We chose this approach in large part because of the far more extensive historical evidence available to assess individual variables.

For a subject as massive as the Cold War, we could not hope to examine every event or trend in detail. Instead, we reviewed a range of case evidence available for each variable and derived several leading implications. Each section below thus includes a set of overall lessons and implications for evaluating the stability of a strategic rivalry.

In the process, the variables in total speak to the two essential characteristics of a stable rivalry proposed by the framework: the mutual acceptance of a shared status quo and an inherent resilience and ability to return to an equilibrium despite shocks. The story of this chapter does not add up to a neat verdict on either count in terms of the essential stability of the Cold War competition. Very generally, there was never an agreed status quo, in the sense that each country sought fairly zero-sum ultimate goals relative to the other—a transformation of its political-economic system. Fairly early, on the other hand, the two sides *did* concur on an agreed status quo in terms of mutual nuclear deterrence and managed to grope their way toward agreed status quos on specific issues, such as the stability of Western European democracies. At the same time, the competition sometimes reflected elements of equilibrium—managing to return to some degree of coordinated stability after crises—but was always subject to massive swings based in part on misperceptions, as late as the 1983 Able Archer war scare.

This chapter also does not nominate specific times or eras of the Cold War, apart from individual crises, that were inherently more or less stable than others—although a pattern does emerge of a competition gaining some elements of both definitional aspects of stability over time, particularly by the mid-1980s. That was very late in the Cold War, however; during the preceding 30 years, the Cold War reflected powerful elements of stability and instability on

both essential, definitional characteristics. This rivalry, in the terms of our essential conception of stability, could be said to be somewhat stable and highly unstable at the same time.

National Policies

The framework of variables governing stability in a strategic rivalry suggests that eight policies can affect it. We discuss each in the sections that follow.

Military Capabilities

The environment in which rivalry occurs is ultimately a product of the choices policymakers make, such as which technologies to fund and what weapon systems to deploy. The way that capabilities and strategies interact with each other influences the overall environment for competition and whether certain actions will be stabilizing or destabilizing. The deployment of capabilities that protect a state's essential security, which reinforces confidence that the state can defend itself regardless of the other side's intent, clearly had a strong influence on superpower relations and stability throughout the Cold War. Choices to develop and deploy certain capabilities both reflected and influenced the strategic balance between the superpowers.

Capability development can both underwrite and undermine stability, as strategic capability development during the Cold War demonstrated. The development of increasingly effective nuclear capabilities played a role in promoting stability by depriving each superpower of the conviction that it could "win" a kinetic confrontation, at least at an acceptable cost. By the mid-1960s, both superpowers had so many strategic weapons that each could absorb a preemptive nuclear strike and still remain capable of retaliating, which Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reasoned was stabilizing on the strategic level and made nuclear war unlikely.[1] Mutually assured destruction (MAD), facilitated by the survivability and sheer destructive power of each side's strategic force structure, provided a sense of stability in the 1970s. In this way, more weapons and more-destructive weapons actually enhanced stability. Analysts have argued that the relationship between the United States and the USSR was more stable in the 1970s, when both states had tens of thousands of warheads and all three major delivery platforms, than the early 1960s, when both states had far fewer warheads and methods of delivery.[2]

The Cold War gave rise to the concept of *strategic stability*, which was based in deterrence theory and the assumption of rational actors who want to avoid the risk of nuclear destruction.[3] Nuclear deterrence is based on the threat of retaliation; it relies on the recognized capability of some kind of retaliatory force to survive a first strike.[4] Brodie's *The Absolute Weapon* (1946)

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[1] Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 29.

[2] Amy F. Woolf, *U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces: Background, Developments, and Issues*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, March 6, 2018, p. 3.

[3] Michael S. Gerson, "The Origins of Strategic Stability: The United States and the Threat of Surprise Attack," in Elbridge Colby and Michael S. Gerson, eds., *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations,* Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2013. This chapter provides a comprehensive historical overview of the development of the concept of *strategic stability* during the Cold War.

[4] During the Cold War, the United States achieved first-strike survivability via several capabilities, including the continuous airborne alert of B-52 strategic bombers; solid-fuel Minuteman quick-launching ground-based missiles dispersed in hardened silos; and the underwater Polaris system, then believed to be undetectable by enemy forces. See Thomas C.

laid the foundation for deterrence and strategic stability theories and emphasized avoiding war in the nuclear age through the ability to retaliate in kind.[5] The basic goal is to remove both an adversary's and one's own incentives to strike first by ensuring that both sides have the capability to retaliate. This second-strike capability eliminates the advantages of surprise attacks and striking first, serving as an effective deterrent.[6] In *Strategy and Arms Control*, Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin defined strategic stability as a situation in which the risks of war are low because neither side has an incentive to strike first; however, this calculation must be "reasonably secure against shocks, alarms and perturbations."[7] Similarly, the authors of a RAND report evaluating Cold War strategic forces reasoned that strategic stability holds when each side believes that the other would not be motivated to strike first in a crisis.[8]

Under the conditions of mutual second-strike capability, states can afford to wait and see how a crisis unfolds rather than immediately respond to unclear signals or escalate a dispute.[9] This idea forms the basis of John Mueller's concept of *crisis stability*, which he defines as "the notion that it is desirable for both sides in a crisis to be so secure that each is able to wait out a surprise attack fully confident that it would be able to respond with a punishing counterattack."[10] Nuclear weapons are the primary method for ensuring the capacity to deliver a "punishing counterattack" and, thus, the primary method for deterring a first strike. Many analysts therefore consider them stabilizing.[11] Both the United States and the Soviet Union devoted significant resources to ensuring the survivability of their nuclear systems and their ability to launch an effective response.[12]

The deployment of awesomely destructive capabilities, such as nuclear weapons, can therefore be stabilizing on the strategic level when certain conditions hold, primarily the existence of a credible second-strike capability. However, the development and deployment of these

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Schelling "Foreword," in Elbridge Colby and Michael S. Gerson, eds., *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations,* Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2013, p. vi.

5 Bernard Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1946.

6 For deterrence to work, it needs to be believable: The essence of deterrence is the demonstration of willingness to begin climbing the unpredictable ladder of escalation toward nuclear war while simultaneously offering one's opponent the option to terminate the crisis. Credible deterrence relies on convincing one's opponent that things might truly get out of control and result in an outcome neither side actually wants. See Colby and Gerson, 2013, p. 5.

7 Thomas C. Schelling and Morton H. Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control*, New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1961, p. 50.

8 Glenn Kent and David Thaler, *First-Strike Stability: A Methodology for Evaluating Strategic Forces*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-3765-AF, 1989.

9 Gregory D. Koblentz, *Strategic Stability in the Second Nuclear Age*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, November 2014, p. 19.

10 John Mueller, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World," *International Security,* Vol. 13, No. 2, Fall 1988, p. 59.

11 For example, see Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better," *Adelphi Papers*, Vol. 21, No. 171, Autumn 1981, p. 1; Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*, 3rd ed., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012; John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System," *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Spring 1986, pp. 99–142; Bruce Bueno de Mequita and William H. Riker, "An Assessment of the Merits of Selective Nuclear Proliferation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 26, No. 2, June 1982.

12 Colby and Gerson, 2013, p. 48.

types of capabilities can also be destabilizing. In 2013, Schelling wrote that it took 12 years from the first use of a nuclear weapon for the United States to "begin to comprehend" deterrence and strategic stability.[13] He pointed to the 1957 Gaither Committee Report as the first time the United States determined that deterrence "depended on the recognized ability of a retaliatory force to survive an attack intended to destroy it."[14] Those early years of the Cold War were characterized by mutual uncertainty and fear on both sides, creating an unstable environment. The early 1950s were marked by U.S. fears of a surprise Soviet strategic strike because first-strike survivability was not yet established. A 1953 National Security Council (NSC) Report (NSC-162/2) stated that, "if the Soviets believed that initial surprise held the prospect of destroying the capacity for retaliation, they might be tempted into attacking."[15]

Throughout the Cold War, each side pursued deterrence in the face of rapid technological advances that continuously threatened to shift the strategic balance and that drove cycles of insecurity and innovation. Fears of vulnerability on both sides drove investments in missile technology and stockpiles in the 1950s and early 1960s, missile emplacements in Europe and Cuba, and an intense arms competition in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the Soviets achieved rough parity with U.S. strategic nuclear capabilities. This parity, along with arms control measures and satellite reconnaissance technology, gave each side some reassurance that the other would not initiate a surprise attack. However, by the end of the 1970s, the Soviet ability to produce and deploy missiles and warheads faster than the United States could—and the U.S. recognition of its vulnerabilities[16]—sparked renewed tensions and arms competition until late 1984.

The development and deployment of capabilities can thus undermine stability and produce mutually reinforcing windows of vulnerability. Scott Sagan has argued that nuclear weapons also carry risks of inadvertent escalation through accidents and miscalculations.[17] The stability-instability paradox increases the probability of minor or indirect conflicts between two nuclear-capable states.[18] During the Cold War, American strategists were concerned that the stability-instability paradox would cause the Soviets to feel confident that conventional use of force would not prompt nuclear retaliation, allowing them to invade Western Europe with conventional forces without fear of a nuclear response. In response to this concern, some U.S. strategists called for steps to raise the risks associated with conventional conflict.[19]

Several patterns emerged in our review of each side's deployment of capabilities throughout the Cold War regarding the role of military capabilities in affecting the stability of the U.S.-USSR relationship. We next highlight four of these.

Balance in capabilities was an important determinant of overall stability in superpower relations during the Cold War. John Lewis Gaddis wrote that stability is a function of both struc-

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13 Schelling, 2013, p. vii.

14 Schelling, 2013, p. v. Also see the influential piece, Albert Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror, *Foreign Affairs*, January 1959.

15 Colby and Gerson, 2013, p. 7.

16 Records of meetings, congressional hearings, and memoirs demonstrate that there was a lot of anxiety during this time within the U.S. defense establishment about U.S. strategic vulnerability, specifically the vulnerability of certain missile and delivery systems (Frances FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, pp. 193–195).

17 Sagan and Waltz, 2012.

18 Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984, p. 31.

19 Jervis, 1984.

ture (power distributions, state capabilities) and state behavior, and that "behavior alone will not ensure stability if the structural prerequisites for it are absent."[20] Gaddis, like many others, contended that the bipolar structure of the Cold War afforded a relatively high degree of stability to the international order. We can also observe that the periods of greatest stability within the superpower relationship during the Cold War coincided with the two periods in which both superpowers acknowledged a general parity in capabilities (from the early to mid-1970s and from the mid-1980s to the end of the Cold War). In contrast, when the strategic balance between the superpowers was askew because one side or the other had developed or deployed quantitatively or qualitatively superior capabilities, bilateral stability worsened: When one side perceived that the other was developing technology that could provide a strategic advantage, it often reacted with investments in countermeasures that worsened overall stability.

The missile gap myth of the late 1950s and 1960s is an illustrative example: Soviet advancements in ballistic missile systems in the late 1950s clearly alarmed Washington (which was already under the mistaken impression that the Soviets had surpassed them numerically in strategic bombers and missiles).[21] Although the United States enjoyed strategic superiority until at least the mid- to late-1960s, its actions demonstrated an underlying feeling of vulnerability that drove provocative missile deployments and an aggressive missile development program. As a countermeasure to the Soviet advancements, the United States deployed 30 nuclear-capable intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in Italy in March 1959, and the United States and Turkey signed an agreement in October 1959 for the deployment of 15 Jupiter missiles in Turkey.[22] The United States also embarked on an aggressive missile development program under President John F. Kennedy,[23] whose initial defense plan tripled the rate of construction of Polaris submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and doubled the production capacity of Minuteman ICBMs.[24] When the missile gap myth was exposed in 1961, the administration did not modify its strategic program, choosing to continue with increased production in case the Soviets increased theirs.[25] As a result, the United States built a large lead in ICBMs, SLBMs, and long-range bombers.[26]

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[20] Gaddis, 1986, pp. 7, 22.

[21] The missile gap myth, the theory that the USSR held the lead in intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), persisted until 1961. The U.S. intelligence community also "significantly overstated" Soviet heavy bomber production from 1955 to 1957, partly because of intentional Soviet deception at the 1955 Aviation Day display (Donald P. Steury, ed., *Intentions and Capabilities: Estimates on Soviet Strategic Forces, 1950–1983*, Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1996, pp. 4–6). In 1957, the USSR launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, which demonstrated the power of the Soviet R-7 missile, the world's first ICBM.

[22] The Jupiter missiles in Turkey did not become operational until April 1962.

[23] The Kennedy administration feared that the Soviets might be in the middle of a large missile production program that would endanger U.S. Strategic Air Command bombers, then "the cornerstone" of the United States' deterrent power (Jerome H. Kahan and Anne K. Long, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Study of Its Strategic Context," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 4, December 1972).

[24] Kahan and Long, 1972, p. 565; Benjamin S. Lambeth, *How to Think About Soviet Military Doctrine*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, P-5939, 1978, p. 30.

[25] Kahan and Long, 1972, 565.

[26] By the end of 1961, it was clear and officially acknowledged that the United States held the lead in ICBMs and in most other categories of nuclear weapons (Greg Thielmann, "The Missile Gap Myth and Its Progeny," Arms Control Association website, May 3, 2011).

The U.S. missile deployments and buildup caused the Soviets to feel increasingly vulnerable despite their advancements in ICBM and satellite technology.[27] In addition, improvements in U.S. conventional capabilities threatened to undermine the Soviets' conventional superiority, which had been seen as a partial counterweight to the U.S. strategic advantage.[28] The Soviets' fears of vulnerability, aggravated by the buildup of their already stronger adversary, influenced their decisions to place missiles in Cuba and to initiate a massive strategic buildup in 1964.

Strategic stability in the Cold War became more interdependent than ever before, primarily because of the stabilizing effects of a second-strike capability and the destabilizing potential of a lack of one. When one superpower felt vulnerable to surprise attack, both superpowers felt less secure. As mentioned earlier, the United States felt insecure throughout the early and mid-1950s despite its superiority. At the same time, the United States felt insecure because of its superiority. U.S. officials feared that the Soviets' vulnerability to a first strike (the Soviets' lack of sufficient capabilities to retaliate to a first strike) could push them to initiate a surprise first strike that the United States was ill prepared to respond to.[29] RAND research conducted in the early 1950s for the U.S. Air Force concluded that the U.S. nuclear force was "highly vulnerable" to a preemptive strike.[30]

The idea began to emerge that strategic stability in the nuclear age was interdependent—the ability of one's adversary to survive and retaliate against a first strike was equally important to ensuring overall stability as one's own second-strike capability.[31] In the late 1950s and early 1960s, some American defense officials and analysts argued that, while it seemed paradoxical, improved Soviet nuclear capabilities would actually enhance U.S. security by decreasing the Soviets' sense of vulnerability to a U.S. strike and easing fears that could lead them to initiate a surprise attack.[32] Secretary of Defense McNamara told the British Minister of Defence in 1962 that he wanted to convince the Soviets to improve their strategic nuclear forces (referring to hardened missile silos and diversified launch systems) because the Soviets' capacity to retaliate was so weak that, if they perceived a threat that the United States was going to attack, they would have no choice but to initiate a first strike.[33]

Mutual investments in new technology areas created constant, mutually reinforcing cycles of windows of vulnerability. The cycle of mutual investment in new technologies, prompted by mutual fear of exploitation by the other side if it achieved a strategic breakthrough first, characterized the development and deployment of capabilities during the Cold War. Even when

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[27] By the early 1960s, the Soviets had deployed only a "handful" of ICBMs in comparison with the Kennedy administration's large and growing strategic missile force (Kahan and Long, 1972, p. 566).

[28] Kahan and Long, 1972, p. 567.

[29] Colby and Gerson, 2013, p. 7; Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983, pp. 98–101.

[30] Kaplan, 1983, pp. 98–101. Two major issues were that Strategic Air Command bases were crowded with aircraft and that all the command's nuclear weapons were stored at only a couple of locations, making both the aircraft and the weapons easy targets.

[31] Gerson, 2013, pp. 19, 20.

[32] Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, January 1978, p. 180.

[33] Apparently, the British Minister of Defence found this line of reasoning unconvincing (Francis J. Gavin, "The Myth of Flexible Response: United States Strategy in Europe During the 1960s," *International History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4, December 2001, p. 853).

one of the superpowers enjoyed a measure of strategic superiority or was reasonably confident it could withstand a first strike, it felt vulnerable because of the rapid development of technologies and the possibility that its adversary could create, widen, or exploit a window of vulnerability.

The intense strategic arms competition between the superpowers throughout the 1960s demonstrated each side's attempt to exploit and protect against windows of vulnerability. With the change of leadership in 1964 from Khrushchev to Brezhnev, the Soviets significantly increased investment in ICBM and SLBM technology to address the strategic gaps that had been painfully exposed in 1961 and 1962.[34] Naturally, the Soviet buildup threatened to undermine U.S. security: Before the mid-1960s, the Soviets did not possess the quantitative or qualitative missile capacity to destroy the U.S. ICBM force. However, as they persisted in their buildup efforts, they not only increased the number of ICBMs but also enhanced their accuracy and yields, creating a window of vulnerability the United States felt it could not afford to ignore. Therefore, the United States increased its own stockpile and continued research and development on offensive missiles with significantly enhanced capabilities.[35] By the mid-1960s, both superpowers had so many strategic weapons that each could absorb a nuclear strike and retaliate, which McNamara reasoned made nuclear war unlikely.[36] However, the continued military buildup, in particular the 1967 deployment of a Soviet anti–ballistic missile (ABM) system around Moscow, was again destabilizing and compelled President Lyndon Johnson to call for the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in 1967.

U.S. defense officials also expressed concern about a window of vulnerability between the early 1980s, when they expected the USSR to deploy ICBMs that could target U.S. missile silos, and the mid- to late 1980s, when the United States planned to field new missiles. This concern drove a large strategic modernization effort (and the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history) that included plans to build the MX missile, MIRV-capable Trident submarines, and the infamous Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).[37] However, the MX missile, which became one centerpiece of the Reagan administration's strategic buildup, had no reliable permanent basing mode that could withstand a first strike; defense experts therefore feared it was inherently destabilizing.[38]

Technology that enhances information on one another's capabilities and activities can increase stability by increasing confidence and lengthening timelines to respond to aggression. The increasing accuracy of intelligence on the other side's capabilities and activities, enabled by the revolution in satellite reconnaissance technology, acted as a stabilizer by reinforcing the confidence of both actors. By at least the early 1970s, each side was capable of assessing the other's capabilities to an extent "totally unprecedented in the history of relations between great powers."[39]

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[34] Lambeth, 1978, provides a detailed overview of Soviet investments in capabilities during the 1960s.

[35] Minuteman III (development began in 1966) and advanced Poseidon missiles (SLBMs) are examples. The Minuteman III program sought to make several important improvements over the previous I and II models, including increasing the payload and making it possible to deploy MIRVs. See Daniel Buchonnet, "MIRV: A Brief History of Minuteman and Multiple Reentry Vehicles," Livermore, Calif.: Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, February 1976, p. 6.

[36] Sargent, 2015, p. 29.

[37] Pavel Podvig, "The Window of Vulnerability That Wasn't: Soviet Military Buildup in the 1970s—A Research Note," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Summer 2008, pp. 119, 120; FitzGerald, 2000, pp. 149–163.

[38] FitzGerald, 2000, pp. 187–191, 196.

[39] Gaddis, 1986, p. 26.

As Gaddis notes, equally important to the development of the capabilities to gather enhanced intelligence was the implicit agreement to allow one another's satellites to pass over their territories unimpeded. International relations literature on stability theory posits that technologies that enhance each actor's knowledge of the other's forces and movements have a stabilizing effect, reducing the fear of surprise attack and the likelihood of miscalculation.[40] A U.S. intelligence assessment written after the Cold War concluded that increased knowledge of what the Soviet forces consisted of at any given time and increasing confidence that U.S. intelligence could detect any major Soviet development program with enough time for the United States to adapt allowed more "crisis stability" in U.S.-Soviet relations.[41] In addition, increased capabilities in satellite and other surveillance technologies made restraining the arms race more feasible by providing a mechanism to monitor compliance with arms control agreements.[42]

Military Restraint

In this section, we examine the exercise of restraint in military doctrines and capabilities that could signal aggressive intent.[43] Restraint can be conveyed to the other side in the public articulation of doctrines or the unilateral or bilateral limitation of capabilities. Restraint can also be used by either side when responding to a crisis, such as Kennedy's decision to implement a naval quarantine during the Cuban Missile Crisis rather than to pursue more forceful options and the Soviet decision not to shoot down U.S. aircraft during the Berlin airlift.[44] Throughout the Cold War, the objectives of both sides tended to be primarily defensive,[45] making the exercise of restraint more feasible than if each side had primarily offensive goals. Although the United States and USSR both restrained themselves from any use of nuclear weapons,[46] the levels of restraint articulated in official doctrines and exhibited in behaviors fluctuated. In the 1960s, the constraints of certain capabilities and the need to manage allies limited the U.S. ability to exercise restraint in a confrontation, even though official U.S. doctrine emphasized controlled response and flexibility. At various times, both powers attempted to employ more-restrained or more-flexible doctrines but still saw the eruption of serious crises and arms competitions, at least partly because of a lack of faith on each side that the other would be

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[40] Gaddis, 1986, pp. 25–26.

[41] Steury, 1996, p. viii.

[42] Steury, 1996; Gaddis, 1986, p. 27. Also see Michael Krepon, *Arms Control: Verification and Compliance*, New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1984, pp. 8–13.

[43] *Restraint* is a somewhat difficult term to define in this context. Doctrines of various U.S. administrations differentiated between indiscriminate attacks on populations (massive retaliation) and targeted strikes on missile sites or military facilities, which were intended to be perceived as more restrained (no-cities doctrine, Flexible Response). However, it could be argued that a doctrine that allows for any use of tactical nuclear weapons is not restrained at all. In addition, *restraint* and *flexibility* are not harmonious—greater flexibility of options to apply force can make policymakers less restrained in using force than they would be if the options were limited to massive retaliation or no use of force.

[44] For a discussion of this event, see Ernest R. May, ed., *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68*, Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993, p. 3.

[45] Martin Patchen and David Bogumil, "Comparative Reciprocity During the Cold War," *Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1997, p. 38.

[46] This nuclear taboo is generally considered to have been, and continues to be, a strong restraint on action (Nina Tannenwald, "Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2005; also see Thomas C. Schelling, "The Legacy of Hiroshima: A Half-Century Without Nuclear War," *Philosophy and Public Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 2/3, 2000).

willing to forgo offensive action. But actual limitations of capabilities did appear to be taken as a serious signal of restraint and were more effective in stabilizing relations than was simply articulating a doctrine or policy of restraint.

Several patterns regarding the role of such restraint in affecting the stability of the U.S.-USSR relationship emerged from our review of each side's exercise of military restraint throughout the Cold War. We highlight six of these in the following.

The tension between reassuring the other side of one's defensive intent and prioritizing capability development was especially pronounced in the early phases of the Cold War (1950s–1960s) before a mutual second-strike capability was established. After a series of destabilizing events—a tense early Cold War period marked by aggressive Soviet doctrine under Stalin,[47] a massive increase in U.S. military expenditure to support a military buildup under President Harry Truman,[48] and the articulation of the "doctrine of massive retaliation" during the administration of President Dwight Eisenhower—policymakers in both countries seemed to support exercising greater restraint, at least rhetorically. U.S. policy began to shift away from massive retaliation as early as 1955, proposing a more flexible strategy of controlled response.[49] A 1955 report on U.S. disarmament policy prepared for Eisenhower argued that the United States should "forego the opportunity to launch a surprise attack upon the USSR in exchange for substantial assurance against a surprise attack upon the United States."[50] Soon after Stalin's death, Moscow implemented a new foreign policy that emphasized the reduction of tensions with the West.[51] Khrushchev explicitly laid out the doctrine of peaceful coexistence in 1956 at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. In 1959, Khrushchev proposed a unilateral reduction of armaments and military personnel to the CPSU, arguing that the USSR had sufficient strategic weapons to defend itself and that maintaining a large army could be used by others to justify aggression.[52]

Despite these indications of a desire for greater restraint, both sides continued to engage in strategic competition and prioritized building up their military capabilities. Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy all made it clear that they were willing to use nuclear weapons in certain

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[47] The consensus in Washington in the late 1940s and early 1950s was that Soviet doctrine, as articulated by Stalin, indicated that Soviet aggression was inevitable (William G. Hyland, *The Cold War Is Over*, New York: Random House, 1990, p. 58), though there was considerable debate and disagreement on the proper U.S. response (see May, 1993, Introduction, for a detailed discussion).

[48] NSC-68, drafted in early 1950, was an influential reassessment of national security policy that proposed a massive buildup of conventional and nuclear forces to meet an expected increase in Soviet capabilities and aggression. Truman approved NSC-68 in late 1950 and almost tripled defense spending between 1950 and 1953 (NSC*, United States Objectives and Programs for National Security*, Washington, D.C.: NSC-68, April 14, 1950).

[49] Campbell Craig, *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, Chapter 3.

[50] Harold E. Stassen, "33. Progress Report Prepared by the President's Special Assistant (Stassen): A Progress Report on a Proposed Policy of the United States on the Question of Disarmament," Special Staff Study for the President, NSC Action No. 1328, May 26, 1955, in David S. Patterson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Regulation of Armaments; Atomic Energy*, Vol. XX, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990, p. 103.

[51] Wohlforth, 1993, p. 149.

[52] Central Committee, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "About Further Steps in the Struggle for Reduction of International Tension," Presidium Decision, trans. Wilson Center Digital Archive: International History Declassified, December 14, 1959.

circumstances.[53] Even while emphasizing restraint and coexistence, Khrushchev began modernizing the Soviet military and focusing resources on developing ICBMs.[54] The Cuban Missile Crisis erupted only a few years after Khrushchev's announcement of peaceful coexistence. Although the general concept of *sufficiency not superiority* was articulated in some way on both sides in the early 1960s, both actors continued to place high importance on competing for superiority throughout the decade. After the ouster of Khrushchev in 1964, Soviet doctrine would continue to strongly emphasize building up capabilities until Gorbachev outlined the doctrine of *reasonable sufficiency* in 1985.[55]

At least in the United States, the way that the military deployed capabilities limited the range of possible responses and policy options available to decisionmakers, making it more difficult to employ policies that emphasized restraint and were not inherently escalatory (i.e., doctrines and policies that allowed for pauses, negotiations, and backtracks). One of the ways to measure whether capabilities and doctrines are stabilizing is whether or not policymakers have the means available to react proportionally. Capabilities that do not easily allow flexibility or proportionality are not likely to be stabilizing, regardless of policymakers' stated doctrines.

A strong example of a mismatch between doctrine and capabilities was the contradiction between the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' stated doctrine of Flexible Response and the actual capabilities and plans each administration had at its disposal. Contrary to its name, U.S. strategic doctrine in the 1960s and early 1970s did not become more flexible, in large part because of the constraints of technologies and command-and-control processes.[56] The doctrine of Flexible Response "presupposed the capability to wage limited nuclear war," when that capability did not exist.[57] When McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a strategy that would allow "controlled response" with breaks for negotiation, they replied that it could not be done.[58]

Well into the 1970s, the U.S. defense establishment maintained a rigid plan for nuclear conflict—the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP)—despite instructions from civilian leadership to allow flexible responses.[59] In the late 1960s, U.S. defense officials determined that the processes and command-and-control capabilities of U.S. strategic systems did not allow

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[53] Kennedy implied possible use of nuclear weapons during the 1961 Berlin crisis and, in early 1962, stated that "in some circumstances we must be prepared to use nuclear weapons at the start" (Kahan and Long, 1972, pp. 565–566).

[54] Steury, 1996, p. 18; Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Estimates Group, "Some Aspects of the Soviet Attitude on War," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Intelligence Estimate 91, August 24, 1959, p. 4.

[55] A 1978 examination of Soviet military doctrine argued that, while U.S. military planning focused on obtaining strategic sufficiency to deter an attack, the Soviets fixated on "an open-ended process of arms accumulation constrained only by domestic economic and technological resources, U.S. forbearances, and the formal protocols of negotiated arms limitation agreements" (Lambeth, 1978, p. 7).

[56] Gavin, 2001.

[57] Gavin, 2001, p. 850.

[58] Gavin, 2001, p. 850. Also see [Lyman] Lemnitzer, "25. Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Lemnitzer) to Secretary of Defense McNamara," Washington, D.C., April 18, 1961, in David W. Mabon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Vol. VIII, *National Security Policy*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996.

[59] For an in-depth discussion of the civil-military relations and issues around U.S. nuclear doctrine in the early 1960s, see Chapters 8 and 9 in Daniel Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.

anything other than large-scale, preplanned strikes.[60] The Air Force had long been skeptical of limited nuclear war because of these command-and-control issues.[61] In 1971, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for System Analysis concluded that the United States would not be able to launch a nuclear response "at less than SIOP levels" until 1975 or 1976 because of the lead time required to develop new equipment and systems that could provide a flexible response capability.[62] When Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger outlined the Nixon administration's nuclear strategy in 1974, he claimed it represented a dramatic departure from the strategies of past administrations in that, for the first time, U.S. nuclear doctrine was *actually* able to emphasize "selectivity and flexibility."[63]

Investment in the development and deployment of certain capabilities can set a state on a path from which it becomes difficult to deviate. As Daniel Ellsberg, who contributed to the development of flexible response, recounted in his memoir, several elements of the original incarnation of the SIOP involved high levels of automaticity. In the event of war, all operational forces would be committed to preplanned targets. The SIOP did not allow distinction between the USSR and China as targets; it did not allow postponement or cancellation of preplanned strikes on urban centers; and it did not provide an option to minimize damage to enemy command and control to the extent possible (which would be critical in allowing an enemy to surrender and avoiding enemy retaliation).[64] Initiating the plan would set the United States on an unalterable course of massive use of force that could not be paused, deviated from, or walked back. This was the basis of Eisenhower's doctrine of massive retaliation but not that of his successors, who sought to enhance the flexibility and adaptiveness of U.S. strategic options.[65] Similarly, once Soviet policymakers devoted significant funding and attention to their strategic weapon program, it became practically and politically difficult to deviate from the planned development and deployment schedule or to limit the program in any substantial way.

The need to reassure allies made it difficult to restrain capabilities in a meaningful way. As U.S. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy observed in 1962, "the forces that one wants for war are not necessarily those which one may want diplomatically."[66] Tactical nuclear weapons proliferated under Kennedy and Johnson despite a stated desire in 1961 to reduce, not maintain or increase, them—"for reasons less of military need than the management of allies."[67] The Kennedy administration wanted to restrict tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in favor of greater reliance on conventional forces but worried about the reaction of the European

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[60] Gavin, 2001, pp. 855, 873.

[61] Austin Long, *Deterrence: From Cold War to Long War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-636-OSD/AF, 2008, pp. 30–33.

[62] Leonard Wainstein, *Evolution of U.S. Strategic Command and Control and Warning, 1945–1972*, Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses, 1975, p. 432.

[63] James R. Schlesinger, "US-USSR Strategic Policies," testimony before the Subcommittee on Arms Control, Committee on Foreign Relations," 93rd Cong, 1st Sess. March 4, 1974, p. 9 (accessed via Gavin, 2001, p. 851).

[64] Ellsberg, 2017, pp. 125–128.

[65] Gavin, 2001, pp. 855, 873.

[66] Quoted in Gavin, 2001, p. 858.

[67] Gavin, 2001, p. 858; J. Michael Legge, *Theater Nuclear Weapons and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation , R-2964-FF, 1983.

partners. Tactical nuclear weapons served a political purpose of reassuring allies, even if the practical or possible use of such weapons was irrelevant or counterproductive.

Capability development sometimes created the demand for restraint and improved relations. Mutual fears of unstable competition (a cycle of unrestrained capability development driving windows of vulnerability) motivated the bilateral restraint of capabilities and periods of détente. In two Cold War cases, the development of capabilities with high destabilizing potential prompted efforts to engage in mutual restraint that effectively constrained the dangerous capabilities and improved relations on a broader scale. The first was both superpowers' development of plans for ABM systems in the 1960s. An effective ABM system could mitigate or eliminate a state's vulnerability to a retaliatory strike, meaning that it could attack its opponent without the fear of retaliation. This capability could undermine strategic stability by eroding the mutual second-strike capability and providing an incentive for a state to strike first if it believed it was going to be attacked (which would become a much more pressing concern if the state's second-strike capability were undercut).[68] The 1967 Soviet deployment of an ABM system around Moscow and the planned U.S. deployment of the Sentinel ABM system thus had significant destabilizing potential, which Western European nations explicitly recognized at the time.[69] However, instead of sparking a dangerous arms race, the deployment helped spur SALT. President Johnson called for the superpowers to begin the talks at a meeting with Soviet Premier Kosygin in 1967 to prevent an ABM race.[70] In 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to set important limitations on ABM systems. The same negotiations led to an agreement that limited the number of nuclear missiles each state could possess. This unprecedented bilateral commitment to restrain certain capabilities ushered in a period of détente in the 1970s.[71]

The second case was the Soviet development and deployment of mobile IRBMs in the late 1970s, which ultimately led to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. In 1977, the Soviets deployed the SS-20 Saber ICBM, which was capable of reaching Western Europe from within Soviet territory, prompting Western Europeans to pressure the United States for a response. NATO feared a "gap in the nuclear escalatory ladder" if the Soviet ICBM deployment went unanswered.[72] Although it took years of stalled negotiations, NATO was able to leverage the threat of its own large-scale deployment of Pershing II missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles to generate mutual acceptance of a ban on all short- and intermediate-range missiles.[73] The INF Treaty, signed in 1987, eliminated all nuclear and conventional missiles, as well as their launchers, with ranges of 500–1,000 km (short range) and 1,000–5,500 km (intermediate range).[74]

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[68] Koblentz, 2014, p. 22.

[69] Thomas L. Hughes, "How Major NATO Countries View the Prospect of an ABM Deployment," research memorandum to the Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., REU-14, March 3, 1967.

[70] Formal SALT talks began under President Nixon in 1969 (U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "Strategic Arms Limitations Talks/Treaty (SALT) I and II," webpage, undated e).

[71] However, SALT I did not place restrictions on critical offensive capabilities, such as MIRVs, so its stabilizing influence was inherently limited.

[72] Avis Bohlen, William Burns, Steven Pifer, and John Woodworth, *The Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces: History and Lessons Learned*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, December 2012.

[73] Bohlen et al., 2012, p. 15.

[74] Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty), December 8, 1987.

Ironically, investments in the research and development of offensive capabilities sometimes inadvertently yielded capabilities with significant stabilizing potential. Satellite reconnaissance technology—which, as previously mentioned, helped stabilize superpower relations—was partially born in research on ICBMs.[75]

It appears that effective, reciprocal restraint of capabilities was more successful during periods of objective strategic parity and less successful when at least one side perceived a shift was occurring or about to occur in the strategic balance. Unsurprisingly, the periods during which the superpowers agreed on certain limitations of capabilities through bilateral arms control agreements and exhibited restraint in other areas of interaction (the early and mid-1970s and the mid- to late 1980s) coincided with periods of greater relative stability. A study of comparative reciprocity during the Cold War found that the United States generally demonstrated greater cooperative reciprocity than did the USSR during the early Cold War period, as the United States was the status quo power and therefore more motivated to promote stability in the rivalry. Thus, the desire to engage in mutually cooperative and reciprocal interactions was not mutual until the Soviets felt they had achieved objective parity with their rival in the 1970s.[76]

Although President Jimmy Carter and Brezhnev signed the SALT II treaty in 1979 and pledged to adhere to the agreement despite a lack of formal ratification,[77] détente broke down soon after for three reasons: a shift to less-restrained policies on both sides,[78] the growing U.S. fear of Soviet superiority, and the shift to a conflictive cycle of reciprocity.[79] Many specific actions conspired to undermine détente in the second half of the 1970s: U.S. passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and resulting Soviet retaliation on prospective trade deals; the rise of human rights and labor movements in eastern Europe and the growing U.S. affinity with them; new proxy competition in the Middle East and Africa; and, eventually, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. President Ronald Reagan did pursue a further reduction of strategic offensive arms during his first term; however, antagonistic behavior on both sides obstructed progress. Such behavior included U.S. research into SDI, the U.S. deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe in 1983, and the 1983 Soviet shootdown of a Korean airliner. The Reagan administration was driven by concerns that it had lost the strategic edge to the Soviets in the early 1980s.[80] It was not until Gorbachev rose to power in 1985 and embraced the doctrine of reasonable sufficiency, and when the Reagan administration felt comfortable that parity had been restored, that the superpowers were able to again couple the actual restraint of military capabilities with more restrained, open policies to establish cooperative reciprocity.[81]

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75 Gaddis, 1986, p. 27. Also see John Prados, *The Soviet Estimate: U.S. Intelligence and Russian Military Strength*, New York: Dial Press, 1982, pp. 24–30.

76 Patchen and Bogumil, 1997, pp. 54–55.

77 SALT II limited the total of both nations' nuclear forces to 2,250 delivery vehicles and placed a variety of other restrictions on deployed strategic nuclear forces, including MIRVs (U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, undated e).

78 Including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan a few months later and the U.S. military buildup that began under Carter and was expanded under Reagan.

79 Patchen and Bogumil, 1997, pp. 54–55.

80 In 1982, Reagan stated publicly that the USSR "does have a definite measure of superiority" (FitzGerald, 2000, p. 181).

81 For more detail, see Willard C. Frank and Philip S. Gillette, eds., *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev, 1915–1991*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992.

Acceptance of the Other Side's Legitimacy

During the Cold War, signaling acceptance or rejection of the other actor's legitimacy—specifically, the legitimacy of its governing regime and its institutions—was a valuable tool, given that both superpowers attached importance to being recognized as legitimate.[82] However, while the United States generally felt comfortable in its position as a legitimate world power, the Soviet Union felt it was not viewed with the legitimacy that it was due. The desire to be acknowledged as a legitimate world power drove Soviet behavior throughout the Cold War.[83] Khrushchev bragged, exaggerated, and intentionally lied at times about the capabilities of the USSR in attempts to obtain the respect from the international community he believed the USSR deserved. In 1961, he argued that the USSR had capabilities equal to those of the United States and, therefore, deserved equal international legitimacy and representation.[84] After an initial period characterized more by attempts to undermine one another's legitimacy than to accept it, both states began sending clear signals in the 1970s that they accepted, or at least begrudgingly acknowledged, one another's legitimacy.

States have several key ways to signal acceptance of one another's legitimacy, including participation in high-level meetings, entry into bilateral treaties, explicit recognition of one another's legitimacy or equality, and cooperation on initiatives. In the early Cold War, both superpowers used propaganda and information campaigns to undermine one another's legitimacy on the world stage.[85] But when both states concurrently and reciprocally signaled acceptance of one another's legitimacy, tensions appeared to decrease, and bilateral relations improved. As the number of bilateral treaties between the United States and the USSR increased (starting in the 1970s), the number of MIDs between them decreased. A shift from U.S. attempts to undermine Soviet territorial legitimacy in the 1950s to accepting the territorial status quo in Europe in the 1970s also improved relations.

Gaddis' examination of the Cold War offered some relevant rules for a stable rivalry. According to Gaddis, international rivalries are governed by a framework of "game-stabilizing rules" that allow rivals to compete without escalating to large-scale war.[86] Throughout history, rivals' tendencies to adhere to these rules have varied. Gaddis argued that, while the Cold War was marked by periods of tension and acute crises, the Cold War system remained stable overall because of the superpowers' ability to largely adhere to such rules. They include two methods of signaling acceptance of one another's legitimacy: respecting one another's sphere of influence and acknowledging the legitimacy of one another's leadership.

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[82] The term *legitimacy* has many meanings in different contexts. Here, we refer only to the singular concept of acceptance of the other side's governing system and/or regime in a rivalry. It would imply that mutual legitimacy today would mean, for example, that the United States and China would each accept the other's government as legitimate and not seek to disrupt or overturn it. It is the opposite of a formal regime change policy.

[83] Wohlforth, 1993, p. 135.

[84] In a 1961 speech, Khrushchev stated, "where there are equal forces there must also be equal rights and opportunities. Yet our partners . . . want to dominate in international agencies and impose their will" (Wohlforth, 1993, pp. 158–159).

[85] For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, the United States tried to delegitimize the USSR by presenting Soviet control of the Baltic states, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe as "Red Colonialism" to undermine the USSR's credibility as a "champion of decolonization." For its part, the USSR used the UN General Assembly as a platform to deride the "exploitative nature" of Western colonialism (Mary Ann Heiss, "Exposing 'Red Colonialism': U.S. Propaganda at the United Nations, 1953–1963," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Summer 2015, p. 82).

[86] Gaddis, 1986, pp. 35–41.

The period of détente in the 1970s was characterized by clear and reciprocal signals of acceptance of one another's legitimacy. As outlined in the following subsections, the signals came in four notable areas: entrance into bilateral treaties, recognition of territorial legitimacy, recognition of the legitimacy of political leaders, and cooperation in space.

Bilateral Treaties

Reaching formal bilateral treaties with a rival can be one way of recognizing the legitimacy of its governing institutions. The United States and the USSR signed only two bilateral treaties before 1970.[87] The period of 1970–1979 saw a sixfold increase in bilateral treaties. During this period, the superpowers also engaged in other important agreements and discussions that did not meet the threshold of an official treaty but were important signals of mutual acceptance of legitimacy and trust. For example, the 1972 Basic Principles Agreement (BPA), signed by Nixon and Brezhnev, recognized superpower equality, established mutual respect, and served as a precursor to the 1973 Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War.[88]

Recognition of Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

In the early Cold War, U.S. signaling of a lack of respect for Soviet sovereignty had clear negative effects on bilateral relations. The infamous shootdown and capture of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers on May 1, 1960, just two weeks before an East-West summit in Paris, embarrassed the Eisenhower administration, cast a shadow over the summit, and contributed to an increase in bilateral tensions. Although aerial reconnaissance flights over Soviet territory had been going on for years and were intended to be covert rather than to send an intentional signal, this public exposure sent a clear message to the USSR that the United States did not respect its territorial sovereignty. Additionally, at least in the minds of the Soviets, the United States and the West did not recognize the postwar territorial gains of the Soviet Union for decades. The USSR had unsuccessfully sought a European conference to obtain formal recognition of the postwar political boundaries in Eastern Europe in 1954 but did not achieve recognition until more than 20 years later, in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.[89]

In the 1970s, the United States began signaling increased acceptance of the legitimacy of the Soviet bloc. In 1971, the United States engaged in the first informal discussions with the GDR about opening a U.S. embassy. In 1974, the United States established diplomatic relations with the GDR.[90] Around the same time, talks between West German and Soviet officials led to several bilateral agreements and contributed to the commencement and success of the

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[87] The one bilateral treaty entered into by the superpowers between 1945 and 1953 simply concerned a small transfer of land in Germany between the U.S. and Soviet zones in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

[88] Øyvind Østerud, "Decay and Revival of Détente: Dynamics of Center and Periphery in Superpower Rivalry," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1988, p. 21; Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, May 29, 1972, "116. Paper Agreed Upon by the United States and the Soviet Union," Louis J. Smith and David H. Herschler, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol. I, *Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969–1972*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003; Agreement Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Nuclear War, June 22, 1973.

[89] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "Helsinki Final Act, 1975," webpage, undated c.

[90] In contrast, during the period of heightened tensions in the 1980s, there was no progress on issues between the United States and the GDR, and the Reagan administration insisted that Berlin was not the capital of the GDR, as GDR leadership claimed.

Helsinki Process.[91] The 1975 Helsinki Final Act, signed by the United States, Canada, and every European country except for Albania, effectively legitimized the territorial status quo in Europe and recognized the political boundaries of the Warsaw Pact. The Helsinki Act marked the agreement of the USSR and the West on "major elements of the regional order despite tensions and mutual mistrust" and contributed to greater cooperation and stability.[92]

Recognition of the Legitimacy of Political Leaders

Recognizing an adversary's leadership as legitimate and resisting urges to undermine it was an important stabilizing mechanism. Gaddis' second principle is based on the premise that stable leadership on both sides is required to successfully play the game of interstate rivalry. He observed that, if the objective is stability at the international level, it would not make sense to try to destabilize one another's leadership at the national level because this would likely result in an insecure leadership that could lash out.[93] Historical cases in which reciprocal leadership acceptance was absent and conflict occurred support the argument that recognizing an adversary's leadership as legitimate is an important stabilizing mechanism. Gaddis argues that, throughout the Cold War, American and Soviet regimes tended to avoid actively seeking to undermine their counterparts.[94]

In the case of the Cold War, signaling acceptance of one another's leadership as legitimate via high-level meetings often generated good will and correlated with reciprocal efforts to improve the relationship. When the Soviets ended a prolonged deadlock over a peace treaty with Austria in 1955 by agreeing to change their position, Eisenhower rewarded the effort by agreeing to a summit between Soviet and Western leaders in Geneva that year. This was significant because it was the first such meeting since 1945, and the goodwill it generated improved relations between the two countries, even though no tangible agreements were reached.[95] A similar positive spirit and agreements to continue discussions on important international issues resulted from a 1959 visit by Khrushchev to the United States. And, of course, the positive outcomes for superpower relations of increased high-level interactions in the 1970s and mid-1980s are well documented.

In sharp contrast to the détente of the 1970s, the end of President Carter's term and President Reagan's first term were marked by an almost absolute absence of interaction between the U.S. and Soviet leaderships. This period, from late 1979 to 1985, coincided with abysmal relations between the two countries and increasing competition. In late 1985, after years of minimal interaction, Reagan and Gorbachev met in Geneva.[96] This was a critical signal from the Reagan administration that the United States accepted the legitimacy of the new Soviet leader or at least found him to be a more-legitimate leader than his predecessor and worthy of a leadership meeting at the highest level.

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[91] Gottfried Niedhart, "Ostpolitik: Transformation Through Communication and the Quest for Peaceful Change," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Summer 2016, pp. 49–51.

[92] Samuel Charap, Jeremy Shapiro, and Alyssa Demus, *Rethinking the Regional Order for Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-297-CC/SFDFA, 2018, pp. 11–13.

[93] Gaddis, 1986, p. 41.

[94] Gaddis, 1986, p. 41.

[95] Chester J. Pach, Jr., "Dwight D. Eisenhower: Foreign Affairs," webpage, University of Virginia, Miller Center, undated.

[96] Strobe Talbott, "Reagan and Gorbachev: Shutting the Cold War Down," Brookings Institution website, August 1, 2004.

Competition on Peripheral Issues

In the U.S. strategic vernacular during the Cold War, the term *periphery* generally was equated with developing nations or the Third World.[97] *Peripheral* can also mean "of less significance or importance," which is meaningful in the Cold War context: Both superpowers chose to expend resources competing in areas that had previously been judged to be of minimal strategic value.[98] Throughout the Cold War, the United States and USSR each used direct and indirect (overt and covert) methods of competition in these peripheral areas as tools for furthering their influence; countering each other's influence; and obtaining access to useful resources, territories, and populations. These methods of competition included weapon sales, economic aid packages, diplomatic initiatives, indirect support of a party to a local conflict, and direct intervention in a local conflict. As the stability-instability paradox would suggest, there was no direct large-scale military confrontation between the superpowers because of the fear of nuclear escalation, but involvement in external conflicts at lower levels increased.[99]

Our review revealed three interesting points relevant to how peripheral competition affects the stability of a rivalry. First, the USSR's disadvantaged position as the strategically inferior superpower in the early phases of the Cold War compelled it to seek out adequate force multipliers; competing on the periphery became a way to use limited resources to greater strategic effect. Attracting Third World nations to its camp could boost Soviet prestige and legitimacy as a global leader (and firmly establish its position as leader of the communist world); provide material benefits; and, potentially, bolster Soviet influence in international institutions, such as the UN. The USSR thus capitalized on the decolonization movement before the United States did. The United States initially resisted devoting attention and resources to what policymakers, such as George Kennan, deemed nonvital areas, but Soviet initiatives to reach out to nations in Asia and Africa in the mid-1950s compelled much greater focus from the United States. Once both states began to compete for influence on the periphery, meaningful distinctions between peripheral and central issues blurred.[100] Both states accorded developments in areas of peripheral competition more weight than they objectively seemed to possess. Second, even during détente, neither state felt comfortable halting peripheral competition. And third, what happened in the periphery did not always remain in the periphery; developments in these areas affected other major issues in the bilateral relationship, such as arms control.[101]

Soviet initiatives to use influence in peripheral areas to partially compensate for its strategic disadvantages drove greater U.S. interest in these areas, sparking peripheral competition, and the resulting blurred line between central and peripheral would last until the end of the war. Although

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[97] Robert J. McMahon, "How the Periphery Became the Center: The Cold War, the Third World, and the Transformation in US Strategic Thinking," in Bevan Sewell and Maria Ryan, eds., *Foreign Policy at the Periphery: The Shifting Margins of US International Relations since World War II*, Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 2017, p. 19.

[98] Such areas as Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa "ebbed and flowed between being highly important and peripheral" during the Cold War (Sewell and Ryan, 2017, p. 12).

[99] Østerud, 1988, p. 20. There is a body of literature on the stability-instability paradox and how it affects peripheral competition, such as Michael Krepon, "The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation Control in South Asia," in Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen, eds., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 261–279.

[100] McMahon, 2017, focuses on this point.

[101] Gaddis surveyed many peripheral issues that threatened the stability of the central Cold War relationship (John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, New York: Penguin, 2005a, pp. 118–155).

U.S. defense officials worried about Soviet expansion in the Middle East and Southeast Asia from the earliest days of the Cold War,[102] U.S. policy initially had a narrower focus for containment efforts. The Truman Doctrine had prioritized containment of Soviet expansionism but was based on Kennan's articulation of five areas of vital strategic importance: the United States, USSR, Britain, Western Europe (including West Germany), and Japan.[103] Because the USSR was out of reach, it was crucial that the United States focus its limited resources on protecting the other four areas from Soviet influence. Under this doctrine, other parts of the world were less relevant and should not consume limited resources. The "loss" of a country in Southeast Asia to communism would not be ideal, but it should not be perceived as more of a threat than it actually was.[104] Even though NSC 68 had "essentially globaliz[ed] America's definition of what could be referred to as a *core area*" in 1950, in practice U.S. policy neglected much of the globe.[105] As one example, when the U.S. Ambassador to India pushed for an economic aid package in 1952, he was told, "we cannot afford an economic development program unrelated to the communist threat."[106]

The peripheral began growing in strategic importance early in the Cold War because of Soviet perceptions of its value. The death of Stalin allowed the USSR to adjust its doctrine to allow more-active engagement with countries emerging from colonial rule.[107] This marked a departure from Stalin's Soviet doctrine, which had essentially argued that countries that had recently broken from colonial rule were part of the imperialist camp until a communist party won power.[108] At the same time that Khrushchev emphasized a new policy of peaceful coexistence with the United States, he grouped together the socialist bloc, newly independent, and developing countries in a "vast zone of peace" to justify a policy of expanding influence in these areas.[109] In the mid-1950s, the Soviets began a concerted campaign of diplomatic and economic overtures. In 1955 alone, Khrushchev and Premier Nikolai Bulganin made high-profile trips to Afghanistan, Burma, and India; subsidized weapon sales to Egypt; and made numerous generous aid-and-trade offers to nations in Asia and Africa. The Soviets had identified an exploitable U.S. vulnerability: its close association with detested colonial powers.[110]

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[102] In 1946, Dean Acheson wrote a memo cautioning that, if the USSR obtained control over Turkey, it would eventually gain control over the whole Near and Middle East (Dean Acheson, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of State, at Paris," memorandum to Secretary Byrnes, August 15, 1946, in Herbert A. Fine, John G. Reid, and John P. Glennon, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Near East and Africa*, Vol. VII, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969). A 1948 NSC report defined the ultimate Soviet objective as communist world domination (National Security Council Staff, "Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary [Souers]," March 30, 1948, in Neal H. Petersen, Ralph R. Goodwin, Marvin W. Kranz, and William Z. Slany, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, General; the United Nations*, Vol. I, Part 2, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 546).

[103] McMahon, 2017, p. 22.

[104] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005b, pp. 54–64.

[105] Sewell and Ryan, 2017, p. 4, emphasis in the original.

[106] Cited in McMahon, 2017, p. 28.

[107] Alessandro Iandolo, "Imbalance of Power: The Soviet Union and the Congo Crisis, 1960–1961," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Spring 2014, p. 33; Westad, 2005, pp. 57–72.

[108] Wohlforth, 1993, pp. 162–163.

[109] Wohlforth, 1993, pp. 162–163.

[110] McMahon, 2017, pp. 27–28.

U.S. policymakers were immediately threatened by Soviet initiatives in the developing world and adjusted policy to counter them. A 1955 intelligence report warned that the new Soviet policy could be even more threatening than Stalin's belligerent policies and rhetoric.[111] McMahon acknowledged that the developing world did not suddenly become of interest to U.S. policymakers in the 1950s just because it had become important to the Soviets (previous administrations had viewed parts of the Middle East and Southeast Asia as important), but Soviet actions in the mid-1950s shifted how U.S. policymakers perceived the periphery's strategic value and affected the level of resources and attention paid to areas previously seen as nonvital.[112]

Peripheral competition continued even during periods of détente and, ultimately, contributed to the collapse of détente in the late 1970s. Superpower peripheral competition became known as the "blind spot of détente"—it continued even as the powers cooperated and relaxed tensions in other areas.[113] This observation underscored how important both powers perceived maintaining influence and control in peripheral areas to be for economic, ideological, and geopolitical reasons. During the 1970s, even as the superpowers agreed to restrict the development of major capabilities for protecting their essential security, they were unwilling to completely stop competing in peripheral areas. Soviet officials believed they could support détente with the United States while continuing to expand Soviet influence in the Third World.[114]

President Nixon saw active intervention in peripheral conflicts as an expensive distraction and possible disrupter of détente but continued to indirectly support anticommunist groups. Early in his first term, he told Secretary of State Kissinger not to waste time on the less-developed parts of the world, "as what happens in those parts of the world is not, in the final analysis, going to have any significant effect on the success of our foreign policy."[115] The Nixon Doctrine shifted greater responsibility for regional stability and security to local allies. Still, the administration provided material assistance to parties in Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, and Zaire to counter Soviet influence without direct intervention.[116] The administration also illegally provided weapons to Pakistan in 1971.[117]

The intensification and increased openness of peripheral competition in the second half of the 1970s contributed to the decline of détente. In the 1970s, the Soviets increased their overt and covert involvement in sub-Saharan Africa; though they tried to obscure certain aspects of their involvement, such as large military aid packages, U.S. intelligence suspected

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[111] Central Intelligence Agency and the Intelligence Organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Joint Staff, "39. National Intelligence Estimate: World Situation and Trends," Washington, D.C., 100-7-55, November 1, 1955, in William Klingaman, David S. Patterson, and Ilana Stern, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1955–1957, Vol. 19: *National Security Policy*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990, pp. 131–145.

[112] McMahon, 2017, pp. 27–29.

[113] Østerud, 1988.

[114] Vladislav Zubok, "The Soviet Union and Détente of the 1970s," *Cold War History*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2008, p. 434.

[115] [Richard] Nixon, "61. Memorandum from President Nixon to His Assistant (Haldeman), His Assistant for Domestic Affairs (Ehrlichman), and His Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)," March 2, 1970, in Louis J. Smith and David H. Herschler, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol. I, *Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969–1972*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003.

[116] Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 38.

[117] Alvandi, 2014, Chapter 2.

increased activity.[118] In 1976, the Soviets signed a secret $100 million arms deal with the new Ethiopian regime, followed by a larger, unconcealed deal the next year.[119] Both the United States and Soviet Union provided ostensibly covert military assistance to parties in the Angolan Civil War in the 1970s, though in practice neither side was successful in keeping its activities hidden.[120] The increase in substantiality and overtness of Soviet involvement in such places as Yemen, sub-Saharan Africa,[121] and Afghanistan in the latter half of the 1970s directly damaged support for ratification of SALT II in the U.S. Congress and contributed to the decline of détente.[122]

What happened in the periphery did not remain in the periphery; it affected the broader Cold War in meaningful ways. Competition in peripheral areas affected central concerns, such as arms control and the tenor of bilateral relations. For example, U.S. and Soviet competition in the Congo conflict in the early 1960s contributed to making the broader superpower competition more militarized because the poor Soviet performance brought into sharp relief its need for greater power-projection capabilities.[123] Soviet policymakers realized that trying to gain influence in peripheral areas solely with offers of economic, technical, and political assistance was insufficient when compared to the Americans' ability to project power far from its borders. By 1973, the USSR deployed a permanent naval unit in the Mediterranean, supplemented it with shore-based airpower, and developed a rapid response intervention capability.[124] Another example was the negative impact effects of superpower confrontation during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War on policymaker and public confidence in the SALT process.[125]

Respecting one another's spheres of influence was an important, if unofficial, mechanism of keeping rivalry constrained on the periphery. In general, both sides refrained from significant interference in one another's spheres of influence; when this custom was not respected, crisis followed. Demarcating a zone of agreed competition (and a zone where competition would not be tolerated) that is based on mutual interest in containing a rivalry was thus a characteristic of a stable rivalry. Gaddis argued that each superpower's respect for one another's spheres of influence, even though it was never explicitly articulated, was an important and stabilizing acknowledgment of one another's interests.[126] He conceded that each side attempted to exploit opportuni-

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[118] For example, U.S. intelligence believed that the Soviets were increasing their military presence in Somalia in the early 1970s (William Beecher, "U.S. Hears Soviet Has Somali Base," *New York Times*, April 9, 1973).

[119] Robert G. Patman, "Soviet–Ethiopian Relations: The Horn of Dilemma," in Margot Light, *Troubled Friendships: Moscow's Third World Ventures*, London: British Academic Press, 1993, pp. 110–139.

[120] Jane Hunter, *Israeli Foreign Policy: South Africa and Central America*, Boston: South End Press, 1987; Harold Hongju Koh, *The National Security Constitution: Sharing Power After the Iran-Contra Affair*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 52.

[121] This included a huge increase in military aid to Ethiopia in 1978 and 1979 and a gradual uptick in military support for the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola that led to the provision of massive amounts of aid in the early 1980s.

[122] Østerud, 1988, pp. 16, 23. Richard B. Remnek, "Translating 'New Soviet Thinking' into Practice: The Case of Ethiopia," in George W. Breslauer, *Soviet Policy in Africa: From the Old to the New Thinking*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California at Berkeley, 1992.

[123] Iandolo, 2014, p. 33.

[124] Francis Fukuyama, *Soviet Threats to Intervene in the Middle East 1956–1973*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, N-1577-FF, 1980.

[125] Østerud, 1988, pp. 15–16.

[126] Gaddis, 1986, p. 35. Also see Østerud, 1988, p. 25.

ties in the other's sphere but maintained that each side did so only when it believed that the other side could or would not reassert control.[127]

The United States never seriously tried to unravel Soviet control in Eastern Europe. A 1953 NSC report concluded that only Soviet acquiescence or an "unacceptable war" could end Soviet control of Eastern Europe.[128] The Brezhnev Doctrine, announced in late 1968 to provide retroactive justification for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, made clear that the USSR would intervene in countries where Soviet regimes were threatened. According to the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Historian, the United States interpreted the Brezhnev Doctrine and Soviet interventions in Eastern Europe as defending already established territory rather than expanding Soviet control over new territory.[129] The doctrine and associated Soviet behavior were thus viewed as a legitimate, if undesirable, form of Soviet defense of its sphere of influence rather than as unbridled Soviet aggression.

Soviet actions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 indicate confidence that the United States would not intervene to stop the reassertion of Soviet control in its sphere of influence. According to one U.S. intelligence report, the Soviets interpreted the U.S. posture at the 1955 Geneva Summit as an acknowledgment that challenges that did not threaten vital U.S. interests would not be met with a U.S. military response.[130] The report assessed that the Soviets believed that—if faced with the choices of inaction, intervening locally with inferior means, or escalating the conflict—the United States would choose the first option.[131] The lack of serious discussion among the Soviet Presidium on the threat of U.S. military escalation in Hungary in response to Soviet intervention was illustrative. The reassuring signaling of U.S. officials, which was intended to persuade the Soviets to allow Hungarian neutrality, might have had the opposite effect, convincing the Soviets that the Americans would not respond to an intervention.[132]

Although the USSR left the U.S. sphere of influence alone for the most part,[133] the significant exception was the Soviet placement of missiles in Cuba. An important lesson can be drawn from the onset and severity of the Cuban Missile Crisis: When a superpower did miscalculate the other's vital interests and interfere in its sphere of influence, dangerous confrontation occurred, with the potential for escalation and instability.

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[127] For example, the United States exploited Yugoslavia's defection from the Soviet bloc but did not intervene in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, or Poland in 1981. The USSR exploited the defection of Cuba from the American orbit after 1959 but did not challenge the assertion of U.S. influence in Guatemala in 1954, the Dominican Republic in 1965, or Grenada in 1983. See Gaddis, 1986, p. 36.

[128] NSC, *United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe*, Washington, D.C., Report No. 174, December 11, 1953; Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, and János M. Rainer, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents,* Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002, pp. 34–37.

[129] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968," webpage, undated d.

[130] Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Estimates Group, 1959.

[131] Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Estimates Group, 1959.

[132] Johanna C. Granville, *The First Domino: International Decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis of 1956*, College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2004, p. 214.

[133] As one example, despite repeated entreaties from Latin American communists to bolster the Jacobo Arbenz government in Guatemala against the hostile United States, the Soviets provided them with only one shipment of obsolete and fairly useless weaponry (Michelle Denise Getchell, "Revisiting the 1954 Coup in Guatemala: The Soviet Union, the United Nations, and 'Hemispheric Solidarity'," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Spring 2015).

Communication Channels

Some veins of international relations theory say that conflict and security dilemmas can arise out of uncertainty, particularly uncertainty about a rival state's intentions and capabilities. In the face of incomplete information, states rely on their own interpretations of a rival's intentions and capabilities, which, according to Jervis, are often inaccurate because they are subject to decisionmakers' cognitive biases.[134] This can result in misperceptions of a rival's intentions and capabilities—or "inaccurate inferences, miscalculations of consequences, and misjudgments about how others will react on one's policies."[135] When states incorrectly interpret a rival's behavior as bellicose although it is intended to be benign, misperceptions can lead to inadvertent conflict among states.[136]

One way to help address misperceptions and contribute to stability is through mechanisms that increase transparency about a rival's intentions, behavior, and capabilities. CBMs—actions that states agree to pursue to reduce secrecy about their actions and intentions and to enhance clarity about their rival's behaviors and motivations—foster transparency.[137]

Our review of each side's communication channels and CBMs during the Cold War highlighted two patterns of effects on the stability of the U.S.-USSR relationship.

One type of CBMs—communication measures—served as important tools to manage crises and avert their escalation to outright conflict. Certain types of communications were found to be more stabilizing than others. Although these measures were important in deescalating crises, they were likely less useful in ameliorating underlying sources of political tension between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The most notable communication measure established during the Cold War was the direct communication link, more commonly known as the hotline, connecting Washington and Moscow. The hotline was born out of what is often considered to be the nadir of the Cold War superpower rivalry, the Cuban Missile Crisis. On a practical level, the channels of communication the two countries used during the crisis were slow and unreliable. At times, it took "up to four hours to code, decode, and translate messages."[138] The channels were so cumbersome that Khrushchev used the radio to broadcast his final message to Kennedy (about agreeing to withdraw Soviet missiles from Cuba) while also relaying it via normal diplomatic channels. Psychologically, the crisis underscored the catastrophic consequences of miscalculation in the nuclear age and the significance of preventing misperception through open channels of dialogue.[139]

Shortly after the crisis, the Americans and Soviets set out to negotiate an agreement to establish a rapid and reliable communications conduit that would allow their respective leader-

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[134] Jervis, 1976.

[135] Robert Jervis, "War and Misperception," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1988, p. 675.

[136] Jervis, 1976.

[137] Richard E. Darilek, "East-West Confidence-Building," in Michael Krepon, Dominique M. McCoy, and Matthew C. J. Rudolph, *A Handbook of Confidence-Building Measures in Regional Security*, Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, September 1993, p. 19.

[138] Deborah Welch Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S. Soviet Relations During the Cold War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 145.

[139] Larson, 1997, p. 145.

ship to communicate during emergencies.[140] The hotline consisted of a full-time duplex wire telegraph circuit, with a full-time duplex radiotelegraph circuit to be used as a backup in the event that the telegraph line was disrupted.[141]

It is difficult to say with any certainty whether the existence or use of the hotline was a major contributor to the overall stability of U.S.-Soviet relations. The counterfactual—how unstable relations would have been in its absence—is unknown. That said, an examination of how the hotline was used offers an indication of the White House and Kremlin's conception of it. The Americans and Soviets both used the hotline as designed: to communicate at times when conflict between their proxies had the potential to embroil Washington and Moscow in a broader confrontation. These instances included the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, the Arab-Israeli War of 1973, following Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and during the Reagan administration to discuss events in Lebanon and uprisings in Poland.[142]

Soviet Premier Kosygin was the first to use the line in 1967, to communicate Moscow's desire to bring an end to a conflict in the Middle East that had erupted between U.S. and Soviet proxies.[143] A total of 20 messages were exchanged during this period, now known as the Six-Day War. In the initial messages, the Americans and Soviets expressed their hopes for the peaceful resolution of the conflict, conveyed their most recent actions, and urged one another to moderate their respective proxies' actions by "exercising" their influence.[144]

The hotline became particularly important as a channel to convey accurate information (to prevent miscalculation) when Israeli forces accidentally torpedoed the USS *Liberty*. The *Liberty* was sent to the Mediterranean when hostilities between Israel and the Arab states intensified. Johnson used the hotline to notify the Kremlin of the incident and of his decision to dispatch U.S. aircraft to investigate. In his message, the President reassured Kosygin that "investigation is the sole purpose of this flight of aircraft," and he urged the Premier to "take appropriate steps to see that the proper parties are informed."[145] This action conveyed the information to the Soviets and, by extension, the Egyptians. Given its timing, this action might have preempted potential misperceptions about U.S. intentions to secretly enter the conflict.

Hotline messages also demonstrate that the channel was used to posture, chastise, or communicate threats. In a Politburo meeting to discuss responses to President Carter's hotline message regarding Soviet personnel in Cuba, Andrei Alexandrov-Argentov, foreign policy

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[140] Memorandum of Understanding Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link, Geneva, June 20, 1963.

[141] Memorandum of Understanding, 1963.

[142] Tom Clavin, "There Never Was Such a Thing as a Red Phone in the White House," *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 18, 2013.

[143] Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., "Summary," in Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968,* Vol. XIX: *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004b.

[144] For a record of these messages, see Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., "Six Days of War, June 5–10, 1967," in Harriett Dashiell, ed. Schwar, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. XIX, *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004a; Lyndon B. Johnson, "159. Message from President Johnson to Premier Kosygin," Washington, D.C., June 5, 1967, in Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968,* Vol. XIX*, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004.

[145] Schwar 2004b. The messages between Johnson and Kosygin appear in Schwar, 2004a.

adviser to Brezhnev, made a case for including language that communicated Soviet displeasure, condemned U.S. behavior, and wielded a thinly veiled threat:

> I would like to suggest beginning the text of the letter with the following: "First of all, I must openly tell you, Mr. President, that we are extremely surprised by the openly hostile to the Soviet Union campaign which has been launched in the USA with the active participation of the Administration, for which the United States has absolutely no real reasons and no legal basis. It seems to us that the only result of the swelling of this artificially created campaign can be a real loss to the relations between our countries and to the stability of the peace . . . ."[146]

Likewise, Kosygin used intimidating language in one of his later messages during the Six-Day War, threatening that, if Israeli "military actions are not stopped in the next few hours," the Soviets would be forced to "adopt an independent decision," which could enmesh the Americans and Soviets in a "clash which will lead to a grave catastrophe."[147]

The United States exhibited the same kind of behavior when using the hotline. Thus, while the communication link was an important tool for crisis management, its use as a conduit to compel behavior could potentially have been destabilizing.

Although its founding document established that the line was reserved for "use in time of emergency," the hotline later became conceptualized as a means of signaling the gravity of a situation or of one side's position on an issue. The renewal of the hotline agreement at several points throughout the Cold War speaks to the mutual belief in its utility. As Nish Jamgotch has noted:

> Convinced that these emergency communications had proved their worth during the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, the United States and the Soviet Union acted to improve the system and ensure its reliability by employing advances in satellite technology of the late sixties. As part of the negotiations leading to SALT I, working groups were organized to explore extended measures to prevent accidents and improve the Washington-Moscow communications system. Understandings became part of a formal agreement in the summer of 1971 to upgrade the Hot Line by establishing two satellite communications circuits with multiple terminals in each country.[148]

Additional agreements to renew and modernize the hotline were signed in 1984 and 1988.[149] Although voice and video links were considered as upgrades, it was determined that these could, in fact, be destabilizing because they could convey too much information, such as the appearance of "strain and fatigue."[150] The renegotiation was itself used as a yardstick of positive relations between East and West.

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[146] "Meeting of the CC CPSU Politburo, September 27, 1979 (excerpt)," Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, George Washington University, September 27, 1979.

[147] Alexei Kosygin, "243. Message from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson," Moscow, June 10, 1967b, in Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. XIX: *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004b.

[148] Nish Jamgotch, Jr., ed. *Sectors of Mutual Benefit in U.S.–Soviet Relations*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985, p. 10.

[149] Memorandum of Understanding, 1963.

[150] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Making of America's Soviet Policy,* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 408.

Likewise, in addition to placing limits on U.S. and Soviet systems and activities in the military arena, Cold War era arms control agreements established communication channels—specifically, groups that convened regularly to discuss issues related to the treaties. These channels were significant, as Joseph S. Nye, Jr., and Alexander L. George have noted, because they institutionalized mechanisms that allowed the superpowers to clarify questions about the implementation of the treaties or discuss issues related to compliance.[151] These discussions might have prevented misperceptions from arising about one another's actions or motives.

A provision in the ABM Treaty established the Standing Consultative Commission (SCC), a bilateral forum in which the superpowers could discuss ambiguities that arose from implementation of the ABM and SALT I and II treaties, resolve questions about compliance, "consider questions involving unintended interference with national technical means of verification," and address other potential grievances.[152] Additionally, the SCC was responsible for assessing the effects of changes in the strategic environment or of technological advances that might upset the balance provided in the agreements and for considering avenues for "future limiting strategic arms."[153] The commission was also significant in that it established a permanent mechanism for communication between the Americans and the Soviets.

The effectiveness of the SCC as a means of resolving compliance issues has been debated. Because its proceedings were classified, impartial analyses assessing its effectiveness are largely absent from the literature.[154] Officials' personal appraisals of the SCC offer some insight, although they are limited by their potential for partiality. Many officials that participated in the SCC's meetings underscored its utility.[155] This view was held at the highest echelons in some administrations. In a letter to President Carter discussing SALT I negotiations, Brezhnev noted that "practice [had] shown that the Commission effectively perform[ed] its duties" of "removing any misunderstandings when they arise."[156] Others questioned its merits, citing what they deemed as the group's failure to address Soviet violations of treaty provisions.[157]

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[151] Alexander L. George, "The Basic Principles Agreement of 1972: Origins and Expectations," in Alexander L. George, ed., *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, Inc., 1983, p. 249; Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Arms Control and International Politics," *Daedalus*, Vol. 120, No. 1, Winter 1991, pp. 156, 161.

[152] Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM) Treaty, May 26, 1972; E. Asa Bates, Jr., "The SALT Standing Consultative Commission: An American Analysis," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* Vol. 4, No. 2, September 1, 1975; Sidney N. Graybeal and Michael Krepon, "Making Better Use of the Standing Consultative Commission," *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Fall 1985.

[153] Graybeal and Krepon, 1985, p. 184.

[154] Graybeal and Krepon, 1985, p. 186.

[155] For examples of officials' expressions of effectiveness of the SCC, see the comments of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. David Jones, as recorded in NSC, "15. Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting," Washington, D.C., February 6, 1981, in James Graham Wilson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988*, Vol. III: *Soviet Union, January 1981–January 1983*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2016; [Warren] Christopher, "131. Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union," Washington, D.C., July 12, 1980, in Chris Tudda, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, Vol. XXVI, *Arms Control and Nonproliferation*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2015; Graybeal and Krepon, 1985, pp. 186–188.

[156] Leonid Brezhnev, "181. Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Carter," March 11, 1979, in Melissa Jane Taylor, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980,* Vol. VI: *Soviet Union*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2013.

[157] Graybeal and Krepon, 1985, pp. 187, 191.

Regardless of the SCC's effectiveness in resolving compliance concerns, evidence shows that the superpowers used the commission as intended: to clarify uncertainties about treaty implementation and address concerns about compliance.[158] In 1975, the United States raised the issue of Soviet radar testing, which Washington perceived as a violation of the ABM Treaty, through the SCC. The superpowers' delegations used the forum to clarify their positions on the issue, and the Soviets halted the activity thereafter.[159] Likewise, the Reagan administration used the body in 1983 as a forum to address concerns over what it believed to be Soviet violations of the ABM Treaty.[160]

Early CBMs helped promote transparency and establish expected norms of behavior. However, their lack of enforcement mechanisms limited their ability to contribute to stability. The later inclusion of independently verifiable mechanisms in confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) helped address outstanding insecurities of both members of the rivalry.

The first generation of CBMs that the United States and the Soviet Union negotiated and agreed to were important building blocks for both arms control agreements and later CSBMs.

In the military sphere, CBMs, unlike formal arms control agreements, were not intended to limit physical armaments. Rather, they were designed to moderate behavior in a way that increased transparency in a sphere historically dominated by secrecy.[161] It was thought that this "increase in transparency would then promote higher level arms control objectives, such as reducing miscalculation and misunderstanding, which in turn would support even higher-level objectives, such as preventing war and preserving peace."[162]

The 1972 Preventing Incidents at Sea agreement helped promote transparency between the two countries and establish rules of behavior for their two navies.[163] Prior to the agreement, U.S. and Soviet vessels and aircraft frequently harassed one another when coming into contact at sea, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s after the Soviet navy's presence increased.[164] This behavior—such as playing chicken, flying reconnaissance aircraft close to vessels (buzzing), simulating attacks on and/or accidentally firing at the other vessels—was dangerous and posed a threat of increasing political tensions between Washington and Moscow. Likewise, the misperception of behavior or intent surrounding such incidents could have sparked combat between the vessels, with the potential to escalate into a broader conflict.[165] The agreement included measures aimed at the "(1) regulation of dangerous maneuvers; (2) restriction of other

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[158] Graybeal and Krepon, 1985, pp. 188–191.

[159] Henry Kissinger, "169. Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford," July 23, 1975, in David C. Geyer, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol. XVI, *Soviet Union, August 1974–December 1976*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012.

[160] Steven Pifer, "The INF Treaty, Russian Compliance and the U.S. Policy Response," Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, July 17, 2014.

[161] Darilek, 1993, p. 19.

[162] Darilek, 1993, p. 19.

[163] Agreement Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Incidents on and over the High Seas, May 25, 1972.

[164] Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "A Quiet Success for Arms Control: Preventing Incidents at Sea," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Spring 1985, pp. 154–155.

[165] Lynn-Jones, 1985, pp. 165–166.

forms of harassment; (3) increased communication at sea; and (4) convening regular naval consultations and exchanges of information."[166]

The agreement appeared to contribute to the stability of U.S.-Soviet relations by restraining provocative behavior at sea. Commenting on the agreement's effectiveness 12 years after its passage, then–Secretary of the Navy John F. Lehman said the agreement had resulted in "a marked reduction in collisions and near collisions."[167] The late 1960s had witnessed more than 100 incidents annually. By contrast, there were about 40 between June 1982 and June 1983.[168]

In addition to the practical success of reducing the immediate risk to U.S. and Soviet sailors, the agreement laid the groundwork for the cultivation of a cordial working relationship between the two states' navies. It also established the "stable pattern," in the words of Lehman, of using annual meetings as a channel to inquire about issues or resolve disagreements.[169] Resolving issues in this venue rather than at the political level could have shielded issues from becoming squabbles.[170] The agreement's success is rooted in the facts that it did not try to fundamentally alter the nature of U.S.-Soviet relations and recognized that the two states would likely continue to compete.[171] Its focus was limited. It targeted specific provocative behavior and promoted communication channels that could be used to clarify miscalculations as they arose. That said, given its nonbinding nature, its success was dependent on both sides' desire to adhere to its provisions.

The Helsinki Final Act, signed in 1975, included military CBMs.[172] These included the prior notification of military maneuvers and major military movements and the exchange of observers to attend exercises.[173] According to Darilek, who has written extensively on CBMs, this piece of the Helsinki Final Act was a necessary precursor to later CBNs in that it began to break down the traditions of military secrecy. Likewise, it began routinizing new practices of information-sharing in the military space:

> Through CBMs the countries of Europe grew accustomed to telling each other in advance, on a routine basis, about periodic military activities, which neighboring states would find out about anyway through their intelligence sources. The process of informing others is as important for the party that is doing the telling as it is for the side that is receiving the information (and checking it against what its own sources have provided). When it comes to building confidence, the fact that information is being passed by mutual agreement may even be more important than specific details of the information.[174]

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[166] Lynn-Jones, 1985, p. 174.

[167] Fred Hiatt, "Soviet Sub Bumps Into U.S. Carrier," *Washington Post*, March 22, 1984.

[168] "Superpowers Maneuvering for Supremacy on High Seas," *Washington Post*, April 4, 1984, p. A18.

[169] Lynn-Jones, 1985, p. 176.

[170] Lynn-Jones, 1985, p. 176.

[171] Lynn-Jones, 1985, p. 181.

[172] Richard Davy, "Helsinki Myths: Setting the Record Straight on the Final Act of the CSCE, 1975," *Cold War History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, February 2009, p. 12.

[173] Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe, *Final Act*, 1975, pp. 11–13.

[174] Darilek, 1993, p. 29.

Later, more-intrusive CSBMs would not have been possible without this step, Darilek argued.[175]

Although important, the ability of CBMs to engender trust and prevent inadvertent conflict was limited because they lacked enforcement mechanisms and were nonbinding. In practice, the superpowers had no means of validating one another's compliance with the Helsinki provisions and instead relied on their trust in one another's word—a tall order, given the prevailing mutual mistrust characteristic of U.S.-Soviet relations for much of the Cold War.[176] The concern remained that states could use CBMs, such as advanced notice of military maneuvers, to foster false confidence, which could be used to deceive.[177] That is, states could establish credibility with their rival by appearing to promote openness, then use their rival's increased sense of security to stage a surprise attack.[178] This danger became apparent shortly after the ink at Helsinki had dried.

At the first follow-up meeting to Helsinki, parties expressed concern about these issues, particularly the potential to use military maneuvers as a prelude to a surprise attack or as a means of intimidation.[179] In Madrid, at the second follow-up meeting, the parties decided that any new CBMs negotiated "would be militarily significant, verifiable, and mandatory" and would apply to all of Europe, including the "entire European part of Soviet territory (i.e., to the Ural Mountains)"; previously it had applied only to Soviet territory less than 250 km from the Soviet border.[180] It was at this meeting that CBMs were renamed CSBMs "to distinguish them from their weaker, essentially voluntary Helsinki predecessors."[181]

By the time the Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe opened in Stockholm in 1984, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union had deteriorated markedly from where they had been at the Helsinki Accords' signing. From the West's perspective, the Soviets had violated the terms and spirit of the Accords. Moscow continued to prohibit the emigration of religious minorities. It used large-scale military exercises and deployments to influence the outcome of Polish resistance movements. Lastly, the Soviet military had invaded Afghanistan.[182]

The provisions outlined in the Stockholm Document on Confidence and Security Building Measures (Stockholm Document) were different from earlier CBMs in that they were mandatory and included more-intrusive verification measures. Signatories agreed to notify other parties of military activities 42 days in advance, invite observers from all participating

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[175] Darilek, 1993, p. 28.

[176] Darilek, 1993, p. 20.

[177] Nye, 1984, p. 410; Darilek, 1993, p. 20; Mike Bowker and Phil Williams, "Helsinki and West European Security," *International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 4, October 1985, p. 610.

[178] Darilek, 1993, pp. 20–21.

[179] Yoav Ben-Horin, Richard E. Darilek, M. Jas, Marilee Lawrence, and Alan Platt, *Building Confidence and Security in Europe: The Potential Role of Confidence- and Security-Building Measures*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-3431-USDP, 1986, pp. 4–5.

[180] Document of the Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe Convened in Accordance with the Relevant Provisions of the Concluding Document of the Madrid Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Stockholm, September 19, 1986.

[181] Ben-Horin et al., 1986, pp. 4–5.

[182] Max M. Kampelman, "The Helsinki Final Act: Peace Through Diplomacy," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol. 13, 1983, p. 330; Darilek, 1993, p. 20.

states to exercises and other specified military activities, and exchange annual calendars of planned military activities, among other provisions.[183] Moreover, the document spelled out the rights of each party to conduct up to three on-site inspections annually.[184]

These differences were significant in that they addressed some of the underlying insecurities about deception and surprise attack. They went a step further than the Helsinki CBMs by not only increasing transparency but providing a means of independently validating the information shared as part of this openness, thereby reducing the incentives for surprise attack.[185] However, provisions in the agreement left open the potential for the use of certain large-scale military activities, which required notification only "at the time troops involved commence[d] such activities," as a means of "political intimidation."[186]

In the final years of the Cold War, in which cooperation between the Americans and Soviets resumed, a flurry of agreements outlining CSBMs were signed. As the name might suggest, the Agreement on the Establishment of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers initiated the creation of two centers in Moscow and Washington that could communicate rapidly and reliably by facsimile and direct satellite links to exchange information as mandated by arms control agreements and confidence-building agreements.[187] The 1989 Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities Agreement between the two countries expanded the principles of the Preventing Incidents at Sea agreement to all services in an effort to reduce the likelihood of accidental or inadvertent conflict based on military activity.[188] The follow-on to the Stockholm Document, the 1990 Vienna Document, included items that were discussed at Stockholm but not included in the agreement.[189] It broadened the Stockholm Document's information exchange requirements, strengthened on-site inspection provisions, and established communications mechanisms through a computer network, among other significant provisions. Unlike previous agreements, the Vienna Document placed constraints on military behavior that could provoke unintended conflict—it placed caps on the number of military activities that signatories were allowed to conduct.[190] The agreement included other provisions to increase transparency and trust, such as its mandate to demonstrate new major weapon systems to other participants.[191]

Finally, while CBMs are often discussed as precursors to arms control agreements, both conventional and nuclear arms control treaties during the Cold War era included important

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[183] Document of the Stockholm Conference, 1986.

[184] Document of the Stockholm Conference, 1986.

[185] Johan Jorgen Holst, "Confidence-Building Measures: A Conceptual Framework," *Survival*, Vol. 25, No. 1, January/February 1983, pp. 2–15; Darilek, 1993, p. 21.

[186] Document of the Stockholm Conference, 1986; Darilek, 1993, p. 22.

[187] Agreement Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Establishment of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers, Washington, D.C., September 15, 1987.

[188] Agreement Between the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Government of the United States of America on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities, June 12, 1989; Rachel Gosnell, "Preventing Dangerous Military Incidents in Peacetime," Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018.

[189] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "The Vienna Document 1990: Of the Negotiations on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures Convened in Accordance with the Relevant Provisions of the Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe," 1990.

[190] Darilek, 1993, p. 25.

[191] Darilek, 1993, p. 25.

confidence-building provisions themselves. These agreements required both superpowers to exchange sensitive information about their forces and postures, contributing to transparency, which might have helped squelch potentially destabilizing misperceptions or miscalculations about one another's intentions.

Although they did not address underlying U.S. and Soviet insecurities, early CBMs were integral to establishing norms and setting expectations for sharing sensitive information between the rivals. More-intrusive measures might not have been possible, given the mutual mistrust between Moscow and Washington in the early Cold War era. These early CBMs thus laid the groundwork for later CSBMs, which further engendered trust through measures that institutionalized the verification of compliance.

Personal Relationships

Trust is a fundamental pillar of stable relations among states. To avoid unintentional conflict, states need to be able to trust in the reliability and legitimacy of one another's commitments—that their competitors' stated intentions are genuine and not merely attempts to subvert one another. Trust is particularly difficult to foster among actors that have strong preexisting images of one another as untrustworthy, as was the case with most U.S. and Soviet leaders throughout the Cold War.[192] To overcome deeply held suspicions of one another, rival states must demonstrate their credibility over time. Because "images of states as hostile and aggressive tend to endure," it is unlikely that infrequent interaction among policymakers will alter their perceptions of the other side.[193] Likewise, it likely requires more-significant conciliatory gestures to establish the credibility of one's intentions.[194]

Chollet and Goldgeier argued that actors can foster trust among one another (and the states they represent) through personal relations, which, in turn, engenders cooperation and affects policy outcomes.[195] Our review of the personal relationships among leaders during the Cold War highlighted two patterns regarding their effects on the stability of the U.S.-USSR relationship.

Many Soviet and U.S. policymakers entered office with negative preconceptions of the other side, which might have clouded their perceptions of each other's intent or behavior. In some cases, increased interaction among the policymakers cultivated personal relationships, which appears to have eased the preexisting images of the rival as untrustworthy. That said, actions rather than words alone helped convince policymakers of the legitimacy of one another's intentions. In some cases, the cultivation of cordial relations and trust appears to have had a somewhat moderating effect on U.S.-Soviet competition.

An examination of policymaker remarks, discussions, memoirs, and diaries can provide some insight into their perceptions of the other side, although these artifacts do not always offer an unbiased account. They reveal that, in many cases, the U.S. and Soviet leadership held negative images of and were deeply mistrustful of one another, particularly at the beginning of

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[192] Derek H. Chollet and James Goldgeier, "Once Burned, Twice Shy? The Pause of 1989," in William C. Wohlforth, ed., *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates*, University Park, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 147.

[193] Larson, 1997, p. 32.

[194] Larson, 1997, pp. 27–28.

[195] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, p. 168.

their terms in office. This appears to be especially the case later in the Cold War, when negative images of Washington and Moscow as evil empires had been rooted.

Yet, in some cases, negative images of the other side appeared to soften over the course of time in office. Policymakers often attributed their changes in perceptions to increased interaction with the other side and the cultivation of relationships with their counterparts. Scholarly analyses have, in some cases, substantiated these claims. Scholars have found that while such factors as geopolitical pressures and domestic politics influenced U.S.-Soviet relations, increased interaction between U.S. and Soviet policymakers and the personal relations they helped cultivate contributed, in some cases, to the easing of tensions between Washington and Moscow. The following paragraphs illustrate a number of examples of this dynamic.

The first years of Reagan's presidency were marked by a lack of dialogue between Washington and Moscow. Détente had given way to soured relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of several factors, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, an escalation in proxy conflicts, the Korean Air Lines incident, and "NATO deployment of Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe."[196] Additionally, the Reagan administration's initial perceptions of the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire" spurred a U.S. policy of confrontation with Moscow.[197] The administration relied on a buildup of its defenses and modernization of its nuclear forces to exert pressure in place of negotiations.[198]

Then–Secretary of State George P. Shultz sought to reengage with the Soviets in 1982, but his efforts were blunted by Reagan's more staunchly anti-Soviet inner circle. Despite Shultz' attempts to move forward on small, specific issues, such as consular exchanges, Reagan's staff continued to debate "the same old fundamental question: should the United States have *any* contacts with the Soviet Union. The NSC staff answer was, as ever, a resounding no."[199]

This changed in 1983. In June, Shultz was granted approval to engage the Soviets in a dialogue on more peripheral issues, such as cultural exchanges and the opening of consulates, which was followed by a deal on Soviet grain purchases from the United States and discussions on the modernization of the hotline.[200] That fall, Reagan learned that the Soviets had considered a 1983 U.S. military exercise a "possible prelude to nuclear war."[201]

Troubled by this, Reagan began to soften his public rhetoric on the Soviets and floated initial overtures about reengaging in a dialogue with Moscow.[202] In remarks in January 1984, Reagan noted that America's "working relationship with the Soviet Union [was] not what it must be," and that "these were conditions which must be addressed and improved."[203] The United States "must and [would] engage the Soviets in a dialogue." He stressed that, despite their differences, Washington and Moscow should "always remember that [they] do have

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[196] William D. Jackson, "Soviet Reassessment of Ronald Reagan 1985–1988," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 4, Winter 1998–1999, p. 619.

[197] George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, New York: Vintage Books, 1998, p. 11.

[198] Bush and Scowcroft, 1998, p. 11.

[199] George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, New York: Charles Scribners's Sons, 1993, pp. 274–275, also referenced in FitzGerald, 2000, p. 225.

[200] FitzGerald, 2000, p. 226.

[201] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 619.

[202] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 619.

[203] Ronald Reagan, "Transcript of Reagan's Speech on Soviet-American Relations," *New York Times*, January 17, 1984.

common interests."[204] This language marked a departure from the anti-Soviet rhetoric that characterized Reagan's first term in office.[205] Despite these initial overtures, Soviet leadership remained skeptical of U.S. intentions. Likewise, Reagan and some of his advisers remained guarded.[206]

Interaction between the United States and the Soviet Union continued to increase. Shortly after Gorbachev emerged as the new Soviet general secretary in early 1985, the Reagan administration expressed its desire to establish a dialogue with the leader and proposed a summit meeting between the two.[207] Although Gorbachev was encouraged by the prospect of a summit, William D. Jackson's analysis of released Soviet documents demonstrates that, throughout his early years at the helm, Gorbachev was deeply distrustful of Reagan and his administration's motivations and assumed that their anti-Soviet stance was immutable.[208] The Soviet leadership perceived these moves to be disingenuous and largely motivated by U.S. attempts to improve the administration's image.[209] These suspicions manifested in a strategy that Gorbachev pursued during his first years in office. It involved a new peace offensive directed at influencing Western European opinion, which would pressure the United States to rethink its arms buildup.[210]

Gorbachev and Reagan first met at a summit in Geneva in 1985. Although the summit did not yield formal agreements on any significant issues of the day, it appeared to be a first step in the development of personal relations between the U.S. and Soviet leaderships. Commenting on the outcome of the meeting, Reagan noted that while he and Gorbachev did not have a "meeting of the minds on such fundamentals as ideology or national purpose," he found that they "understood each other better."[211] Reagan believed this to be the "key to peace."[212] In his words: "I gained a better perspective; I feel he did, too."[213] This initial interaction with Gorbachev helped Reagan understand that the Soviets were not fundamentally untrustworthy.[214]

Gorbachev walked away from the meeting with mixed impressions. On the plane ride back to Moscow, he told Anatoly Dobrynin, then Soviet Ambassador to the United States, that while he perceived Reagan as "a complex and contradictory person, sometimes frankly speaking his mind, and sometimes . . . harping on propaganda dogmas," he nevertheless "discovered a man who was not as hopeless as some believed."[215] In his memoirs, Dobrynin, who had wit-

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[204] Reagan, 1984.

[205] FitzGerald, 2000, p. 236.

[206] James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 92.

[207] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 620.

[208] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 618.

[209] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 618.

[210] Jackson, 1998–1999, pp. 621–622.

[211] Bernard Weintraub, "Reagan and Gorbachev Optimistic After Meeting; President, Back in U.S., Looks Ahead to a 'New Realism,'" *New York Times*, 1985.

[212] Weintraub, 1985.

[213] Weintraub, 1985.

[214] J. G. Wilson, 2014, p. 101.

[215] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962–1986)*, New York: Times Books, 1995, p. 598.

nessed many summits over the course of his two decades as ambassador, noted the importance of this initial meeting as an initial step in surmounting "psychological barrier[s]" and finding ways of communicating with one another.[216]

Policymaker interactions at a summit in Reykjavik the following year further cultivated personal relationships and positive images of one another at multiple levels.[217] Yet, both sides left Reykjavik disappointed—while they felt close to an arms control agreement, they ultimately could not agree on specific terms. Because of Reagan's intransigence on SDI, Gorbachev remained skeptical of true U.S. intentions on arms control and blamed Reagan for the failure to reach an agreement at the summit. The leader's comments to his team following the summit demonstrated this skepticism: "What is it that America wants?" Gorbachev queried. "I have more and more doubts about whether we can achieve anything at all with this administration."[218] The Soviets therefore continued their strategy of attempting to use Western European public opinion to shape U.S. foreign policy behavior.

Jackson argues that the Washington summit in 1987 was a significant "turning point."[219] From the Soviet perspective, the signing of the INF Treaty at the summit was evidence of the Reagan administration's cooperation and adaptability and helped dispel suspicions that the administration's overtures were merely rhetoric.[220] Several U.S. and Soviet policymakers who participated in the summit underscored its significance in this respect. The U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock, recalled: "from December 1987 . . . [Gorbachev] no longer dealt with us as a hostile force."[221] Sergey Akhromeyev, Marshal of the Soviet Union, commented on the professionalism of his counterparts after interacting with them at the summit. Following the summit, he and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM William J. Crowe, formed a relationship through their increased interaction.[222]

Jackson notes that the most telling evidence of Gorbachev's altered conception of the Reagan administration was the change the Soviet leader spurred in the Soviet ideological conception of its enemy. In public remarks, Gorbachev floated signals of the leadership's approval for "a managed reconstruction of the image of the enemy in official ideological discourse."[223]

By the time Reagan departed office, U.S.-Soviet relations were markedly different from what they had been even at the outset of his second term—they had transitioned from mutual distrust and confrontation to cooperation. In the words of his vice president, George H. W. Bush, commenting on the last meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev,

> This would be a farewell meeting with a man he had come to respect and for whom he felt genuine fondness and friendship. Reagan had brought the US-Soviet relationship a long way forward. He had dispelled the myth that he opposed absolutely everything to do with

[216] Dobrynin, 1995, p. 598.

[217] Jackson, 1998–1999 p. 633.

[218] Quoted in J. G. Wilson, 2014, p. 122.

[219] Jackson, 1998–1999, pp. 638–640.

[220] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 637.

[221] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 638.

[222] Jackson, 1998–1999, pp. 638–639.

[223] Jackson, 1998–1999, p. 642.

> the Soviet Union, and the Soviet leaders no longer looked upon him as an unreconstructed Cold Warrior.[224]

Through their interactions, Reagan, Gorbachev, and their senior advisers cultivated personal relationships with their counterparts. When paired with deeds that reinforced the credibility of their promises, the personal relationships between the world leaders and their senior staffs helped cultivate trust among them, which might have increased the prospects for progress in areas of the bilateral relationship, contributing to stability.

Despite the progress made in the Reagan-Gorbachev era, Reagan's successor George H. W. Bush and many of his close advisers also entered the presidency skeptical of Soviet intentions. While Bush had served as vice president under Reagan, he was wary of his predecessor's friendlier stance toward the Soviets. His administration's initial assessment of Soviet behavior and intentions was such that it believed Moscow was still trying to undermine U.S. efforts to pursue Soviet interests.[225] Bush and his advisers perceived actions such as Gorbachev's 1988 announcement of cuts to Soviet conventional forces as evidence of Kremlin attempts to appear cooperative while competing rather than positive developments in U.S.-Soviet relations.[226]

However, as the Chollet and Goldgeier analysis demonstrates, the Bush administration's perceptions of their Soviet counterparts evolved from their initial position of distrust—their trust in the legitimacy of Moscow's intentions grew with the evolution of their personal relationships with one another.[227] Most of Bush's senior advisers had never interacted with Soviet leaders when taking their positions. Bush had interacted with Kremlin leadership only on a handful of occasions as vice president, and administration officials customarily left their initial meetings with Soviet leadership still skeptical of Soviet intentions.[228]

Over time, senior U.S. leaders were able to foster personal relationships with, and build trust in, their Soviet counterparts, although some were quicker to do so than others. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze met several times in Baker's first months in office. By their third meeting in July of 1989 in Paris, Shevardnadze shared his personal concerns about ongoing Soviet social issues. Baker described this conversation as "not the words of a government minister reading off a prepared briefing paper" but the "words of a man involved in a historic struggle."[229] This marked the beginning of a close relationship between the officials, which was further solidified at their next discussions in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Here, not only did the two interact informally, but Shevardnadze offered

> significant concessions—delinking Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) negotiations from an accompanying agreement on space-based defense systems, and pledging to dismantle the Krasnoyarsk radar, a system that the United States had long claimed was a violation of the ABM Treaty.[230]

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[224] Bush and Scowcroft, 1998, p. 6.

[225] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, pp. 152–153.

[226] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, pp. 152–153.

[227] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, p. 158.

[228] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, pp. 159–160.

[229] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, p. 161.

[230] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, p. 163.

As Chollet and Goldgeier have noted, it was not until later that others in the Bush administration began to trust Soviet intentions as cooperative in nature. Bush and Gorbachev's interaction at the Malta summit in 1989 laid the foundation for the friendship that would later blossom between the two leaders. Bush arrived at the summit open to cooperation and came prepared with a set of 17 proposals. The two sides held frank discussions about their interests, which provided all sides with an understanding of one another's priorities and positions.[231] For the first time during the Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet leaders held a joint press conference following their summit.[232] Although the summit yielded few concrete decisions, it set the tone for how the two states would interact going forward.

Changes in U.S.-Soviet relations cannot be entirely attributed to the growth of personal relationships and trust, of course. As many scholars have noted, structural factors, such as the relative positions of power of each state, influenced the dynamics of the relationship.[233] That said, structural factors alone cannot explain the shift from increased trust, to mistrust, and back to trust just within the Reagan-Bush transition, while Soviet leadership was consistent and its behavior remained largely unchanged.[234] Instead, Chollet and Goldgeier asserted that, perhaps, the weakened position of the Soviet Union and strong position of the United States established an environment in which the personal relations of leaders could influence the nature of their relations.[235]

The combination of personal relations and concessions was also important. Conciliatory actions alone made by rival states that fundamentally distrust one another—as the United States and Soviet Union did for much of the Cold War—might fall on deaf ears because they are likely to be perceived as attempts to mislead one another. Likewise, the cultivation of trust through increased personal relations alone might not be sufficient to dispel deep-seated negative preconceptions of one another. In some cases, the combination of measurable actions after some level of trust has been established could help stabilize contentious relations between rivals.

In other cases, increased communication between leaders and efforts to foster personal relations were not enough to overcome preexisting negative conceptions, mistrust, or misperceptions.

Some policymakers' negative preexisting images were likely too rigid to overcome even after interaction with the rival. Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, a staunch anti-Soviet, assumed that Soviet concessions offered as part of negotiations for the 1955 Austrian State Treaty were motivated by disingenuous intentions, even after some of his colleagues' perceptions toward the Soviets had appeared to soften. He remained suspicious of Soviet intentions and continued to perceive their actions through his preexisting lens: "The wolf has put on a new set of sheep's clothing, and while it is better to have a sheep's clothing on than a bear's clothing on, because sheep don't have claws, I think the policy remains the same."[236] What is more, because Dulles was unable to overcome his conception of the Soviets as aggressive, he attributed Soviet conciliatory gestures as being reactions to firm U.S. policies.

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[231] Bush and Scowcroft, 1998, p. 173.

[232] Bush and Scowcroft, 1998, p. 173.

[233] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, p. 168.

[234] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, p. 168.

[235] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003, p. 168.

[236] Martin Walker, *The Cold War: A History*, New York: Henry Holt, 1993, p. 104.

In other cases, misperceptions persist despite increased communication. President Kennedy and Soviet leader Khrushchev interacted through several informal communication channels, yet they presided over what is often considered the tensest period of the Cold War.

On November 9, 1960, the day after Kennedy won the U.S. presidential election, Khrushchev sent the president elect a letter congratulating him on his victory. This letter established a back-channel avenue of communication that allowed Kennedy and Khrushchev to communicate their views "in a purely informal and personal way," "free from the polemics of the 'cold war,'" as Khrushchev and Kennedy noted respectively.[237] This correspondence was the first of its kind between the most senior U.S. and Soviet leadership.[238]

Washington and Moscow also established a secret communication channel between Soviet intelligence agent Georgi Bolshakov and U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy after the former approached the president's brother in spring 1961 to offer a direct line to the Kremlin's top leadership.[239] It was through this channel that Moscow introduced the idea of a summit between Kennedy and Khrushchev, and the channel served as the conduit through which the two sides ironed out the details of the 1961 Vienna Summit, where Kennedy and Khrushchev first met face to face.

Despite the interaction of U.S. and Soviet policymakers and advisers through multiple channels at different levels of seniority, Kennedy and Khrushchev's tenure was marked by a deterioration in relations and several destabilizing crises. The interaction between Washington and Moscow might not have been sufficient to dispel misperceptions about one another's intentions. Some argue that Khrushchev's aggressive demeanor at the Vienna Summit, particularly on the issue of Berlin, strongly influenced Kennedy's perception of the Soviet leadership and its intentions.[240] Conversely, others, such as Kennan, believed that Kennedy's performance at Vienna was formative in shaping Khrushchev's impression of the President as a "tongue-tied young man who isn't forceful."[241] Some argue that this influenced Khrushchev's fateful decision to place missiles in Cuba, although this point is debated.[242]

Kennedy and Khrushchev's comments suggest that the two leaders believed their states had irreconcilable interests. Their interaction at the Vienna Summit appears to have contributed to their mutual distrust of one another's motives. Frustrated by what he perceived to be Kennedy's attempts to ignore core Soviet interests in Berlin and Eastern Europe and to support American hegemony, Khrushchev said to the President: "I want peace. But if you want war, that is your problem."[243] Although the tone of this comment might have been a negotiating tactic, it nevertheless conveyed Khrushchev's perception of the two sides as having opposing

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[237] Nikita Khrushchev, "21. Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy," September 29, 1961, in Charles S. Sampson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. VI: *Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges, 1961–1963*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996, p. 120; John F. Kennedy, "22. Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev," Hyannis Port, Mass., October 16, 1961, in Charles S. Sampson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. VI: *Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges, 1961–1963*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996, p. 148.

[238] Charles S. Sampson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. VI: *Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges, 1961–1963*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996, p. 21.

[239] Michael R. Beschloss, "Summitry: A Warning from the Chilly Past," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1991.

[240] Glenn T. Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Test Ban*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1981, p. 67.

[241] Seaborg, 1981, p. 67.

[242] Seaborg, 1981, p. 68.

[243] Beschloss, 1991.

interests. Commenting on what he called a "very sober two days," Kennedy left the Vienna Summit with the impression that he and the general secretary had "wholly different views of right and wrong, of what is an internal affair and what is aggression; and above all," he noted, "we have totally different concepts of where the world is and where it is going."[244] These perceptions are also conveyed in other primary source documents.

Management of Allies and Proxies

Both the United States and Soviet Union maintained alliances and relations with client states whose behavior had the potential to impede their bilateral relations and incite hostilities between the superpowers. Particularly as U.S.-Soviet competition became global in the late 1960s and 1970s, the actions Washington or Moscow's allies or proxies took had the potential to strain U.S.-Soviet relations and embroil the superpowers in conflict with one another when their core interests were not threatened. Crisis prevention and management during the Cold War therefore required the careful handling of allies and proxies. In some cases, the Americans and Soviets needed to exercise authority over their allies or clients to restrain their destabilizing behavior.

Given the breadth of allies and proxies with which the superpowers maintained relations and given the complexity of these relationships, it is difficult to identify overarching themes that would characterize U.S. and Soviet management of their allies to prevent unintended conflict. Instead, we will discuss a handful of illustrative cases that might offer useful lessons.

On several occasions during the Cold War, unrest broke out in several Warsaw Pact states. The Soviets attempted to exert pressure on the leadership of their allies through political channels and other means to subdue uprisings in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. These efforts proved largely ineffective, and the Soviets were ultimately forced to intervene using violence to extinguish the uprisings. On each occasion, the United States refrained from interfering, likely driven, in part, by the desire to avoid a dangerous confrontation with the Soviets over what was a core sphere of interest for Moscow.[245] These cases might not squarely fit within this variable of managing allies because the unrest in each case was not a purposeful policy decision made by the allied state governments. The cases are important nevertheless because they had the potential to destabilize U.S.-Soviet relations had events unfolded differently.

As both superpowers competed for influence in various parts of the globe for much of the Cold War, they sometimes relied on allies and proxies to further their interests. In the 1970s, for instance, the Soviets relied on Cuban forces to intervene in local African conflicts because this was seen as less likely to spark confrontation with the United States than using Soviet forces would have been.

The superpowers also competed for influence in the Middle East. Both saw the region as one of strategic significance; however, unlike in Europe, neither had clearly defined its own interests in the region, and neither had a clear understanding of the other's interests in the region.[246] Further complicating matters, U.S. and Soviet allies in the region—Israel and

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[244] Seaborg, 1981, p. 67.

[245] Alexander L. George, "US-Soviet Global Rivalry: Norms of Competition," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1986, p. 252.

[246] George, 1986, p. 254.

a number of the Arab states, respectively—were themselves bitter adversaries whose tensions frequently threatened to, and in some cases did, draw Washington and Moscow into the fold.

Although the Americans and Soviets both sought to avoid outright conflict, they did not always manage their allies in ways that offered high prospects of averting conflict. Several factors appear to have been at play. In some cases, one superpower misread signals or messages from the other or misperceived the other's intent. In other cases, they prioritized their own interests over those of their allies or proxies, sparking intense disagreements that contributed to unstable and sometimes chaotic geopolitical dynamics. Finally, an ally's primary interests sometimes outweighed benefits it derived from its relationship with the superpower, and the ally chose to pursue its primary interests. It is important to note that, in each of these crises—notably the Six-Day War and the 1973 Arab-Israeli War—the Americans and Soviets ultimately exercised restraint and avoided escalation to direct conflict with one another.

In 1967, the Soviet Union wrongfully warned the governments of Egypt and Syria that Israel had massed troops on Syria's border.[247] Moscow, however, cautioned for restraint when delivering this information.[248] Acting on this false report, the Egyptian leadership took a series of provocative steps against Israel, including closing the Straits of Tiran.[249] Despite several Johnson administration attempts to thwart preventative action from Israel and to identify peaceful alternatives, the Israeli leadership launched a preemptive attack, thus inciting conflict between it and a coalition of Arab states that included Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq.[250] This conflict, fought between close allies of the superpowers, had the potential to enmesh the United States and the Soviet Union in inadvertent direct combat.

The hotline exchanges between Kosygin and Johnson show both powers affirming their desire for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.[251] In their messages, both heads of state affirmed that they would use their positions to "secure the immediate cessation of the military conflict," and they encouraged one another to "exercise [his] influence to bring hostilities to an end," in the words of Kosygin and Johnson, respectively.[252] Evidence from these exchanges and other sources demonstrates that both superpowers ultimately did just that. These moves likely resulted in the cessation of hostilities and agreement on a cease fire.[253] But in this case, while the superpowers attempted to prevent conflict between their respective allies, either the efforts were insufficient or the allies' interests in going to war outweighed Moscow and

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[247] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "The 1967 Arab-Israeli War," webpage, undated a.

[248] Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 2, Spring 2006, p. 288.

[249] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, undated a.

[250] Popp, 2006, p. 306; White House, "157. Message from the White House to Premier Kosygin," Washington, D.C., June 5, 1967, in Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. XIX, *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004.

[251] Lyndon B. Johnson, "159. Message from President Johnson to Premier Kosygin," Washington, D.C., June 5, 1967, in Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968,* Vol. XIX*, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004; Alexei Kosygin, "156. Message from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson," Moscow, June 5, 1967a, in Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. XIX: *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004a.

[252] Lyndon B. Johnson, "159. Message from President Johnson to Premier Kosygin," June 5, 1967, in Harriet Dashiell Schwar, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. XIX, *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004.

[253] Schwar, 2004a.

Washington's cautionary admonitions. Only months later, a subsequent conflict—the War of Attrition—erupted between Israel and Arab states over unresolved issues from the previous conflict.

Both conflicts, among other factors, contributed to a recognition of the inherent dangers of U.S.-Soviet competition in the Third World and the need for accepted guidelines of behavior to prevent crises.[254] The BPA, signed by Nixon and Brezhnev in 1972, therefore included several articles affirming superpower cooperation in crisis prevention.[255] As noted earlier, the agreement was flawed in several ways; most notably, U.S. and Soviet perceptions of its meaning were incongruent. Likewise, it did little to spell out how such a crisis-prevention regime might work in practice. This was significant in that it did little to avert future crises, such as the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

Initial Soviet efforts to encourage Egyptian restraint in the prelude to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War resulted in political costs for Moscow, culminating in the expulsion of Soviet military advisers from Egypt.[256] Fearful that their influence in the region was threatened, the Soviets reversed their position and supplied their ally with military equipment. The United States was aware of the Soviets' strained relations with Egypt and pursued policies intended to distance the two. These actions only exacerbated the stalemate between Israel and its Arab neighbors.[257] War broke out when Egypt and Syria attacked Israeli forces.

Concerned that a quick and devastating victory for the Israelis threatened to spur Soviet intervention, Nixon suggested that the two superpowers "call for an end to the fighting and a return to the 1967 ceasefire lines," to which the Soviets agreed.[258] The Egyptians, however, rejected the proposal. In an effort to help prevent their allies' defeat, the Soviets began resupplying them with Soviet weapons. The Nixon administration responded in kind. Tensions between the Americans and Soviets escalated and reached their peak when the United States placed its nuclear forces on worldwide alert.[259] The superpowers ultimately avoided direct combat and were able to deescalate from the near-nuclear crisis. Nevertheless, this case demonstrates that superpower efforts to moderate their allies' behavior in an effort to avoid conflict with one another were not always effective. Additionally, the BPA was insufficient. A stronger, more-explicit crisis prevention regime designed to moderate superpower competition might have helped avert crises in the first place.

Creation of and Compliance with Norms and Rules

As is the case with many theoretical concepts in the international relations discipline, the scholarship that examines norms puts forth several related but somewhat distinct definitions. These generally converge on the idea that, in the foreign policy context, norms are understood standards or principles of behavior that are considered legitimate by the states ascribing to

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[254] Larry C. Napper, "The African Terrain and U.S.-Soviet Conflict in Angola and Rhodesia: Some Implications for Crisis Prevention," in Alexander L. George, ed., *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press Inc., 1983, p. 155.

[255] George, 1983, p. 107.

[256] George, 1983, p. 141.

[257] George, 1983, p. 141.

[258] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "The 1973 Arab-Israeli War," webpage, undated b.

[259] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, undated b.

them. Put simply, they are rules of conduct or rules of the game that guide state behavior.[260] As Cohen noted in his taxonomy classifying norms, such rules can be established formally or informally and explicitly or implicitly.[261] Formal, explicit norms are those established by agreements (whether legally binding or not), such as treaties or other signed understandings. Rules moderating state behavior can also be implied. Unlike those enshrined in formal agreements, tacit norms are not negotiated or officially acknowledged by any party but rather "develop through experience and offer useful precedents or benchmarks" to guide future behavior.[262]

The bipolar international system that emerged from the ashes of World War II—with the United States and Soviet Union as the dominant poles—marked a distinct change from the distribution of power prior to the war. The early Cold War period largely lacked established norms to govern state behavior, particularly superpower behavior, in this new structure. Such norms were established over time, some formally through official agreements between the superpowers (and, in some cases, their allies). In other cases, unspoken but implied rules developed from repeated patterns of U.S. and Soviet behavior. The Cold War era witnessed some instances in which these guiding principles appeared to moderate U.S. and Soviet competition and cases in which attempts to establish ground rules might have contributed to increased tensions between Washington and Moscow.

Our review of superpower norms and rules during the Cold War highlighted two patterns in their effects on the stability of the U.S.-USSR relationship.

In some cases, formal agreements establishing norms appear to have acted as moderating forces on superpower competition and might have therefore contributed to stability. In other cases, the superpowers held different conceptions of the principles outlined in such agreements, which might have contributed to mistrust and instability in the bilateral relationship.

Over the course of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union negotiated and signed various formal agreements that established accepted norms of behavior. These included agreements that intended to constrain behavior in specific geographic locations; that regulated behavior with regard to the development, production, and use of specific arms; and that attempted to establish broader ground rules for U.S.-Soviet competition.

One of the earliest such agreements was the 1959 Antarctic Treaty.[263] Shortly after World War II, states began to assert territorial sovereignty over portions of Antarctica with an eye toward exploiting its natural resources. Neither the Americans nor the Soviets recognized these claims, many of which overlapped, and instead reserved the right to make their own claims on the continent. Recognizing the potential for future conflict over the region, states including the United States and Soviet Union formally recognized the demilitarization of the Antarctic in a treaty that includes a provision for the independent verification of its peaceful use by observers.[264]

This marked the first of several nonarmament treaties intended to forestall future competition over specific geographic areas with an eye toward avoiding conflict over them by pro-

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[260] These terms are used in George, 1986.

[261] Cohen's taxonomy includes six categories of norms, generally classified according to the form of the norm and the "degree of explicitness with which it was communicated" (Raymond Cohen, "Rules of the Game in International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 1, March 1980).

[262] George, 1986, p. 249.

[263] Antarctic Treaty, December 1, 1959.

[264] Antarctic Treaty, 1959.

hibiting certain behavior in those areas. Others included the Outer Space Treaty (1967), which outlaws the placement of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in outer space, and the Seabed Arms Control Treaty (1971), which prohibits the placement of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction on the ocean floor.[265]

Other Cold War–era crisis-prevention agreements were also based on the mutual recognition that specific geographic areas could be prone to provocative competition, which needed to be regulated if conflict were to be avoided. In the 1955 Austrian State Treaty and the 1962 International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos, the Americans, Soviets, and others agreed to the designation of these respective countries as neutral states. Neutralization, according to Larson, is "a classic diplomatic technique for crisis avoidance" in which the neutralized state abdicates its right to use force except for self-defense, to enter into alliances, and to allow other powers to use its territory for military ends.[266]

Neither agreement halted all superpower activity in Laos and Austria. For instance, not long after the agreement over Laos was brokered, the United States and Soviet Union resumed their competition for influence in the state by secretly supporting their respective clients in the country's civil war.[267] Likewise, Austria remained a hotbed for U.S. and Soviet espionage following neutrality.[268] In effect, by codifying Austrian and Laotian neutrality, U.S. and Soviet competition in these areas did not cease, but it was bounded to behavior that was not exceedingly provocative.

These agreements appeared to contribute to stability in that they constrained destabilizing and potentially escalatory behavior. They became established, explicit norms that the superpowers and other signatories not only endorsed on paper but also abided by in practice. There are several likely reasons for these successes. First, these agreements were narrow in scope. They were designed to regulate specific behavior in discrete geographic locations and/or functional areas. This left less room for misinterpretation or confusion. Furthermore, the arms limitation treaties constrained behavior in areas—Antarctica, outer space, the ocean floor—in which neither superpower had established significant equities.

The norms that the Cold War nuclear arms control agreements established were designed to avert confrontation between the superpowers by addressing potentially destabilizing imbalances in the U.S. and Soviet arsenals. More specifically, these agreements restricted the use of specific weapons or technologies; banned the development of inherently destabilizing systems; and, in some cases, mandated the elimination of entire classes of weapons.

The SALT I treaty signed in 1972, for instance, marked the first time in the Cold War era that the superpowers agreed to set formal ground rules restricting the number of nuclear missiles each side was allowed to maintain in its arsenals.[269] Yet, this *missile* agreement failed to address a potentially destabilizing *warhead* practice, the "enlarge[ment of] forces through

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[265] Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, January 27, 1967; Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water, August 5, 1963; Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof, February 11, 1971.

[266] Larson, 1997, p. 29.

[267] William M. Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955–1974: Supporting the 'Secret War,'" *Studies in Intelligence*, Winter 1999–2000.

[268] Nicholas Kulish, "Vienna Still a Spot for Cloak-and-Dagger Work," *New York Times*, July 9, 2010.

[269] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, undated e.

the deployment of" MIRVs on the ICBMs and SLBMs.[270] Although SALT II included provisions restricting the number of MIRVs each side could possess, the negotiators also "sought to prevent both sides from making qualitative breakthroughs that would again destabilize the strategic relationship."[271]

By contrast, the INF Treaty, signed in 1987, mandated the elimination of all intermediate-range "ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles . . . their launchers, and associated support structures and support equipment."[272] This agreement was spurred by Soviet efforts in the mid-1970s to replace its older intermediate range missiles with a new generation—a move that was seen as a shift in the strategic balance, which had the potential to be destabilizing.[273] In the case of the ABM Treaty, the agreement placed restrictions not on the nuclear weapons themselves but on related systems that threatened the delicate nuclear balance between Washington and Moscow.[274]

Despite the establishment of formal communication channels to clarify questions about the implementation of Cold War arms control agreements and to resolve compliance issues, assumptions about ambiguities in the formal agreements contributed to destabilizing conditions in several cases. In some of these, U.S. and Soviet efforts to establish accepted rules of conduct to moderate competition might have increased the potential for conflict between the superpowers rather than diminish it. This was largely a function of Washington and Moscow's assumptions that, by negotiating and signing formal agreements, both sides had agreed to play by the same rules when, in fact, their understanding of the rules was incongruous from the start.[275]

This was the case with the BPA of 1972. With the BPA, the superpowers attempted to set ground rules for their competition. According to George, the BPA's language indicates that the agreement "contained unresolved disagreements and ambiguities that were interpreted differently by the two sides."[276] In his analysis of the BPA, Grynaviski noted several reasons for these issues. First, each superpower was responsible for taking the lead on drafting one of the agreement's two articles.[277] Second, Washington and Moscow were both "overconfident that a mutual understanding had been reached," which was reflected in the agreement's brief negotiations.[278] Grynaviski found that, in some cases, misperceptions about shared beliefs—instances in which states believed they held shared beliefs but did not—resulted in cooperation. He argues that this is the case with the BPA: that U.S. and Soviet beliefs that both agreed on a set of basic guidelines to moderate their competition brought them to the negotiating table.[279]

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[270] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, undated e.

[271] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, undated e.

[272] INF Treaty, 1987.

[273] INF Treaty, 1987.

[274] ABM Treaty, 1972.

[275] George, 1983, p. 110.

[276] George, 1983, p. 284.

[277] Eric Grynaviski, *Constructive Illusions: Misperceiving the Origins of International Cooperation*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014, p. 71.

[278] Grynaviski, 2014, p. 71.

[279] Grynaviski, 2014, p. 72.

Whereas misperceptions might have resulted in cooperation on the agreement itself, the incongruities in Washington and Moscow's interpretation of its meaning might have ultimately proved destabilizing. Because each rival assumed the other shared its conception of the rules, it viewed the other side's signing as a formal recognition of these rules. Thus, when either state acted in a way that broke the other's understanding of established norms, this was seen as a violation. Rather than contributing to stability in U.S.-Soviet relations, the BPA might have strained relations because it "later led to a sense of cheating and deception after the Middle East war of 1973 and the Soviet transport of Cuban troops to Angola in 1975 and 1976."[280]

The Helsinki Final Act (Helsinki Accords) of 1975 falls somewhere in the middle—while it codified norms on European political, security, and human rights issues, its unresolved ambiguities meant that the superpowers operated according to their own interpretations of its provisions. The Soviets had first introduced the concept of a European security conference at the 1954 Berlin Conference, hoping that such a meeting might result in the West's explicit recognition of the postwar territorial status quo.[281] They also believed that a formal European security framework was a precondition for the settlement of the German question.[282] Moscow pursued the idea for nearly two decades. The superpowers and other European states opened negotiation in 1972 when the previously strained East-West relations warmed.

Helsinki was significant in that it established explicit norms for the territorial integrity of states, prohibited the use of violence for the intervention of states, and set norms for issues related to respect for human rights. Yet, given the breadth and sensitive nature of the issues covered, many ambiguities related to the act's provisions remained. Thus, in the years after its passage, the superpowers often acted according to different interpretations of the act, sometimes inadvertently and at other times exploiting its gray areas. Washington viewed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Moscow's suppression of movements for independence in Poland, and continued constraints on personal freedoms as violations of the accord.[283] The Kremlin criticized U.S. efforts to uphold human rights in the Soviet Union as a violation of the provisions prohibiting interference in the internal affairs of other states.[284]

Superpower behavior during the Cold War era also spurred the formation of informal and in, some cases, unspoken or tacit understandings of the rules for competition.

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[280] Nye, 1984, p. 403.

[281] Text of the original Soviet proposal presented at the Berlin Conference was titled "General European Treaty on Collective Security in Europe (Basic Principles)" (Soviet Delegation, "517. Proposal of the Soviet Delegation: General European Treaty on Collective Security in Europe [Basic Principles]," Berlin, February 10, 1954, in David M. Baehler, John A. Bernbaum, and Charles S. Sampson, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Germany and Austria*, Vol. VII, Pt. 1, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986); U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, undated c.

[282] Geoffrey Roberts, *A Chance for Peace? The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953–1955*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 57, December 2008, p. 26.

[283] Kampelman, 1983, pp. 330–333.

[284] U.S. Department of State, "217. Memorandum of Conversation," New York, September 28, 1982, in James Graham Wilson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988*, Vol. III: *Soviet Union, January 1981–January 1983*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2016.

In some cases, U.S. and Soviet behavior was moderated by what George referred to as implicit "patterns of restraint" that "emerged through past experience which the two sides [found] it useful to observe in new situations which arise."[285]

Scholars cite two sets of examples as evidence of these unspoken norms. The first involves Washington and Moscow's understanding of accepted Soviet behavior in Cuba following the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Duffy found that, in this case, the Americans and Soviets treated the informal agreement between Kennedy and Khrushchev, which ultimately resolved the crisis, as a guideline for accepted behavior years later.[286] Because the negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev were largely secretive, the provisions of their agreement were never formalized. Kennedy privately agreed to Khrushchev's proposal in a message to the premier, outlining the conditions as he had interpreted them from Khrushchev's initial letter:

> 1) You would agree to remove these weapons systems from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and undertake, with suitable safeguards, to halt the further introduction of such weapons systems into Cuba.
>
> 2) We, on our part, would agree—upon the establishment of adequate arrangements through the United Nations to ensure the carrying out and continuation of these commitments—(a) to remove promptly the quarantine measures now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba.[287]

Although it settled the Cuban crisis, this informal arrangement left many issues unresolved. The nations' behavior in the years after the crisis indicated that Moscow and Washington conceived of this arrangement as having established broad norms for the superpower competition in Cuba. That said, in the absence of an explicit mutual understanding of the limits the agreement established, the Soviets tested its boundaries through the deployment of military equipment and forces to the island, which resulted in two incidents and one crisis.[288] Each Soviet attempt to probe the U.S. response defined more precisely the boundaries and expectations that the informal arrangement about Cuba had set.[289]

In 1970, after deploying Soviet submarines to Cuba and beginning construction of a naval base on the island, the Soviets used diplomatic channels to ask whether the Kennedy-Khrushchev arrangement stood.[290] In its response, the Nixon administration affirmed the continuation and attempted to clarify its provisions but left several issues undefined. Several additional Soviet attempts to probe for further clarification added more specificity to the Soviet understanding of U.S. boundaries on acceptable behavior in Cuba; for instance, the United

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[285] George, 1986, p. 249.

[286] Gloria Duffy, "Crisis Prevention in Cuba," in Alexander L. George, ed., *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983.

[287] U.S. Department of State, "67. Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union," Washington, D.C., October 27, 1962, in Charles S. Sampson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Vol. VI, *Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996.

[288] Duffy, 1983, p. 288.

[289] Duffy, 1983, p. 288.

[290] Duffy, 1983, p. 288.

States "objected to the servicing of Soviet submarines in or from Cuba" but was not opposed to broader Soviet political support for Havana.[291]

A similar situation arose with Soviet plans to deploy new MiG-23 fighter jets to Cuba. The Soviets produced two versions of the aircraft—one capable of delivering nuclear missiles, the other not. The Carter administration was unable to verify Soviet assurances that the planes headed to Cuba were not nuclear capable. Given that the Soviets pledged to deploy only a limited number of these, the Carter administration decided that their deployment did not present a threat to the United States, averting a crisis over the MiGs. This exchange was also significant in that it demonstrated to the Soviets that nonnuclear offensive forces could be deployed to Cuba under the guidelines of the Kennedy-Khrushchev arrangement.[292]

The following year, discord over the existence of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba escalated, resulting in a diplomatic crisis between Washington and Moscow. The Carter administration found that the brigade's presence in Cuba violated the implicit 1962 agreement. From the Soviet perspective, such behavior had been acceptable before, and the Kremlin refused to withdraw the brigade from the island. That said, the Soviets insisted that the "brigade's mission was confined to training Cuban forces and promised not to change its function or status."[293] Duffy cautioned about the difficulty in knowing whether the Soviets actually moderated their behavior in keeping with these informal norms; however, we know, at the very least, that the Soviets considered the norms prior to acting.

In the case of U.S.-Soviet competition in the Middle East, which we will discuss in greater detail in a subsequent section, the superpowers were unable to establish broader explicit rules to guide the competition. Nonetheless, as George noted, the mutual U.S. and Soviet desire to avoid dangerous entanglements in proxy conflicts and to moderate their respective clients' behavior during the first Arab-Israeli war established a precedent that was used in subsequent conflicts.[294]

In some cases, the informal and sometimes tacit norms might have helped moderate superpower competition. However, these kinds of norms have inherent drawbacks. Particularly when the rules are tacit, it is difficult to know whether all parties are operating according to a shared understanding of the norms. Likewise, ambiguities have the potential to cause misunderstandings that could induce rather than prevent crises. Furthermore, tacit norms that might help moderate behavior in one location, functional area, or location might not apply to others.[295]

Contextual Factors

The framework suggests eight additional variables that help govern the stability of a strategic rivalry. We examined the historical basis for each of them during the various subperiods of the Cold War. Given that research, we suggest that five of the eight variables were not primar-

[291] Duffy, 1983, p. 293.

[292] Duffy, 1983, p. 298.

[293] George, 1986, p. 250.

[294] George, 1986, pp. 254–255.

[295] George, 1986, pp. 249–250.

ily responsible for determining the degree of stability, although they did drive some U.S. and Soviet behavior during the Cold War:

- *Domestic interest groups*. From time to time, domestic leaders and interest groups pulled the rivalry in more-stable or less-stable directions. But the outstanding feature of this variable was its relative constancy on both sides. In neither rival did a powerful set of interests emerge that was determined to either fundamentally stabilize the relationship (by, for example, abandoning the competition) or radically destabilize it (by taking direct actions against the other's homeland).[296] The lack of more-radical domestic views can be considered a stabilizing factor, but this must be weighed against the persistence of an intense and sometimes excessive threat perception among key groups on both sides. In sum, the constellation of domestic interests helped keep the rivalry going but was not instrumental in determining its stability.
- *Prioritization of status, honor, and prestige*. Both sides attended to these objectives during the Cold War, but our research does not suggest that they determined the stability of the relationship. Status considerations drove some ambitions (and some threat perceptions) and a number of specific, dangerous actions, but at various times the two rivals were able to subordinate these to more-urgent needs to stabilize the competition. The continual desire for status and prestige was somewhat destabilizing in that it added to the general tension and perceived zero-sum character of the rivalry. But this desire does not appear to have been a leading determinant of stability or instability.
- *Contestation over resources*. We examined Cold War competition over resources, primarily oil, and found that, while energy-related crises sometimes provided flashpoints in the rivalry,[297] the two sides did not, on the whole, view resource issues as determinative of the relationship, and these issues did not play a central role in determining its stability. The United States certainly considered oil to be a national security asset during the Cold War and worried about the Soviet threat to it, especially after the invasion of Afghanistan.[298] But neither side ever chose to threaten the other's energy security in fundamental ways. One can consider the lack of Soviet intervention in the Persian Gulf as a stabilizing factor, but this decision was the product of other factors rather than an independent determinant of stability in the rivalry.

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[296] Gorbachev's intent, moreover, was initially reform to compete better rather than to desert the rivalry; see William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017, pp. 215–219.

[297] For some of this detail see Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil Money & Power*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991, pp. 456–469; Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, "The Soviet Union and the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973–74," *International Relations*, Vol. 5, No. 3, April 1976; and Keith Crane, Andreas Goldthau, Michael Toman, Thomas Light, Stuart E. Johnson, Alireza Nader, Angel Rabasa, and Harun Dogo, *Imported Oil and U.S. National Security*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-838-USCC, 2009. See also National Intelligence Council, "61. National Intelligence Estimate: Security of Oil Supply to NATO and Japan," Washington, D.C., NIE 20/30-70, November 14, 1970, in Linda Qaimmaqami, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol. XXXVI: *Energy Crisis*, 1969–1974, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, 2011.

[298] Jeff D. Colgan, "Fueling the Fire: Pathways from Oil to War," *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Fall 2013; Charles L. Glaser, "How Oil Influences U.S. National Security," *International Security*, Vol. 38. No. 2, Fall 2013. On concerns about Soviet intentions for the Persian Gulf, see W. Scott Thompson, "The Persian Gulf and the Correlation of Forces," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Summer 1982; and Dennis Ross, "Considering Soviet Threats to the Persian Gulf," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Fall 1981.

- *Existence of a common enemy*. No common enemy for the United States and the Soviet Union existed during this period that could have provided a stabilizing ballast to the relationship. Both confronted Communist China to different degrees during this period, but this was not a crucial factor in determining the stability of the rivalry. At times, a version of a common adversary could emerge in the risk of war, the stridently independent stance of Communist China, or other factors, but these were generally temporary and limited situations and did not serve as decisively stabilizing effects.
- *Means to react proportionally*.[299] This variable did not strongly affect the stability of the balance one way or the other in part because both sides easily met the criterion. Each possessed a broad suite of tools to respond to the other's actions, and the absence of such means of response was rarely, if ever, a threat to stability. We considered the role of flexible response as a U.S. deterrent doctrine and whether it enhanced the proportionality of means available to the United States. Arguably, it did so, but the effect on overall stability is difficult to assess.

Finally, our analysis of a sixth variable—the existence of powerful forms of interdependence that link the fates of two or more rivals and make it difficult to take hostile actions without causing blow-back that harms the aggressor—suggests that this variable alone appears to have limited analytical power. We capture this factor as a subset of another variable—factors governing the perceived value and cost of aggression, which we discuss in detail later. We therefore do not evaluate this variable independently here (and delete it from the revised framework offered in the concluding chapter), but we discuss economic concerns as a subfactor of "cost of aggression" in this chapter.

This left the two contextual factors that we assessed for their effect on the stability of the strategic rivalry during the Cold War: (1) military capabilities (and related concepts and doctrines) that shaped the *offense-defense balance* and the feasibility of aggression and (2) objective factors governing the perceived value and *cost of aggression*.

Military Offense-Defense Balance

The relative levels of offense and defense constitute one of the most deeply analyzed causes of war in recent scholarship on international relations. Jervis has argued that "the virulence of the security dilemma is influenced by whether offensive weapons and strategies can be distinguished from defensive ones, and whether the offense is more potent than the defense."[300] If the offense is weaker than the defense (or defense is stronger than offense), the probability of armed conflict drops. If, however, the offense is stronger than the defense (or defense weaker

[299] For a description of the potential importance of this factor in the Cold War, see Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977; Barry R. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991; Karl P. Mueller, "Strategic Airpower and Nuclear Strategy: New Theory for a Not-Quite-So New Apocalypse," in Phillip S. Meilinger, ed., *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 1997; and Forrest E. Morgan, Karl P. Mueller, Evan S. Medeiros, Kevin L. Pollpeter, and Roger Cliff, *Dangerous Thresholds: Managing Escalation in the 21st Century*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-614-AF, 2008.

[300] Robert Jervis, "From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation," *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 1985, p. 62.

than the offense), warfare is more likely.[301] This theory has demonstrated some empirical validity in both the nuclear and conventional deterrence domains.[302]

During the Cold War, offense-defense theory played out in at least four key variables: respective perceptions of the number of nuclear weapons and delivery systems that the United States and the Soviet Union possessed, respective perceptions of the availability of secure second-strike nuclear forces, the introduction of next-generation strategic technologies related to missile defense, and military concepts each side used. Shifting dynamics within these areas either helped maintain or threatened to wreck the delicate deterrence balance.

A good example of the first variable was Washington's acute concern over the so-called missile gap with the Soviet Union prior to and, especially, following, Moscow's launch of Sputnik in October 1957. To be sure, discrepancies in each side's respective missile inventories were only part of the equation. The gap also included a perceived discrepancy in the number of Soviet bombers—a bomber gap—that could bolster Moscow's objective of carrying out a disarming "splendid first-strike" against U.S. nuclear weapon sites.[303]

According to declassified intelligence estimates from the time, the U.S. Air Force believed that the Soviet Union would have 1,000 ICBMs by 1962; the intelligence community, while more conservative, still foresaw the possibility of 500 operational Soviet ICBMs by 1962.[304] Either way, it would take only 100 ICBMs to completely disarm the U.S. nuclear inventory, and that realization caused a crisis in Washington. The Soviet Union's parallel pursuit of Bison bomber aircraft only exacerbated the crisis, with intelligence agencies estimating that Moscow might have anywhere between 500 and 800 such bomber aircraft by 1960.[305]

Within a few years, American U-2 reconnaissance flights had demonstrated that the deterrence gap was wildly overstated. Yet, in the meantime, the U.S. Air Force had been planning to move ahead with the deployment of 10,000 land-based Minuteman ICBMs and thousands of bombers, justified by the need to match the perceived Soviet capabilities.[306] Despite growing evidence that the missile gap was exaggerated, President Kennedy decided to press ahead on his original plan to deploy 1,000 Minuteman ICBMs, along with 29 submarines and 464 Polaris SLBMs, by 1965.[307] His insistence on proceeding, in spite of updated intelligence figures, contributed significantly to the Cuban Missile Crisis, to Soviet leader Khrushchev's decision to abrogate the nuclear testing moratorium, and to the Soviet buildup of ICBMs in

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[301] Jervis, 1978.

[302] See, for example, see George Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System*, New York: Wiley, 1977; Glaser and Kaufmann, 1998; and Stephen Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Spring 1998. For a critical perspective on offense-defense theory, see Stephen Biddle, "Rebuilding the Foundations of Offense-Defense Theory," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 3, 2001.

[303] Kaplan, 1983, pp. 155–173. See also "Missile Gap" in Steury, 1996, pp. 55–138. RAND analysts at the time referred to the situation more broadly as a "deterrence gap," and rightly so, given the potentially lopsided effects on the offense-defense balance and the corresponding strategic implications.

[304] Kaplan, 1983, pp. 155, 161–162.

[305] Kaplan, 1983, p. 156.

[306] Kaplan, 1983, p. 288.

[307] Larson, 1997, pp. 115–116. See also Raymond Garthoff, "Report of the Special Inter-Departmental Committee on Implications of NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] 11-8-62 and Related Intelligence," in Raymond Garthoff, ed., *Intelligence Assessment and Policymaking: A Decision Point in the Kennedy Administration*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1984, and Desmond Ball, *Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1980.

the late 1960s and early 1970s.[308] This episode vividly demonstrates how, even with greater transparency, it is still easy to push an offensive advantage too far and to compel an adversary to respond in destabilizing and dangerous ways.

The second key offense-defense variable was whether the United States or Soviet Union assessed that the adversary maintained a secure second-strike nuclear force.[309] The conventional wisdom in Washington and Moscow was that, once established, second-strike forces were nearly impossible to remove from the battlefield prior to launch, thereby enhancing deterrence against the possibility of a first strike.[310] Indeed, by the early 1980s, the thought had become so ingrained in U.S. military strategy that DoD officially proclaimed the assurance that "even after riding out a Soviet first strike . . . the United States will be capable of attacking a comprehensive list of military and non-military targets."[311]

However, there were moments throughout the Cold War in which secure second-strike forces were called into question because of shifting offense-defense dynamics—particularly conventional developments affecting the delicate nuclear balance.[312] For example, the U.S. Navy's significant improvements in antisubmarine warfare operations in the late 1960s and 1970s forced Soviet nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) to develop countermeasures, such as longer-range SLBMs from protected bastions near the Soviet coastline and quieter SSBNs and attack submarines.[313] Moscow's modernized attack submarines probably inadvertently caused an escalating security dilemma in Washington—both in the nuclear and conventional deterrence realms—as it sought to develop new measures to bypass Soviet countermeasures.

Not all offensive improvements related to the strategic balance necessarily led to defensive panic. In a development that seemed sure to rock the delicate offense-defense balance, Israel during the Yom Kippur War in 1973 employed U.S.-provided precision-guided munitions against its Arab adversaries. With precision-guided munition technology, NATO could have redirected several nuclear-tipped Pershing II IRBMs destined for Europe in 1983 to take on

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[308] Larson, 1997, p. 120.

[309] The literature is substantial on this issue, but for authoritative examples, see Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987; Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon,* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989; and Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967.

[310] Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960.

[311] Harold Brown, *Department of Defense Annual Report Fiscal Year 1981*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 29, 1980. Not everyone thought second-strike forces were safe. For critical perspectives, see, for example, Bruce G. Blair, *Strategic Command and Control: Redefining the Nuclear Threat*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985. Blair argued that the state of U.S. command, control, communications, and intelligence following a nuclear attack might render U.S. second-strike forces less capable of retaliation. More recently, in 2015, Long and Green have argued this point in detail but from the perspective of intelligence capabilities being more able to track second-strike forces than previously realized (Austin Long and Brendan Rittenhouse Green, "Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies,* Vol. 38, Nos. 1–2, 2015, pp. 38–73).

[312] For a broad look at conventional technology affecting the nuclear balance, see Stephen Rosen, "Conventional Combat and the Nuclear Balance," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 1987.

[313] See footnote 71 in Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence," *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 4, Spring 2017. See also Owen R. Cot**é,** Jr., *The Third Battle: Innovation in the U.S. Navy's Silent Cold War Struggle with Soviet Submarines*, Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2003; and Peter Sasgen, *Stalking the Red Bear: The True Story of a U.S. Cold War Submarine's Covert Operations Against the Soviet Union*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009.

counterforce missions against the Soviet Union. Indeed, with some modifications to the active-radar terminal-guidance technology, the Pershing II could have featured a circular error probable of just 30 to 50 meters—perfect for targeting command-and-control and nuclear sites.[314] And yet, interestingly, there was no perceptible concern in Moscow and no serious discussion about potential countermeasures.[315]

Of all technological advancements affecting the offense-defense equation in the nuclear domain, offensive MIRVs on ICBMs could have been the most destabilizing. Fortunately, in 1969, the superpowers began engaging in SALT talks that culminated in the signing of the SALT Treaty, which limited such armaments, and the ABM Treaty in 1972, which prevented large-scale ballistic missile defense (BMD).

For the most part, the ABM Treaty worked. But it could not solve every problem related to defensive shields, and continued work on defenses led to the third area of potential instability: development of new technologies related to strategic defense. In the early 1980s, President Reagan began to advocate for SDI— known derisively as *Star Wars*—to protect the U.S. homeland from nuclear attack. The primary thrust of SDI was the employment of space-based lasers to stop incoming ICBMs. In the end, Reagan did not move ahead with deployment of SDI, though Reagan's touting of SDI appears to have frightened Gorbachev into compromise in other areas of nuclear deterrence—a departure from what offense-defense theory would predict. It would have predicted that tensions would have continued ramping up, creating a potentially uncontrollable arms race. The fact that the opposite happened—greater stabilization—suggests that other factors might have influenced the course of events in this narrative.

Judging from these cases, the record is mixed on the ways in which specific technologies or weapon systems have affected the offense-defense balance. For instance, SDI, which should have been destabilizing, turned out to be very stabilizing. The SALT and ABM Treaties were both forged out of concerns about destabilizing technologies. More often than not, however, pushing the boundaries of offense tended to result in escalating security dilemmas, as illustrated by the Kennedy-Khrushchev dynamic, U.S. Navy tracking of Soviet SSBNs, and Moscow's concerns about the future of strategic air defense.

In addition to specific capabilities, each side developed various concepts—of grand strategy, operational effectiveness, and the employment of military force—that significantly influenced the stability of the rivalry. This is the fourth and final area of the offense-defense calculus that influenced stability during the Cold War.

The United States, the Soviet Union, or both understood several concepts that colored the nations' perceptions of bilateral stability. U.S. and Soviet perceptions of each other's nuclear doctrine, for example, had enormous implications for military planning efforts and the perception of the offense-defense balance, specifically by sparking views—accurate or not—about whether the other side was determined to gain an offensive, war-winning capability. The foundation of conceptual thinking was broadly defensive and stabilizing—in particular, the perception in Washington and Moscow of MAD was *the* single most stabilizing factor pre-

[314] Long, 2008, p. 51.

[315] See, for example, Sergey Minasyan, "Russia's Conventional Deterrence: An Enhanced Tool for Both Warfighting and Political Strategy," PONARS Eurasia website, Policy Memo No. 466, March 2017.

venting nuclear conflict during the Cold War.[316] American military planners throughout the Cold War assessed that Moscow would follow the rational actor model that they themselves followed—i.e., that because nuclear war was essentially unwinnable, the Soviet Union would consider nuclear conflict only as retaliation for a first strike.[317]

This approach explains President Kennedy's decision to adopt the policy of "Flexible Response," thereby transitioning away from President Eisenhower's "New Look," a policy of "massive retaliation." Kennedy and his staff had essentially concluded that nuclear deterrence would hold for general war, especially as the United States rolled out secure second-strike options at the start of his administration. They became increasingly preoccupied, instead, with ensuring the security of Western Europe from advantages held by Warsaw Pact forces over NATO forces in the conventional realm.[318] Yet, in a dynamic known as the "stability-instability paradox," a perception of powerful defensive dominance at the highest strategic level could produce risk-taking behavior at subsidiary levels: Flexible Response might have stabilized the nuclear arena, but it had the equally destabilizing effect of convincing successive U.S. administrations of the need to leverage conventional capabilities to engage in limited wars to prevent Communist takeovers of disputed states, most notably Vietnam, and produced conceptual temptations to consider the use of low-yield nuclear weapons if a conflict broke out. Kennedy's doctrine remained virtually unchanged throughout the remainder of the Cold War in such varied climates as President Nixon's period of détente and Reagan's period of simultaneous engagement with and ramping up of pressure on Moscow.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin's perception of U.S. nuclear concepts was the most significant factor in shaping its own nuclear doctrine. The Soviet Union had declared a no-first-use (NFU) nuclear policy by the mid-1960s, but the United States refused to do so, even after its secure second-strike options had been operationalized.[319] To some extent, this contributed to Soviet anxiety about U.S. intentions throughout the Cold War. Soviet concerns came to a head in 1983 during the NATO Able Archer exercise, which featured the U.S. testing of Soviet defensive systems and conducting exercises near Soviet territorial waters. Although a U.S. NFU statement would have gone only so far in Moscow, it probably would have somewhat alleviated Soviet concerns that an attack might be forthcoming—hence, enhancing stability.

Although the release of declassified Soviet archival information in the 1990s has made more data accessible on the thought process behind the Kremlin's nuclear doctrine, the picture nevertheless remains ambiguous. According to Keith B. Payne, the Soviet Union had sought to integrate nuclear weapons with conventional military operations in a nuclear warfighting

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[316] See, for example, the thoughts of President Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, as detailed in Ball, 1980, pp. 171–193. Also see Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983, pp. 331–371. For Soviet perspectives, see, for example, John A. Battilega, "Soviet Views of Nuclear Warfare: The Post–Cold War Interviews," in Henry D. Sokolski, ed., *Getting MAD: Nuclear Mutual Assured Destruction, Its Origins and Practice*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, p. 155.

[317] For this line of thinking, see Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction*, Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2001, pp. 22–30.

[318] Gavin, 2001, pp. 857–858. Also see, Robert J. McMahon and Thomas W. Zeiler, eds., *Guide to U.S. Foreign Policy: A Diplomatic History*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: CQ Press, 2012, p. 304.

[319] Kennedy had actually considered declaring NFU. In his initial statement on defense, he said "our arms will never be used to strike the first blow in any attack." He ultimately did not adopt NFU, however, because of the deterrent value and the thought that nuclear weapons could be used as instruments of policy. See, for example, Gaddis, 2005b.

posture.[320] Other research efforts relying on data outside the declassified records suggests that Moscow's nuclear doctrine was much more defensive during the Cold War and, therefore, benign. For example, according to Nicole Evans, who analyzed public Soviet statements and documents, Moscow's declarative NFU policy in the mid-1960s and the decision to sustain it throughout the Cold War, even when Washington did not reciprocate, is evidence of an approach predicated exclusively on massive retaliation.[321] Interviews conducted right after the collapse of the Soviet Union regarding Soviet nuclear doctrine seem to support the notion that, in general (it fluctuated over time), Soviet leaders assessed that the prospects of starting and winning any nuclear war—whether general or limited—were poor and therefore not worth the attempt.[322]

In sum, nuclear doctrines seem to have played a fairly significant role in U.S.-Soviet stability throughout the Cold War. Although neither side fully understood the other's nuclear doctrine, the one general principle that both could safely recognize was MAD. This mutual recognition was demonstrated most acutely during the Cuban Missile Crisis but also to some extent in the Soviet response to NATO's Able Archer exercise. Extreme caution and an aversion to so-called limited nuclear war appear to have been hallmarks of the era.

Objective Costs of Aggression

Our research pointed to one other contextual factor that was especially important in driving stability during the Cold War: the set of environmental developments that governed the perceptions of both sides about the costs and risks associated with major war. There were two primary environmental developments governing these perceptions: the nuclear revolution, which permanently changed the context for thinking about major aggression, and economic concerns.

The Nuclear Revolution

The U.S.-Soviet rivalry constituted the first instance of great-power competition involving nuclear weapons. The concept of MAD—at least when solidified with credible second-strike capabilities on both sides and crystalized through the experience of the Cuban Missile Crisis—stabilized the Cold War by the mid-1960s. Reflecting on arms control negotiations over multiple decades, Bohlen confirmed that U.S. leaders perceived nuclear weapons as a stabilizing force:

> It was our firmly held belief that nuclear weapons kept the peace by forestalling an otherwise inevitable conventional war in Europe. And indeed, if we look at the historical record of how great power rivalries have resolved themselves in the past, I'm not prepared even today to say that this was wrong. Thus, nuclear weapons came in some sense to be regarded as a stabilizing factor. We lost any interest in abolishing them or even in the pretense that this would be a good thing.[323]

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[320] Payne, 2001, pp. 25–26.

[321] Nicole C. Evans, "A Defensive Orientation in Soviet and Russian Strategic Nuclear Thought? The Case of No First Use," *International Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 1, Winter 2003/2004.

[322] Battilega, 2004.

[323] Avis T. Bohlen, James Goodby, and Adam Garfinkle, "Arms Control in the Cold War," presented at the Teaching the Nuclear Age: A History Institute for Teachers, seminar, Las Vegas, Nev., March 28–29, 2009.

That basic sentiment—that nuclear weapons made major war unthinkable as a conscious policy option—was repeated hundreds of times in both public and private settings by U.S. and Soviet leaders. President Truman rejected GEN Douglas MacArthur's demands to use nuclear weapons in Korea partly out of a sense of the impossibility of fighting such a war, even at that early stage in the Cold War. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, both President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev referred to nuclear risks in their mutual communications and internal deliberations. Gorbachev's interest in disarmament stemmed from an appreciation of the intense risks of nuclear war.

On the Soviet side, for example, oral history testimony from former senior Soviet officers and officials suggests that, once Moscow understood the true consequences of nuclear war, no justification was ever made for painting major conflict as more beneficial than costly. Iu Mozzhorin, former General Director for the Ministry of General Machine building, conveyed that after the Soviet Union acquired larger numbers of "long arm" weapons (i.e., ICBMs), "the Soviets did not seriously expect a war and thought it would not happen."[324] As a result of the unfathomable consequences, the possibility of war began to evaporate.

Exactly how much stability nuclear weapons engendered is another question. Several nearly cataclysmic events—such as the 1983 Able Archer incident, during which the Soviet Union misinterpreted the intent behind the NATO exercise—demonstrate that MAD did not eliminate the possibility of miscalculation.[325] Nuclear weapons also did not portend a stable Third World: Most of the Cold War witnessed each side engaging in conflict with the other through proxies (e.g., Korea, Vietnam, Angola, and Afghanistan).

Two technological developments warrant mention in connection with this general contextual factor. First, the development of the hydrogen bomb, which increased nuclear lethality many hundreds of times over that of the weapons used in Japan, played a psychological role in nudging the two sides toward stability. Limited Test Ban Treaty negotiations began with a Soviet proposal in 1955 and culminated in the 1963 agreement to ban testing in the atmosphere, oceans, and space. Although concerns about the environment, and popular fears of nuclear fallout, might have been enough to initiate negotiations, it was not until after the Cuban Missile Crisis that an agreement was reached.

The second technological development concerns BMD. From the vantage point of the Soviet Union, the Reagan administration's pursuit of a missile shield was deeply troubling in that it promised to *reduce* the destructiveness of its nuclear weaponry and nullify Soviet second-strike capacity. Indeed, this concern on the part of Moscow continues to plague U.S.-Russian relations to this day.

Economic Concerns

Economic competition, trade diplomacy, and perceptions regarding the economic intentions of the two rivals caused or contributed to periods of stability and instability during the Cold War. This was the case despite the global economy's bifurcation into semiautonomous Western and communist blocs and overall levels of trade between the superpowers remaining relatively low throughout much of the Cold War. Even though direct economic interdependence between

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[324] Quoted in Brendan R. Green and Austin Long, "The MAD Who Wasn't There: Soviet Reactions to the Late Cold War Nuclear Balance," *Security Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4, July 2017, p. 616.

[325] For a detailed information about this crisis, see, Nate Jones, ed., "The 1983 War Scare: 'The Lady Paroxysm' of the Cold War Part I," *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, No. 426, May 16, 2013.

the two states was low, the economic vulnerability of both to global shocks created a clearly appreciated cost and risk of destabilizing the strategic balance. Moreover, a clear Cold War pattern was that economic concerns helped stabilize the relationship, especially from the Soviet side: Its faltering economy produced an incentive for détente to gain more Western trade.

Copeland has argued that the very origins of the Cold War can be traced to U.S. fears of a loss of access to trade and investments in Western Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. The Roosevelt and Truman administrations believed that postwar economic growth would be difficult if states in these regions were "permanently lost to Soviet communism, even if Moscow was not [yet] deliberately seeking to pull them into its sphere."[326] In 1945 and 1946, the United States took a series of steps that appeared provocative from the Soviet perspective, such as curtailing lend-lease to the USSR prior to an allied victory over Japan and denying postwar loans to help stabilize the western Soviet Union, which had borne the brunt of German aggression on behalf of the allies. Next, the United States worked to consolidate the West German economy and refused to allow West German reparations to the Soviet Union, a breach of the agreement at Yalta. Although these steps had a strategic rationale (keeping Western European economies afloat and out of the hands of communist parties), they reinforced existing Soviet beliefs that Moscow must dominate Eastern Europe, attempt to spread communism to Western Europe, and compete for influence around the globe.[327] Declining expectations regarding future trade with Western Europe, if it fell to communism, played a critical role in driving U.S. actions, which, in turn, greatly damaged Soviet expectations about future trade and credit coming from the West.[328] Copeland concluded that long-term economic considerations drove each side's decisionmaking.

Détente in the 1970s and attempts at détente starting as early as the late 1950s were centered on trade. By the mid-1950s, the Soviet economy was slowing down. The lack of a strong technological base—especially in the chemical, electronic, and oil industries—was projected to limit future economic growth and the military's ability to remain on par with the West. This was the primary motivation behind Khrushchev's efforts to seek a deal with the United States that would end the strategic embargo on high-tech goods. According to Copeland, "there was now for the first time in the Cold War a distinct possibility of using commerce and changing trade expectations to moderate the superpower conflict."[329] Eisenhower would not, however, agree to free trade and the easing of restrictions on technology transfer without first seeing changes in Soviet behavior in the arms race or Third World competition. The Soviets, fearing long-term economic and technological decay, continued to act aggressively in turn.[330] The turbulent, crisis-prone 1960s followed.[331]

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[326] Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 5.

[327] Copeland, 2015, pp. 249–267.

[328] Copeland, 2015, p. 265.

[329] Copeland, 2015, p. 295. Several negotiations between Eisenhower and Khrushchev appeared fruitful at the time; each side sought a formula that would limit competition to "peaceful fields." Inside the U.S. administration, those favoring a relaxation of trade restrictions argued that the Soviets would be driven to increase pressure on the West and act aggressively in the Third World.

[330] Copeland, 2015, p. 293.

[331] Of course, factors beyond economics were simultaneously at play, chiefly the arms race and each side's doubts about surviving a second strike.

By the early 1970s, Soviet leaders concluded that the USSR's stagnating economy was faltering to such a degree that they should offer strategic concessions in exchange for the easing of U.S. trade restrictions. In early 1971, Brezhnev codified a peace program that linked increased trade and the slowing of the arms race to Soviet long-term economic growth.[332] Nixon and Kissinger embraced the prospect of arms control negotiations, Soviet assistance in resolving Vietnam, and restraint in the Third World.[333] By 1972, the two superpowers successfully concluded SALT I negotiations and reached a trade agreement, which gave the Soviet Union most-favored nation status and extended trade credits. Copeland has argued that the economic incentives "embedded in détente" significantly moderated Soviet behavior during the 1973 Yom Kippur War and led to Moscow's pressuring Hanoi to the negotiating table.[334] Similarly, Gasiorowski and Polachek, using a statistical analysis, found a "strong, inverse relationship" between trade and conflict and claimed that trade moderated the superpower competition.[335]

A similar dynamic occurred in the late-1980s, when the Soviet Union agreed to massive concessions in arms control and European security in response to U.S. promises to increase trade and technology transfer. Compared with the prior détente, Soviet concessions were deeper and broader. Fear of permanently falling behind the West, even economic collapse, eventually caused Gorbachev to reduce tensions with the West across all aspects of bilateral relations.

In sum, the fear of falling behind influenced American behavior in the opening stages of the Cold War. In the following decades, it was primarily Soviet fears about future economic prospects that influenced stability. In periods during which economic relief, primarily through trade with the West, was occurring (or seemed plausible in the near future), the superpowers effectively managed competition. On the other hand, in the absence of economic cooperation (or prospects for such), such crises as Berlin and Cuba nearly escalated to direct war.

Perceptual Factors

Finally, we considered the third major category of variables governing stability in the Cold War: the five major perceptual factors that constitute an intermediate level between the policy and contextual factors itemized earlier and the two major characteristics of a stable relationship. Our analysis suggests that, while some policies or contextual factors have objective and independent effects, the variables take on meaning only through the ways they affect the perceptions and beliefs of leaders and senior officials.

Speaking of generic perceptions of the two sides conceals massive differences and debates among the leaders, officials, military officers, and scholars on both sides. There were, from the beginning of the Cold War, fundamental differences of opinion within the United States, for

[332] Copeland, 2015, p. 304.

[333] Philip J. Funigiello, *American-Soviet Trade in the Cold War*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p. 221.

[334] Copeland, 2015, p. 306.

[335] The authors concluded that trade caused conflict reduction, not the other way around. The statistical analysis was performed using quarterly trade data for 1967–1979 and the Conflict and Peace Data Bank to measure the level of hostilities based on the diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural actions that the Warsaw Pact and United States had taken (Mark Gasiorowski and Solomon W. Polachek, "Conflict and Interdependence: East-West Trade and Linkages in the Era of Detente," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 26, No. 4, December 1982).

example, about whether the USSR sought the collapse of the United States in any immediate way. These debates among scholars, officials, and commentators were never resolved, and so, in this section, we speak to general trends, which always admitted major exceptions. Ultimately, the only decisive perceptions were among those with decisionmaking authority—the President and the general secretary and/or the small number of advisers or Politburo members whose support was needed or who decisively influenced it. If their beliefs were strong enough, such leaders and/or leadership groups could, and did, often overcome an opposing consensus in perceptions.

For each of the five perceptual factors, we briefly review the main implications of our research on the Cold War. We then offer a lesson from each for the emerging rivalries.

Perceived Revisionism

Does one rival see the other as intent on overthrowing its political system or the international order?

Our analysis of the Cold War suggests that this might be the predominant factor: the basic sense of whether a rivalry is existential or can be held at arm's length, whether the rival is seeking moderate and pragmatic advantage or absolute and total victory. The more extreme this perception, the less stable a rivalry will be, and this was certainly true across various phases of the Cold War.

Both sides very much held more absolutist concerns during various phases of the Cold War. Significant concern about mutual intent to harm the other's system persisted until the end: Some U.S. officials remained concerned that *glasnost* was a front designed to sustain Soviet power and make possible a new systemic assault.[336] Each side believed that the other was at least theoretically willing to wage major war to achieve its goal.

That overall perception set the context for individual events that might have led to war: the Cuban Missile Crisis, regional crises, and the Able Archer exercise. Soviet actions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan were partly grounded in this perception, as were U.S. actions in Korea, Vietnam, Central America, and Africa.

Yet this perception was not constant, and the degree of destabilization from existential threat perceptions waxed and waned. At times, this perception was constrained enough that the two sides could operate with a fair degree of calm and even come to believe that the relationship had stabilized somewhat. By 1986, Gorbachev had come to believe that the Cold War was essentially over.

The intensity of these perceptions was significantly, but not totally, leader dependent. The revisionist intentions of particular leaders—a Khrushchev or Reagan in confrontational terms, a Gorbachev in the other direction—could play a key role in shifting this perceptual variable. In particular, top leaders (Reagan or Bush, for example) could have mellowed their conceptions of the degree of the threat, while senior advisers continued to hold to much more hawkish views. At the same time, systemic factors played a leading role in determining the intensity of these perceptions, regardless of the leaders on either side (especially during the middle Cold War series of relatively gray and uninspiring Soviet leaders). The two sides also found ways to signal that their mutually aggressive intentions had limits. Major initiatives, such as détente, were designed in part to push this perception more into the background. Arms control played this role as well.

[336] Taubman, 2017, pp. 468–471.

Existential threat perceptions, and the required policy responses, were not merely a function of the adversary's actions or perceived intent. Each side could gain some degree of confidence from a belief that its system was resilient in the face of the other's intent. Steps to enhance one side's own security, then, could underwrite stability by reducing the sense of urgency or desperation that could emerge when threat perceptions are at their apex.

The lesson for today's rivalries is that *a widespread belief that a competitor seeks existential, systemic damage is arguably the single most destabilizing perception in a competition, most especially when that perception extends to the fear that the other side would be willing to employ major war to achieve that goal*.

Perceived Defense Against Existential Threat

Does one rival believe that it has the ability to counter potential aggression from the other?

This factor could be viewed as a subset of the first perceptual factor, a constraining and moderating perception of the belief in mutual systemic revisionism. This perception was, in all periods, partly a function of objective analyses of the military balance, especially the nuclear balance. But these internal analyses were prone to worst-case analyses and narrowly technical thinking that produced intermittent fears of vulnerability not necessarily justified by the political perceptions. Self-analyses of nuclear vulnerability seldom matched the other side's conceptions; each side had greater risk perceptions than the other had opportunity perceptions.

One lesson of various periods and moments in the Cold War is that, if a perception of the other's intent is strong enough, a state engaged in a seemingly existential competition *will not* be able to sustain confidence in its basic security, no matter how much "objective" evidence there might be. The Soviet Union came to views of U.S. intent in Afghanistan, for example, that far outstripped the objective evidence available but fulfilled expectations.

After the early Cold War, neither side ever had a pressing belief that the other could achieve existential levels of damage to its system short of large-scale military, likely nuclear, aggression. U.S. perceptions about Soviet fifth-column recruitment in the United States and political subversion in Europe gave way to a more relaxed attitude about the ability of communist propaganda and active measures to shift the orientation of societies. Concern partly shifted to more-active Soviet covert machinations in the developing world—Asia, Africa, and Latin and Central America. Likewise, Soviet leaders seem not to have been concerned about the imminent threat of a loss of power as a result of U.S. political manipulation.

Despite overarching concerns about the intentions of the other side, each side managed to get to a position in which it felt relatively secure about day-to-day deterrence for much of the middle and end of the Cold War. This relatively benign perception was interrupted at specific moments but still allowed a certain degree of stability.

Our assessment of this factor suggests one lesson for emerging rivalries: *A baseline of objective deterrence confidence is important for overall stability. But a growing capability for direct manipulation of other societies poses a new and potentially very perilous threat to stability.*

Perceived Respect

Does one rival perceive that the other accords it due respect?

This factor seems to have evolved notably over time. In the early Cold War period, intense U.S. concern about Soviet active measures and other efforts to destabilize the West, combined with Stalinist paranoia, created mutual fear that the other did not grant it any legitimacy. This

shifted somewhat in the middle Cold War period with major signposts of mutual accommodation, as in the détente era, and was mostly transformed in the late Cold War.

This variable played out differently in the military and nonmilitary spheres. In the military realm, each side quickly learned to respect the other as a credible adversary (in many periods, *each* side believed that the other possessed military superiority).

In the nonmilitary sphere, mutual perception of legitimacy was often heavily tied to prevailing ideologies. The Nixon administration arguably reached an apogee of legitimate respect for Soviet interests, out of its realist-inspired view of the USSR as a great power. The Reagan administration, at least in its first term, reflected a low point of such perceptions, very nearly a return to a "rollback" notion of implied regime change.

At the leadership level, leader relationships sometimes disproportionately influenced this factor. A general systemic perception could be at least partly counteracted by a differing one between two or more leaders.

At times, each side sought, or granted, signifiers of respect, equality, and legitimacy. These became manifest in the Helsinki Accords (in which the United States acceded to fundamental Soviet interests in Eastern Europe, and Moscow endorsed, in principle, certain liberal value objectives), the scale and scope of diplomatic contacts, arms control regimes, and cooperative ventures on specific policy issues.

The lesson of this variable for emerging rivalries is constrained by the fact that it is not independent of the first one: If a perception arises that the other side is irredeemably revisionist vis-à-vis the major competitor, it will be very difficult to manage this variable separately from that predominant one. Nonetheless, historical experience with this variable does suggest an important lesson: *Various steps are readily available to convey signals of mutual respect and recognition, and these can play an important role in stabilizing a rivalry.*

Extreme Measures Seen as More Costly Than Beneficial

Does a rival consider extreme measures to be more costly than beneficial?

This factor quickly became an essential characteristic of the nuclear age, and the mutual perception of the dangers of extreme escalation firmly embedded itself into the relationship. It was repeatedly stressed in both public and private discussions during the Cold War. It was arguably the principal factor in constraining and thus, in some ways, stabilizing the competition.

On the other hand, because of the importance of nuclear deterrence, any potential instability in the nuclear balance became the source of intense fears and consideration of policy options. The nature of nuclear risks meant that a side that perceived itself as vulnerable might consider more-extreme measures (e.g., a nuclear first strike) than any state would typically conceive.

Broadly speaking, however, the nuclear revolution meant that both sides perceived the premeditated initiation of large-scale aggression as being counterproductive at essentially all moments during the Cold War. Tools of statecraft that had been viewed as perfectly legitimate in prior eras were viewed as being more costly than beneficial in the nuclear era.

The times when the two came the closest to breaking through this threshold emerged by accident or miscalculation rather than by conscious choice. The trick, then, became playing the competitive game below the threshold while avoiding steps that would decisively provoke the other side. Both sides played this game with uneven success—both in terms of making measurable gains and in terms of not provoking the other. But both realized it was the game they were playing.

The lesson for emerging rivalries is that *the fundamental reality that nuclear deterrence makes extreme measures more costly than beneficial remains a stabilizing factor. In fact, it has arguably been joined by intense forms of interdependence, at least in China's case, in which extreme measures can be economically and socially destructive. But another lesson of the Cold War is that neither side fully appreciated how seriously the other took the reality of the nuclear danger, leading to sometimes exaggerated threat perceptions.*

Enough Mutual Understanding to Avoid Disastrous Misperceptions

Is there enough mutual understanding to avoid disastrous misperceptions?

As with the other factors, the judgment about this one varied significantly depending on the leaders, officials, or experts. No single judgment makes comprehensive sense for each side.

An especially critical aspect of this variable was knowing the other side's redlines—the interests it considered vital or core, for which it would fight if pushed. There is evidence that both sides went to extraordinary lengths—partly out of respect for the nuclear danger—to identify and avoid these redlines. They were only partly successful but did make the effort.

An especially important aspect of this perceptual factor arose in crises in which each side suddenly confronted the need to revalidate existing assumptions. An excellent example of trying to reevaluate such assumptions occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The lesson for today is that *awareness of the other side's interests will often be imperfect among senior leaders. Efforts to understand these interests and convey them broadly across a government must have high priority*.

Lessons and Implications: Stability During the Cold War

This chapter has reviewed all the variables in the proposed framework to understand how they may have influenced the stability or instability of the Cold War competition. These variables can be used to assess the stability of a rivalry according to our essential concept—the mutual acceptance of an agreed status quo and a degree of resilience and ability to return to an equilibrium in the wake of shocks. The evidence gathered for this analysis does not support a simple judgment that, by these two basic criteria, the Cold War was essentially stable or unstable. It had elements of both conditions over time. At specific moments, it reflected more or less stability, although these tendencies were not reflected in extended periods of the larger competition.

This evidence therefore suggests that the Cold War competition contained important elements of both stability and instability. Our analysis offers six broad lessons for understanding the lessons of this complex picture.

First, during the Cold War, the overwhelming factor in sustaining a baseline of stability (i.e., no direct clashes) was the fear of nuclear annihilation. Although views about whether nuclear war could be fought and about whether the adversary was indeed preparing to fight one varied somewhat during the Cold War, the central conviction that major war was no longer a sensible instrument of statecraft never really wavered. This played the most essential stabilizing role in the conflict by constraining the degree of escalatory options each side believed that it could employ.

Second, another factor beyond the variables in our framework emerged as a source of stability. For various reasons, sometimes connected to domestic imperatives, each side ended up having powerful motives to reach at least a temporary *modus vivendi* with the other side—a less

comprehensive and ambitious version of the agreed concept of a shared status quo that is one of our defining aspects of stability. The foremost example of this was the pressure on Moscow, from perhaps the 1970s forward, to reduce the temperature of the rivalry to allow a stronger focus on domestic economic revitalization, a process that culminated in Gorbachev's choice to abandon the competition for all practical purposes. The lesson is that rivals will have strong economic reasons to ease their tensions from time to time and that this can be a major source of stability.

Third, the Cold War suggests that stability is a function of a delicate dance between firmness and accommodation. American deterrent strength in drawing clear lines in Europe that Stalin could challenge only at the risk of war was essential to creating a shared status quo. Otherwise, the Soviet Union would have been tempted to press the boundaries of Western security in much more profound ways. At the same time, the development of capabilities, doctrines, and strategies to support such firmness posed among the greatest risks of destabilization, whether in terms of specific weapon systems (such as strategic defense) or overall military postures. The Cold War suggests that stability cannot be purchased through simple resort to either end of the deterrence-reassurance spectrum.

Fourth, the Cold War points to the chief culprit in destabilizing a strategic rivalry: the strong sense on one or both sides that the other is determined to undermine its political system and security. When a contest is believed to be absolute, it is very difficult to keep it stable—because neither side believes that such a thing is possible in such an existential conflict.

Fifth, the Cold War speaks to the potentially destabilizing role of allies and proxies and the ways in which their social developments and conscious actions could drag the United States and the Soviet Union into clashes that both would have preferred to avoid but that nonetheless created some of the most intense risks of war in the period. The outstanding example was the Cuban Missile Crisis, a product of Khrushchev's desire to protect the Cuban revolution, but there were others: uprisings in Eastern Europe, the maneuverings of Taiwan and North Korea, and many others.

Finally, in the process of responding to their mutual challenges, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently fell victim to a phenomenon that represents the sixth lesson for stabilizing rivalries: the role of credibility doctrines in catalyzing excessive threat perceptions and overreactions to limited strategic moves. Because of these doctrines, both countries gave unwarranted significance to developments with little intrinsic importance to their interests but seemingly great value as dangerous precedents, from the U.S. reactions to perceived challenges in Korea and Vietnam to Soviet reactions to perceived challenges in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan. These doctrines turned out to be engines of instability, insofar as they damaged the degree of equilibrium that had been possible in the rivalry.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Emerging U.S.-Russia Rivalry, 1991–2019

In this and the next chapter, we apply the framework developed in the previous chapters to the two ongoing U.S. strategic rivalries. For the two key measures of a stable rivalry, we focus on the mutual acceptance of a status quo in key areas and the ability of the relationship to absorb shocks. By these standards, the U.S.-Russia rivalry demonstrates alarming instability.

On critical national security issues, the United States and Russia have increasingly divergent perspectives. Ukraine is a core security concern for Russia, and the United States and Russia have dramatically different understandings of the nature of the conflict there and are pursuing mutually incompatible visions of its resolution. In Syria, incidents in the skies and on the seas between NATO and Russian aircraft and naval vessels are clear signs of instability. Meanwhile, the erosion of formal arms control norms governing conventional forces and intermediate-range missiles and the lack of norms governing new domains, such as space and cyber, have created uncertainty about the status quo in terms of capabilities. During the Cold War, as Russian scholar Sergei Rogov told us, these norms "had the effect of excluding zero-sum outcomes: Neither side can have complete victory, but neither side loses; they thus established a shared status quo."[1] Today, he added, that dynamic is largely absent. Equally, it seems that neither side accepts the status quo concerning alliance memberships and economic integration projects. Some of Moscow's recent actions seem to be aimed at undermining the solidarity of NATO and the European Union (EU), while the United States does not consider the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union to be fully legitimate organizations.

In terms of the shock-absorption capacity of the bilateral rivalry, the situation is perhaps even more problematic. There have been at least three major shocks since 2014: Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, its intervention in Syria, and its interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. In each case, the relationship has not recovered to its preshock mean. In fact, the relationship has deteriorated significantly, with mutual hostility at levels not seen since the height of the Cold War. Even relatively minor shocks have long-term, if not permanent, effects: The poisoning of the former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in the UK, for example, did significant damage to the overall U.S.-Russia relationship.

How did we arrive at this rather dangerous juncture? The U.S.-Russia rivalry was not always so unstable; some might say that, at certain periods in the 1990s, the relationship was not even a true rivalry. The following sections analyze how the key variables identified in this report's framework have contributed to the present instability. In most cases, we assess these factors over the course of the post-Soviet period to the present to document any changes over time.

[1] Sergei Rogov, interview with the authors, Moscow, December 2017.

National Policies

In this section, we assess the conditions that govern stability in U.S-Russia rivalry in the post–Cold War era. This section synthesizes the extent to which the United States and Russia have (1) deployed capabilities that provide for essential security to reinforce confidence, (2) exhibited restraint in the use of military doctrines and capabilities that could signal aggressive intent, (3) signaled the acceptance of one another's legitimacy, (4) chosen to compete in peripheral rather than central areas, (5) built communication channels and CBMs, (6) maintained personal relations between representatives of the respective governments, (7) managed allies and proxies to avoid crises, and (8) agreed to create and comply with norms and rules for accepted behavior. For each set of factors, we assess the contribution of salient developments to the level of stability of the U.S.-Russia rivalry.

Military Capabilities

Throughout the post–Cold War era, each of the rivals commanded capabilities sufficient to provide for its own essential security. Both countries are commonly deemed to have nuclear arsenals sufficient to assure a second strike and, thus, to provide a powerful deterrent against attacks on their territories.[2] At present, neither side believes that it is fatally vulnerable to the other, but both rivals, particularly the United States, are also developing capabilities that could undermine the other side's confidence in its essential security in the longer term.

The United States and Russia have conceptualized their essential security vis-à-vis each other in terms of strategic stability, understood as crisis stability and arms-race stability.[3] Strategic stability thus entails mutual vulnerability to retaliatory strikes. This understanding is reflected in arms control treaties from the Cold War to the present.[4] Strategic stability is canonically deemed to be a function of mutual vulnerability to counterattack and is thus a strong disincentive for both sides to strike first, even in a serious crisis.[5] Maintaining this condition depends on mutual limitations on strategic offensive arms and strategic defense systems.[6]

The economic collapse and institutional disorder that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union compromised Russia's capacity for maintaining nuclear parity. Although Russia sought to maintain spending on its nuclear arsenal, "the readiness and reliability of Russia's nuclear forces may have eroded" as a result.[7] Nuclear forces were in a lower state of read-

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[2] See, for example, Bryan Frederick, Matthew Povlock, Stephen Watts, Miranda Priebe, and Edward Geist, *Assessing Russian Reactions to US and NATO Posture Enhancements*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1879-AF, 2017, p. 25; and James N. Miller, Jr., and Richard Fontaine, *A New Era in U.S.-Russian Strategic Stability: How Changing Geopolitics and Emerging Technologies Are Reshaping Pathways to Crisis and Conflict*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, September 19, 2017.

[3] There have been extensive debates about whether both sides truly share the same definition of *stability*, but the definition provided here has served as a baseline for both sides since the early 1970s.

[4] Alexey Arbatov, "Understanding the US-Russia Nuclear Schism," *Survival*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 2017.

[5] See, for example, Christopher S. Chivvis, Andrew Radin, Dara Massicot, and Clinton Reach, *Strengthening Strategic Stability with Russia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-234-OSD, 2017.

[6] See, for example, the preamble to the New START Treaty (Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, April 8, 2010).

[7] Frederick et al., 2017a, p. 27.

iness, and early warning systems were outdated and inadequate.[8] U.S. nuclear capabilities, by contrast, were maintained or improved in the years following the Cold War, even as the numbers of nuclear weapons were reduced.[9] By 2006, the gap between the trends in the two state's nuclear capabilities was such that one prominent (although disputed) analysis concluded starkly that the United States stood "on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy" and that Russia was "no longer [able to] count on a survivable nuclear deterrent."[10] At the same time, the post–Cold War collapse of Russian conventional capabilities meant that Moscow was ill equipped to defend against or deter potential large-scale conventional attacks on its territory without resort to nuclear weapons. A history of land invasions has also led Russian leaders to view the country's essential security as threatened by such a prospect.[11] Although the extent of U.S. nuclear superiority in the 1990s and 2000s was heavily debated and although relations with the United States were less adversarial than in Soviet times, Russia's relative weakness in the earlier post–Cold War years did somewhat erode Russia's confidence in its ability to assure its security.

As Russia's economy recovered and as the relationship between Russia and the West deteriorated in the mid-2000s, Moscow improved its military capabilities, including its nuclear arsenal. Russia modernized every leg of its nuclear triad with the capability to launch hundreds of warheads against the United States even after an attempted disarming first strike.[12] Russia also improved, and continues to improve, its nuclear command-and-control architecture and is in the process of improving its early warning system.[13] Russia has also enhanced its nonnuclear deterrence capabilities since the mid-2000s, including conventional precision-strike systems, air and missile defenses, and "capabilities intended to disrupt an adversary's C4ISR [command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance]."[14] Long-range conventional strike capabilities provide "a buffer against reaching the nuclear threshold—a set of conventional escalatory options that can achieve strategic effects without resorting to nuclear weapons."[15] These capabilities have boosted Russia's confidence that it can mitigate the existential threat that U.S. capabilities have posed over the last decade or

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[8] For one assessment of the deficiencies in Russia's nuclear forces as of 2006, see Keir Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy," *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 2006, pp. 45–46.

[9] Among these improvements, Lieber and Press cited the upgrading of the ballistic missiles on its submarines, the shifting of some SSBNs to the Pacific "in the blind spot [of] Russia's early warning radar network"; "equipping its B-52 bombers with nuclear-armed cruise missiles, which are probably invisible to Russian . . . air-defense radar"; enhancing B-2 stealth bombers to fly low and avoid radar; and improvements to its remaining ICBMs. See Lieber and Press, 2006, p. 45.

[10] Lieber and Press, 2006, pp. 43, 48. Although the conclusion that the United States has or desires nuclear primacy is disputed, the general trends of deterioration in Russian capabilities and improvement in U.S. capabilities are less so. See Peter C. W. Flory, Keith Payne, Pavel Podvig, and Alexei Arbatov, "Nuclear Exchange: Does Washington Really Have (or Want) Nuclear Primacy?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006.

[11] Scott Boston and Dara Massicot, *The Russian Way of Warfare: A Primer*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-231-A, 2017.

[12] Miller and Fontaine, 2017, p. 24; Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, Moscow, 2014.

[13] For a general discussion, see Elbridge Colby, *The Role of Nuclear Weapons in the US-Russian Relationship*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016; for a more thorough treatment of Russia's nuclear modernization program, see Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Russian Nuclear Forces, 2017," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 73, No. 2, 2017, pp. 115–126.

[14] Anya Loukianova Fink, "Crisis Stability in the Twenty-First Century," Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2017.

[15] Boston and Massicot, 2017; Fink, 2017.

so.[16] In part as a result of Russia's reforms and modernization of its capabilities, there is, at present, rough nuclear strategic parity between the United States and Russia and also mutual vulnerability.[17]

However, decisions both rivals have made to develop and deploy certain new capabilities threaten to erode confidence in mutual vulnerability to a second strike. Analysts on both sides have pointed to missile defense; conventional strike; and new cyber, space, and autonomous weapon systems as potentially undermining strategic stability.[18] U.S. development of missile defenses and long-range precision-guided conventional missiles, such as Prompt Global Strike (PGS), has been of particular concern to Russia because of the potential to undermine Russia's deterrent. In 2002, the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty, discarding what the George W. Bush administration believed to be a relic of the Cold War. The United States has since proceeded to enhance its BMD capabilities, including deployments of the AEGIS-ashore system in Romania and Poland, among others.

Although jettisoning constraints on the development of an ABM shield could hypothetically allow a rival to thwart a retaliatory second strike, it could also create incentives for the other side to launch a first strike, thus undermining crisis stability and potentially arms race stability. Moscow has loudly decried the U.S. decision to abandon ABM and develop BMD since even before the 2002 withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. The fear, it seems, is that the current modest U.S. program will inevitably expand to the point where it could "mop up" any Russian missiles launched in retaliation for an attempted disarming first strike. This threat has incentivized Russia to develop new weapon systems to counter U.S. BMD.[19]

Conventional long-range high-precision weapons, such as PGS, could potentially allow the United States to disarm a nuclear rival without resort to nuclear weapons.[20] Other emerging U.S. capabilities could also undermine Russia's confidence in its second-strike capability. These include improvements in intelligence capabilities to track mobile Russian systems, which would increase the effectiveness of a hypothetical first strike and thus diminish an adversary's second-strike capability.[21] Although U.S. officials and analysts repeatedly point out that such alleged effects of U.S. conventional capabilities on Russia's nuclear deterrent are exaggerated, Russia has made clear that it views them as threatening.[22] As a result, many experts conclude that strategic stability may be eroding.[23]

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16 As Oliker notes, the 2014 Military Doctrine "highlights for the first time the deterrent capacity of Russia's conventional weapons (as opposed to only its nuclear arsenal)—perhaps a reference to the country's growing conventional might" (Olga Oliker, "Russia's New Military Doctrine: Same as the Old Doctrine, Mostly," *Washington Post*, January 15, 2015).

17 Chivvis et al., 2017, p. 4; Colby, 2016; Miller and Fontaine, 2017.

18 For example, Miller and Fontaine 2017; Steven Pifer, *Arms Control, Security Cooperation, and U.S.-Russian Relations*, Valdai Discussion Club website, November 2017.

19 Austin Long, "Red Glare: The Origin and Implications of Russia's 'New' Nuclear Weapons," War on the Rocks website, March 26, 2018.

20 Chivvis et al., 2017, p. 2; Frederick et al., 2017, p. 45.

21 Long and Green, 2015, p. 65, concluded that "investments in these capabilities may be quite destabilizing" and "could reintroduce risks of rational military preemption during a crisis." Russia also perceives such other capabilities as hypersonic glide vehicles as threatening, even though they are "not intended to and are not sufficient to prevent Russia from carrying out a large-scale, coordinated second strike," (Chivvis et al., 2017, p. 2).

22 Frederick et al., 2017, p. 58; Colby, 2016, p. 2.

23 See, for example, Chivvis et al., 2017, p. 1; Colby, 2016, p. 3.

Military Restraint

The post–Cold War era began with both sides showing some willingness to moderate their military doctrines and limit capabilities that could signal aggression. Starting in the mid-2000s, however, restraint gave way to doctrines and capabilities on both sides that each side increasingly perceived as aggressive. The progressive lack of restraint, by all available indicators, has contributed to the destabilization of the rivalry.

As the Cold War came to an end in 1989–1991, the rivals reached several important agreements that signaled restraint on both sides. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) limited conventional arms on European territory and set up a verification regime. START and, later, New START committed the rivals to cutting back their strategic nuclear arsenals. A 1992 addendum to CFE limited the numbers of military personnel, and at the 1999 Istanbul summit of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, an Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe to modernize the treaty was reached.[24] The 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act committed both sides to refrain from future permanent deployments of substantial combat forces on the European continent.

Under the Bush administration, U.S. doctrine and high-level statements signaled restraint with regard to strategic offensive nuclear weapons and the need to deter Russia.[25] In 2002, presidents Bush and Putin concluded the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, or the "Moscow Treaty"). Although it lacked the verification mechanism of the previous START agreement and specificity with regard to which warheads were to be reduced or how, SORT committed the sides to reduce their deployed strategic nuclear forces from about 6,000 warheads each to 1,700–2,200, the "largest proposed reduction in strategic nuclear weapons ever codified in an international agreement."[26] SORT, even with its limitations, delivered a boost to stability: Presidents Bush and Putin announced "the dawn of a new strategic partnership" and established the Russian-American Consultative Group on Strategic Stability, a body consisting of foreign and defense ministers.[27]

In the conventional realm, the United States significantly reduced the presence of its troops on European territory, dropping from the late–Cold War level of about 300,000 to around 120,000 in the 1990s.[28] By 2013, the United States had withdrawn its last tank from Europe. NATO allies had likewise dramatically reduced their forces.[29] Russia, for its part, withdrew its troops from former Warsaw Pact countries; radically reduced the size of its military; and, in 1999, committed to pull its troops out of Georgia and Moldova. And Moscow displayed some degree of restraint over moves it perceived as threatening to its interests: It did not respond with overt aggression to the progressive enlargement of NATO, including to the

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[24] Although the treaty was never ratified, the fact of reaching agreement at this earlier point is significant.

[25] For example, in 2001, President George W. Bush declared his commitment to "achieving a credible deterrent with the lowest possible number of nuclear weapons consistent with our national security needs," a commitment reflected in the December 2001 Nuclear Posture Review. See Flory et al., 2006.

[26] Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: US-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century-Updated Edition*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 73; Arms Control Association, "The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) at a Glance," fact sheet, September 2006.

[27] Stent, 2015, p. 74.

[28] Frederick et al., 2017, p. 9.

[29] Frederick et al., 2017, p. 5.

Baltic states, in spite of its long-standing concerns about NATO enlargement.[30] These steps likely enabled the relatively stable competition that characterized the rivalry during what many now call the "Cold Peace," roughly the decade and a half after the Cold War.[31]

Since the mid-2000s, however, the rivals' willingness to exercise restraint has diminished significantly. To be fair, both sides have taken occasional steps to signal their lack of aggressive intent. Notably, New START, a strategic offensive arms reduction treaty, was one of the key achievements of President Barack Obama's "reset" policy, a move that many experts appraised as a boost to stability in the U.S.-Russia relationship.[32] The Obama administration's reset policy led to the easing of some known irritants in U.S.-Russia relations. These steps notwithstanding, restraint has given way to doctrines and deployments on each side that the other has increasingly perceived as aggressive and threatening.

U.S. Military Doctrines and Capabilities That Could Signal Aggressive Intent

Russia has consistently identified a set of U.S. actions as aggressive and threatening to its core interests. These include NATO enlargement and posture enhancements, the deployments of missile defense and conventional long-range precision weapons, and the doctrine and practice of U.S. interventions. Despite U.S. efforts to convince Russia that these actions have not been motivated by any aggressive intent toward Russia, are defensive in nature, and/or are aimed at third parties, the latter's perception of threat and aggressive intent have, by all indicators, become more entrenched with time, particularly as U.S. efforts on these tracks have intensified.

Russia has consistently maintained that NATO enlargement is threatening to its security, evidences hostile intent toward Russia, and is a violation of earlier U.S. commitments.[33] The Russian view of NATO as a U.S.-dominated organization that is oriented against Russia has been bolstered by the lukewarm reception given to the notion of Russia's potential membership, which has been raised by every post-Soviet leader.[34] New and prospective members themselves view NATO more as protection against potential Russian aggression rather than other threats. Enlargement to Eastern European countries—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1999; the three Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004; and Albania and Croatia in 2009—was not welcomed in Moscow. Russia, however, reacted mostly with sorrow rather than anger, and the overall NATO-Russia relationship remained relatively functional. Threat perceptions were greatly magnified as NATO began efforts to integrate the states of post-Soviet Eurasia, a region Russia considers crucial to assuring its own security. Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has focused on preserving influence in this region.[35] The decision at the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit to declare that the two countries "will become" members at some unspecified future time was met with a clear message: Such

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[30] Frederick et al., 2017, p. 27.

[31] The phrase originates with Boris Yeltsin's warning to the West in 1994; see Andrew Marshall, "Russia Warns NATO of a 'Cold Peace,'" *Independent*, December 6, 1994.

[32] For example, Pifer, 2017.

[33] For a general discussion, see Frederick et al., 2017, p. 27, and Olga Oliker, Christopher S. Chivvis, Keith Crane, Olesya Tkacheva, and Scott Boston, *Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-144-A, 2015.

[34] Stent, 2015, p. 74.

[35] Oliker et al., 2015.

a move would represent a "direct threat" to Russia's security.[36] Despite these warnings, and although there are no concrete plans to advance Georgian and Ukrainian membership, the prospect is still on the table, which remains a destabilizing factor in the relationship.

In addition to integrating and possibly incorporating Russia's post-Soviet neighbors, NATO and, particularly, U.S. posture enhancements close to Russian borders remain major concerns for Moscow. Russia has made its viewpoint clear: Positioning "military infrastructure of NATO members in proximity to the borders of the Russian Federation" is cited as the first "military danger" in the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines, a list that also includes the deployment of foreign military forces in any country bordering Russia.[37] Likewise, Russia's 2015 NSS calls NATO's growing military potential and placement of its military infrastructure near Russian borders a threat to national security. Posture enhancements to date have not proven destabilizing, but the open-ended prospect of further U.S. deployments creates a significant degree of uncertainty in Moscow about the future.

Russian Military Doctrines and Capabilities That Could Signal Aggressive Intent

Russia, for its part, has also moved progressively away from restraint and toward actions that could signal aggressive intent. The clearest evidence of Russia's decreasing restraint is the increasingly frequent resort to actual force and to coercive and threatening actions in pursuit of an increasingly assertive foreign policy. Military actions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria have signaled that Russia is prepared to use military force and not only in its near abroad. Not every use of military force is necessarily unrestrained, but Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine could be fairly described as such. Although some kind of a military response to Georgia's initial attack on South Ossetia was expected, the response was disproportionate: Russia not only launched a massive campaign to drive the Georgians out of South Ossetia but also penetrated further, inflicting gratuitous damage on Georgian military capabilities. Russia's reaction to the 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine was anything but restrained; Moscow used force to annex Crimea and foment armed conflict in eastern Ukraine in response to a change of government. Russia's choice to intervene in Syria, while not quite as disproportionate to the threat, further signaled that Russia is not averse to using force, even outside its neighborhood, when the stakes are perceived as sufficiently high. None of these actions has targeted the United States or its allies directly. But in recent years, perhaps as a response to NATO posture enhancements, Russian jets have come close to NATO airspace repeatedly, engaged in dangerous maneuvers near NATO jets, and harassed U.S. and NATO naval vessels.[38]

Moscow's recent willingness to interfere in U.S. domestic politics is another sign of lack of restraint. Russia has long been a formidable cyber actor; it is therefore highly likely that its intelligence services had succeeded in hacking information from presidential campaigns and major political parties in elections prior to 2016. However, Russia had not weaponized this information by strategically leaking it before 2016. The decision to do so was a clear moment when restraint could have been exercised but the leadership chose not to do so. The same is

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[36] Vladimir Putin, "Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following the NATO-Russia Council Meeting," Bucharest, April 4, 2008.

[37] Russian Federation, 2010; Russian Federation, 2014. A *military danger* is a situation with potential to lead to a *military threat*, a situation with a real probability of a military conflict.

[38] One source counted 39 incidents in the eight months after March 2014 (Lizzie Dearden, "Full List of Incidents Involving Russian Military and Nato Since March 2014," *Independent*, November 10, 2014).

true of Russia's meddling in social media. The Kremlin has been using social media platforms to affect political outcomes at home and in its immediate neighborhood since the early 2010s. The decision to turn those capabilities against the United States marked a moment when restraint could have been exercised but was not. Moscow's lack of restraint in cyber interference operations has contributed significantly to the instability in the broader relationship.

Acceptance of One Another's Legitimacy

Throughout most of the post–Cold War period, the United States and Russia signaled acceptance of each other's legitimacy to a considerable extent. As time has gone on, however, both have signaled to the contrary, especially with regard to the legitimacy of each rival's place in the world and each side's view of core security interests. The effects have likely contributed to the worsening of the U.S.-Russia relationship and, thus, to some of the instability of recent years.

Accepting the legitimacy of a rival entails multiple levels of recognition or affirmation of the rival's self-image: recognizing one another as sovereign states; recognizing each other's views of their territorial borders; recognizing one another as trustworthy-enough partners for bilateral transactions, such as treaties, agreements, and diplomatic relations; affirming the legitimacy of one another's political regimes; and affirming one another's views of their places in the world and of their core security interests or concerns. Signals of acceptance or rejection of these aspects of legitimacy might be intended as such by the sender or merely perceived as such by the recipient. Both dynamics are important in assessing the contribution this set of factors makes to the stability of the rivalry. Here, we address the policy decisions to send such signals—or not—and how they affect stability.

At the most basic level, the United States and Russia accept each other's legitimacy as sovereign state actors. They recognize each other's right to act in the international system qua their "stateness"—in contrast with unrecognized political entities, for example. Likewise, both states recognize one another as sufficiently trustworthy to enter into bilateral agreements, notwithstanding mutual recriminations about violating particular agreements. For most of the post-Soviet period, Russia and the United States have also largely recognized one another's borders as legitimate. An early exception stemmed from the dispute between Russia and Japan on the status of the islands known as the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan, with the United States siding with Japan.[39] A more-significant change in this regard occurred with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The United States denounced the invasion and rejected the deeply flawed referendum that Russia used to justify Crimea's annexation.[40] Russia now officially views this behavior as a sign of disregard for its territorial integrity.[41]

The United States has also signaled growing doubt about the quality of Russia's democracy since Putin came to power and has increasingly called the legitimacy of Putin's regime into question as its authoritarian tendencies became more pronounced.[42] The 2011 parliamen-

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[39] "U.S. Recognized Japan's Sovereignty over Russian-Held Isles: Official," *Japan Times*, August 14, 2014.

[40] Mark C. Toner, "Reaffirming U.S. Commitment to a Sovereign and Whole Ukraine on the Third Anniversary of Russia's Crimean 'Referendum,'" press release, U.S. Department of State, March 16, 2017.

[41] See, for example, Toner, 2017.

[42] On the first point, see, for example, "Cheney Chides Russia on Democracy," BBC, May 4, 2006. On the second, see, for example, comments of Senator John McCain and Congressman Tom Lantos in response to Mikhail Khodorkovsky's arrest, calling Russia a "despotic regime," in Stent, 2015, p. 86.

tary elections, for example, drew particularly strong signals that U.S. officials did not accept the legitimacy of Russia's democratic institutions. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for example, declared that the United States harbors "serious concerns about the conduct of the election" and that the Russian people deserved "free, fair, transparent elections and leaders who are accountable to them."[43] The U.S. response to Russia's actions in Ukraine further amplified the signals that the United States did not view the Russian regime as legitimate. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, for example, declared that the economic costs from sanctions would lead Russian citizens to rise against the "adventurism, interventionism and the ambitions of a leader who cares more about empire than his own citizens."[44] Such rhetoric, in combination with the diplomatic isolation the United States sought to institute, signaled to Russia that it was no longer treated as a legitimate actor. These signals have indirectly contributed to instability by reinforcing the Russian regime's insecurity.

Competition on Peripheral Issues

A state's choice to compete in a domain peripheral to itself but central to its rival threatens to destabilize the competition. In the post–Cold War era, the U.S.-Russia rivalry has played out mostly in domains more central to Russia than to the United States. The United States and the West increasingly sought to influence the former Soviet states on Russia's western border, while the conditions of the Soviet collapse led Russia to retrench from the contest in far-away regions central to U.S. interests. Recently, however, Russia has made efforts to bring the competition back to realms that are central to the United States, including reengagement with Latin America.

The United States did not enter into a full-fledged competition with Russia over post-Soviet Eurasia until well into the post–Cold War era. For the first decade or so, the United States did not become actively involved in regional conflicts and was far more focused on Central and Eastern Europe. President Bill Clinton even explicitly suggested that Russia should play the dominant role in the region.[45]

The United States began to assume a more proactive role in the region during the Bush administration. Most significant was U.S. (and European) support for domestic political change generally and for some of the organizations and actors that emerged victorious in Georgia's Rose and Ukraine's Orange revolutions.[46] U.S. enthusiasm for the new governments appears to have cemented in Moscow's mind the notion that the West was behind these (illegitimate, in Russia's view) regime changes—and that the West was seeking to install governments serving its own interests at the expense of Russia's. The United States and some of its allies viewed the color revolutions as an opening, which they used to push more actively for integration of these countries into Western institutions. [47]

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[43] Elise Labott, "Clinton Cites 'Serious Concerns' About Russian Election," CNN, December 6, 2011.

[44] Victoria Nuland, written testimony delivered to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., May 6, 2014.

[45] Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 63.

[46] See, for example, Michael McFaul, "Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Fall 2007, p. 74; Stent, 2015, p. 100.

[47] Charap and Colton, 2017, pp. 74 ff.

A choice to compete, in this context, need not be fully intentional. Western nations have largely "rejected the very notion of strategic or geopolitical competition between Russia and the West" since the end of the Cold War.[48] Nonetheless, Russia certainly viewed U.S. and Western involvement with the states on its border and efforts to integrate them into Western institutions as means of challenging Russia's influence there.[49] As noted earlier, Russia views its near abroad as essential to its own security.[50]

By contrast, Russia has largely withdrawn from competition in areas more central to the United States. In terms of geographic proximity, Russian involvement in Latin America retrenched markedly with the end of the Cold War. Economic aid to allies in the region, such as Cuba and Nicaragua, virtually collapsed, and Moscow's military presence and outposts were abandoned. This included the most important Soviet-era signals-intelligence collection facility at Lourdes, Cuba, which employed an estimated 3,000 intelligence personnel at its peak to monitor the United States.[51] This retrenchment was, to a significant extent, a function of Russia's post-Soviet economic collapse. But some steps, particularly the shuttering of Lourdes, were taken in the early 2000s, when Moscow did so out of choice. That signal, which came in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2011, was received as a sign of Russian partnership in the war on terror. In the past decade or so, though, Russia has shown signs of seeking to reenter competition in what it views as America's backyard and to restore some of its ties with the region.[52] In 2008, after the United States deployed naval forces in response to Russia's operations in Georgia, Russia sent nuclear-capable Tu-160 bombers to Venezuela for symbolic flights around the Caribbean and a four-ship Russian naval flotilla to exercise with the Venezuelan navy, which it followed with visits to Cuba and Nicaragua.[53] Nevertheless, Moscow's moves in Latin America have been largely symbolic and insufficient to constitute real competition for influence thus far.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the locus in which the competition between the United States and Russia has chiefly played out—Russia's immediate neighborhood—has destabilized the relationship. The post-2014 breakdown in relations is traceable directly to the culmination of competition for influence over an area that is far more central to Russia than to the United States.[54] Russia's annexation of Crimea and military action in eastern Ukraine were reactions to Russia's failure to install a Russia-friendly government in Ukraine by other means.[55]

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[48] Oliker et al., 2015, p. 2.

[49] Oliker et al., 2015, p. 23.

[50] As multiple experts on Russian foreign policy have observed, decisive influence over the region "was linked to preservation of domestic stability" (Charap and Colton, 2017, p. 76) and was "an existential question" (Stent, 2015, p. 285). See also Sergey Lavrov, "Democracy, International Governance, and the Future World Order," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1, January–March 2005.

[51] R. Evan Ellis, 2015, *The New Russian Engagement with Latin America: Strategic Position, Commerce, and Dreams of the Past*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2015, pp. 6, 38.

[52] Ellis, 2015, p. 10.

[53] Ellis, 2015, p. ix.

[54] As Charap and Colton concluded, "[i]t was the contestation over the lands between Russia and the West that led to the explosion in Ukraine and sent tensions spiraling out of control." Charap and Colton, 2017, p. 27.

[55] For a full account of the Russian decisions with regard to Ukraine, see Charap and Colton, 2017. Russian analysts also attribute Russian decisionmaking to the desire to stave off EU and, more important, NATO membership. See, for

Communication Channels

The CBMs established at the tail end of the Cold War and largely implemented in the post–Cold War era helped engender transparency and trust between the United States and Russia in the nascent stages of this relationship. In the past 15 years, both Washington and Moscow have taken actions that have violated the spirit of these CBMs, thereby undermining their stabilizing effect. Nevertheless, the post–Cold War era has witnessed the creation of some new CBMs that have likely helped avoid instability in specific domains but that appear to have failed to act as a stabilizing force for relations more broadly.

Given the recent deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations, the proximity in which the U.S. and Russian militaries are operating in Syria, and the increased number of incidents between the two rivals' aircraft and vessels, the potential for misperception, miscalculation, or accidents is likely heightened. In the currently politically charged environment, it is likely that policymakers and military leaderships in Washington and Moscow are more apt to view one another through a negative lens, thereby coloring their interpretations of one another's behavior and intentions.[56] Thus, accidents or actions intended to be defensive could be misread as aggressive.[57] These misperceptions, if acted on, have the potential to escalate to inadvertent confrontation. CBMs, designed to prevent miscalculations by increasing the transparency and predictability of the behavior and intentions of rival states, are therefore particularly important stabilizing mechanisms.

For years, CBMs codified in agreements signed at the end of the Cold War served as constraints on potentially provocative U.S. and Russian behavior. Despite recent setbacks, the CBMs established by the Vienna Document were an important tool for increasing transparency and building trust between its signatories, which include the United States and Russia. Under the agreement's framework, the participating states' militaries continue to meet annually to exchange information on manpower, equipment, deployment plans, and budgets. The agreement also mandates that states provide each other advanced notification of military exercises and other large-scale military activities and allow periodic inspections.[58]

Likewise, CFE and START included important CBMs. Although both arms control agreements were negotiated and signed in the final years of the Cold War, they were largely implemented in the post–Cold War era. The CFE Treaty's Protocol on Information Exchange established firm requirements for data exchanges on the composition, location, and status of parties' forces.[59] Additionally, the agreement outlined on-site inspection requirements.[60] These provisions provided a means for verifying compliance with the treaty and helped stabilize relations between the rivals. The same is true for START's Notification Protocol, which estab-

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example, Sergei Oznobishchev, "Russia and NATO: From the Ukrainian Crisis to Renewed Interaction," in Alexei Arbatov and Sergei Oznobishchev, eds., *Russia: Arms Control, Disarmament and International Security*, Moscow: Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), 2016.

[56] Jervis, 1976, pp. lxxxi–lxxxii.

[57] Jervis, 1976, pp. 117–118, 120.

[58] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Ensuring Military Transparency—the Vienna Document," undated.

[59] Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE Treaty), November 18, 1990.

[60] Anne Witowsky, Sherman Garnett, and Jeff McCausland, *Salvaging the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty Regime: Options for Washington*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2010, p. 4.

lished detailed requirements for the exchange of information, specifically notifications on different aspects of U.S. and Russian strategic offensive arms.

The Treaty on Open Skies—an agreement that was signed at the end of the Cold War and entered into force in 2002—remained an important means of trust-building between the United States and Russia, as well as its other signatories, until Washington and Moscow withdrew from it in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The treaty established a framework under which all participating states are allowed to conduct unarmed aerial surveillance flights over the territories of other signatories. The multilateral treaty was designed to "enhance mutual understanding and confidence by giving all participants . . . a direct role in gathering information about areas of concern to them."[61] The exchange of information is meant to "promote openness and transparency of military forces and activities" for each of its signatories.[62] Flights over the United States and Russia continued despite soured relations. In light of Russia's incursions into Ukraine, the Obama administration reviewed the risks and benefits of remaining in the treaty and determined that the trust these activities yield outweighed the potential risks.[63] The agreement was particularly important during the Ukraine crisis. Flights over Ukraine increased significantly after the Russian intervention in Crimea, and a joint flight between the United States and Germany helped confirm the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine.[64]

But in recent years, the three conventional arms–related CBMs—the Vienna Document, the CFE, and the Open Skies Treaty—have either become dysfunctional or ceased to function completely. Signatories of the Vienna Document have raised concerns over Russia's use of loopholes to conduct large-scale snap exercises without prior notification. These loopholes, some argue, potentially allow Russia to surprise NATO forces, the very thing the CBMs were designed to prevent.[65] The CFE regime collapsed in acrimony beginning in 2007. Following the refusal of NATO member states to ratify the adapted version of the treaty that was signed in 1999, Russia suspended its implementation of the treaty in 2007. The United States (along with a number of other states and parties) ceased implementation vis-à-vis Russia in 2011 as a legal countermeasure to Russia's 2007 move. Despite periodic attempts to resuscitate the CFE, the regime is not only nonexistent as of this writing but the political dispute over it has itself become a source of instability.

The New START Treaty has been an exception to the rule of withering U.S.-Russia CBMs. Signed by the United States and Russia in 2010, New START includes important CBMs that help stabilize the U.S.-Russia nuclear competition.[66] As of February 2018, the countries had completed numerous exhibitions of their systems to "demonstrate distinguishing features and technical characteristics of new strategic offensive arms or to demonstrate the results of the conversion of a strategic offensive arm to be incapable of employing" nuclear

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[61] U.S. Department of State, "Open Skies Treaty," fact sheet, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Spokesperson, March 23, 2012b.

[62] U.S. Department of State, 2012b.

[63] Aric Jenkins, "Why Russia Was Allowed to Fly a Surveillance Plane over the Capitol and Pentagon," *Time*, August 11, 2017.

[64] Davis, 2017.

[65] Igor Sutyagin, *Russia Confronts NATO: Confidence Building Measures*, London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, July 2016.

[66] Wolfgang Ischinger, Steven Pifer, Andrei Zagorski, "Confidence Building Measures Are Now Needed More Than Ever," European Leadership Network website, June 30, 2014.

arms.[67] Likewise, the countries have conducted numerous data exchanges in which both have shared detailed information on the composition and condition of their strategic nuclear weapon systems.[68] Additionally, representatives of both states have completed hundreds of on-site inspections and exchanged thousands of notifications specifying the "location, movement, and disposition" of their weapons.[69] The treaty's mandated biannual meetings between U.S. and Russian diplomats through the Bilateral Consultative Commission offer the rivals a forum in which to discuss issues related to the agreement's implementation. Furthermore, the sessions facilitate the continued interaction of U.S. and Russian arms control experts, thereby maintaining open dialogue between the states.

These efforts, in which both countries share sensitive information about their nuclear arsenals, likely contribute to increased transparency between the states. In turn, this increased visibility could help thwart misperceptions about one another's behavior or intentions relating to their strategic nuclear weapons. This avenue for increased transparency and predictability has been particularly impressive because it has persisted in spite of the Ukraine crisis and other blows to the bilateral relationship.

In addition to the treaties and other formal CBMs discussed earlier, Moscow and Washington have established bilateral and multilateral channels for communication and interaction among U.S. and Russian diplomats, military leadership, and policymakers. Like the formal CBMs, these avenues for dialogue are meant to increase transparency, foster trust, and reduce misunderstanding, thus boosting stability between the two rivals.

In 1993, then–Vice President Al Gore and his Russian counterpart, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, founded the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission on Economic and Technological Cooperation (also known as the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission). The commission was conceived of as a forum to identify areas for potential U.S.-Russia cooperation. It was also meant to "create networks of officials that ensured a continuing dialogue and had a vested interest in the success of the relationship."[70] The commission was closed under the George W. Bush administration, although Bush pursued a bilateral forum for dialogue with Russia under a new framework, titled the Russian-American Consultative Group on Strategic Stability. At its meetings, the foreign and defense ministers of Russia and the United States met to discuss various issues related to security, including North Korea, the Middle East, and arms control.[71]

An important outcome of the 2009 U.S.-Russia Summit in Moscow was the establishment of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission. The commission was designed to facilitate increased interaction between the United States and Russia through a framework of working groups that focused on a variety of issues, from nuclear security to educational and cultural exchanges.[72] In its first years of existence, many of the commission's working groups were able to make progress on issues of mutual interest. The science and technology working groups, for instance, initiated research agreements and university-to-university partner-

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67 U.S. Department of State, "Key Facts About New START Treaty Implementation," fact sheet, February 5, 2018.

68 U.S. Department of State, 2018.

69 U.S. Department of State, 2018.

70 Stent, 2015, p. 18.

71 Stent, 2015, p. 75.

72 White House, "U.S.-Bilateral Presidential Commission," fact sheet, July 6, 2009.

ships.[73] Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, however, the United States pulled out of the commission.[74]

The United States and Russia also interact through the NATO-Russia Council. As with the bilateral communication mechanisms discussed earlier, the council was founded as a "forum for dialogue and information exchange," with the aim that increased interaction might "reduce misunderstandings and increase predictability."[75] With each major crisis in NATO-Russia relations, however, the council's work has been suspended. This occurred after the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 and once again in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine. In both cases, the NATO-Russia Council, at NATO's insistence, suspended its regular meetings and ceased joint projects for varying durations.[76]

Several overarching patterns emerge from this examination of communication channels established in recent years. First, regular dialogue between Washington and Moscow and frameworks to institutionalize such communication have achieved some level of cooperation on noncore issues, probably adding to stability at times when it already was relatively high. However, communication channels have largely failed to stabilize relations at times when the rest of the relationship was under strain. The United States has chosen to suspend dialogue during major crises, the times when it is most needed. Currently, institutionalized dialogue is at a post–Cold War nadir.

Personal Relationships

A positive relationship between the U.S. and Russian presidents can have a broader positive effect on relations, and the lack of a working relationship between the presidents can prove destabilizing. However, the core issues straining U.S.-Russia relations can be too profound and complex for personal diplomacy to reconcile.

At the outset of each new U.S. presidential administration in the post–Cold War era, each president has stressed the need to establish a personal relationship with his Russian counterpart. Describing his mindset heading into his first meeting with Putin, President George W. Bush wrote in his memoirs:

> My goal at the summit had been to cut through the tension and forge a connection with Putin. I placed a high priority on personal diplomacy. Getting to know a fellow world leader's personality, character, and concerns made it easier to find common ground and deal with contentious issues.[77]

Bush's successor, President Obama, engaged with then–President Dmitry Medvedev by "appealing to Medvedev as a tech-savvy fellow lawyer from a generation less burdened by Cold

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[73] U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, *2013 Joint Annual Report*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2013.

[74] M. Leann Brown, "US-Russian Relations During the Obama Presidency: From Reset to a New Cold War?" in Richard S. Conley, ed., *Presidential Leadership and National Security: The Obama Legacy and Trump Trajectory*, New York: Routledge, 2018.

[75] NATO, "NATO-Russia Council," webpage, May 31, 2018.

[76] NATO, 2018.

[77] George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 2010, p. 195.

War stereotypes."[78] From the outset of his presidency, President Donald Trump also acknowledged the importance of amicable personal relations with his counterpart, noting after their July 2018 summit: "He's been very nice to me the times I've met him. I've been nice to him. He's a competitor . . . . He's not my enemy. And hopefully, someday, maybe he'll be a friend."[79]

At times, this instinct to develop a personal rapport has helped facilitate the relationship. Clinton and Yeltsin's mutual affinity has been well documented, although some criticized their closeness.[80] After his and Putin's inaugural summit, Bush shared his now-infamous first impressions of his counterpart with reporters, remarking that he had "looked the man in the eye . . . found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy" and was "able to get a sense of his soul."[81] Bush later hosted Putin and a Russian delegation at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and at his family summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine. Likewise, then–Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov developed a close working relationship, and friendship. Ivanov later recounted an anecdote when the two snuck out of a performance of the Nutcracker to attend an avant-garde ballet, when the Secretary of State accompanied Bush to Moscow for a summit.[82]

These personal ties could not prevent the dangerous instability in the rivalry that manifested itself during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, when the United States contemplated striking the attacking Russian forces. But, as Stent has argued, in the absence of institutional and stakeholder ties, personal links between leaders have come to play "a disproportionate role in the relationship."[83] During the Obama presidency, for example, the effective partnership with Medvedev made it possible to resolve difficult problems in negotiations and to advance the relationship. Obama administration officials cited Medvedev and Obama's relationship as a major contributor to successes in the bilateral relationship, such as the signing of the New START Treaty.[84] When Putin returned to the Kremlin in 2012, it became much more difficult to smooth out differences because Obama's rapport with Putin was notoriously bad. There is a case to be made that the poor state of presidential relations contributed to the bilateral relationship's collapse, since neither president saw much point in engaging with the other during the short window when preventative diplomacy might have prevented the Russian annexation of Crimea.

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78 Angela Stent, "US-Russia Relations in the Second Obama Administration," *Survival*, Vol. 54, No. 6, December 2012–January 2013, p. 128.

79 Anton Troianovsky and Philip Rucker, "'Maybe He'll Be a Friend': Trump Highlights Common Ground with Putin Ahead of Summit," *Washington Post*, July 15, 2018.

80 Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy*, New York: Random House, 2002, p. 9; Stent, 2015, p. 13; Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, "Text of Clinton-Yeltsin News Conference," Moscow, September 1, 1998.

81 Jane Perlez, "Cordial Rivals: How Bush and Putin Became Friends," *New York Times*, June 18, 2001.

82 Agnus Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin and the Struggle for Russia,* New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, pp. 44–45.

83 Stent, 2012–2013, pp. 127–128.

84 Daniel Dombey and Charles Clover, "Obama Gambles on Relationship with Medvedev," *Financial Times*, June 23, 2010; Brian Whitmore, "Is 'Personal Chemistry' at Work Between Obama and Medvedev?" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website, April 16, 2010.

Management of Allies and Proxies

Both sides have demonstrated a limited capacity to manage the behavior of allies and proxies. Arguably, this has injected instability at key junctures in the relationship.

The nature of the role of third parties in the U.S.-Russia relationship differs greatly from that of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, when the behavior of allies and proxies regularly caused high-level tensions. In the post–Cold War context, Washington and Moscow largely ceased sponsoring combatants in the various proxy wars that they had pursued on ideological grounds. However, from the mid-2000s, and particularly since 2014, the two rivals have taken opposing sides in regional crises, and their local partners' behavior has proven problematic for stability.

The United States has had difficulties restraining its partners in post-Soviet Eurasia at key junctures. One prominent example was in the summer of 2008 when, despite repeated entreaties from Washington to exercise restraint, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili decided to respond to the provocations of Russia-backed separatists in South Ossetia with an assault on the regional capital, a move that marked the start of the war. In summer 2014, the United States failed to restrain the Ukrainian government from attempting to crush the Russia-backed rebellion in the east of the country by force. Russia's eventual response—a crushing direct military intervention—was inevitable. The belief in Moscow that the United States exercises near-total control over governments, such as those of Georgia and Ukraine, compounds the destabilizing effect of these episodes.

Russia has had its share of difficulties. Russia's recent intervention in Syria has transformed the regime of Bashar al-Assad into its proxy. However, despite Assad's dependence on Moscow, Russia has been unable to control some of his more destabilizing behavior. The Assad regime's alleged use of chemical weapons against its own people is the most prominent case in point. These incidents have contributed to the exacerbation of tensions between the United States and Russia, particularly since they have occasioned the only two direct U.S. attacks on the regime. Russia's past behavior, notably its role in proposing and facilitating the 2013 agreement to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapon stocks and to bring Damascus into the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, is a clear indication that the Syrian regime has acted in these cases either without Moscow's approval or directly against its wishes.

Creation of and Compliance with Norms and Rules

In the early years of the post–Cold War period, the United States and Russia worked to implement formal agreements that constrained potentially destabilizing behavior in specific areas. Since the turn of the century, both states have retreated from these accepted rules. As relations between the rivals have deteriorated and perceptions of one another's behavior as aggressive and provocative have become increasingly entrenched, reaching new agreements on norms of behavior has become much more challenging. In the absence of such rules, the states have often operated under two incongruent sets of norms, which both believe to be shared.

In the final years of the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union signed arms control agreements, notably the INF, CFE, and START treaties, which laid out explicit rules that constrained potentially destabilizing behavior in specific areas of the military arena. The USSR collapsed either soon after or shortly before these agreements entered into force, which left the task of the treaties' implementation to the United States and Russia. (In the case of CFE, there were 29 other states or parties.) In the first decade following the end of the Cold War, the United States and Russia worked to implement the provisions mandated by the agreements. The rivals also negotiated a follow-on treaty, START II, although the agreement never

entered into force, and the New START treaty, which did. But the past decade and a half has witnessed a retreat from these and other norms, and new rules have been largely notable for their absence.

The contentious arena of BMD is an apt example. In 2002, much to Moscow' dismay, the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty. This withdrawal ended norms that had limited the development and deployment of ABM systems—systems that both Washington and Moscow acknowledged to be destabilizing. Since then, the lack of agreed norms governing missile defense has been a thorn in U.S.-Russia relations. After its withdrawal from the treaty, the Bush administration moved forward with the development and deployment of missile defense systems, arguing these were necessary to protect the United States and its allies from growing Iranian threats.[85] Although the United States attempted to reassure the Russian government that it "shouldn't fear a missile defense system," as Bush pledged publicly, Russia maintained that the placement of ground-based interceptor missiles in Poland and a tracking station in the Czech Republic indicated that the system was intended to target Russia, not Iran.[86] Moscow saw this as a threat to Russia's nuclear deterrent and a destabilizing move.[87] In return, Russia proposed an alternative solution: a joint effort to monitor potential incoming missiles from the Middle East, taking advantage of data from a Soviet-era radar station it maintained in Azerbaijan. The United states rebuffed this proposition.[88] Although he continued to seek a compromise, Bush left office in 2009 without resolving this contentious issue with Russia.

Missile defense continued to be a divisive issue in the Obama administration's relations with Russia.[89] Although the administration did change Bush-era policy, adopting a missile defense policy in Europe that initially focused explicitly on short-range systems and actively sought cooperation with Russia on missile defense, the rivals could not reach agreement on either limits or joint efforts. Moscow sought explicit written assurances that the system could not be used against its own missiles.[90] Negotiations did not produce an agreement that provided such a guarantee. In response, then-President Medvedev announced a series of retaliatory measures, including the deployment of Iskandar missiles in Kaliningrad and Russia's decision to furnish its ballistic missiles with missile-defense penetration systems, among other moves.[91]

In the years since, the United States and Russia have continued to spar over missile defense in Europe. Moscow has worked to develop systems that it says could overcome advances in U.S. missile defense shields.[92] Putin continues to cite the 2002 U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty as the motivation for these efforts. The course of U.S.-Russia relations since the U.S. exit from the ABM Treaty suggests that the absence of explicit rules for missile defense has created significant instability.

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85 Matt Spetalnick, "Bush: Missile Shield Is Meant to Deter Iran," Reuters, October 23, 2007.

86 Massimo Calabresi, "Behind Bush's Missile Defense Push," *Time*, June 5, 2007.

87 Bruce I. Konviser, "U.S. Missiles in E. Europe Opposed by Locals, Russia," *Washington Post*, January 28, 2007.

88 Stent, 2015, pp. 156–157.

89 Ken Dilanian, "Obama Scraps Bush Missile-Defense Plan," ABC News, September 17, 2009.

90 Josh Rogin, "Medvedev Announces Failure of U.S.-Russia Missile Defense Talks; Threatens to Withdraw from New START," *Foreign Policy*, November 23, 2011.

91 Rogin, 2011.

92 Dave Majumdar, "Russia's New Doomsday Weapons Can Beat U.S. Missile Defenses," *National Interest*, June 6, 2018.

Five years after the U.S. abrogation of the ABM Treaty, Moscow announced its decision to suspend its implementation of CFE. The agreement had been designed to constrain its signatories' deployments of conventional military equipment in Europe by placing limits on categories of such weapons and required the elimination of weapons above these limits.

Then, in 2014, the U.S. government declared Russia to be testing an intermediate range ground-launched cruise missile in violation of the INF Treaty. Washington has subsequently stated that Russia is deploying this missile, known as the SSC-8. Russia has made counteraccusations, particularly claiming that U.S. missile-defense interceptor launchers in Romania and Poland could be used to launch cruise missiles, which would be an INF Treaty violation. In 2019, the United States withdrew from the INF Treaty.

No norms have been agreed on regarding one of the most contentious issues in the relationship: the eastward enlargement of NATO. On numerous occasions, Russia's leadership has claimed that, during negotiations over the reunification of East and West Germany, the West provided the Soviet leadership with assurances that NATO would not expand beyond its incorporation of East Germany.[93] In his 2007 Munich Security Conference remarks, Putin referenced this alleged guarantee, asking what had "happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact?"—a refrain he repeated in 2014, alleging that the West had "lied to [Russia] many times, made decisions behind [its] back . . . . This has happened with Nato's expansion to the East."[94] The nature and existence of this guarantee is the subject of a robust debate in the scholarly and policymaking communities. Officially, the West rejects these claims, noting that such a promise was never enshrined in a legally binding agreement.[95] For the purposes of this report, the important points are that there are no agreed norms governing NATO enlargement and that the lack of norms—and indeed, lack of willingness to adopt norms—has contributed to instability.

The goal of the aforementioned analysis is not to suggest that the recent period has been marked by the complete absence of norm establishment and observance. The 2010 signing of the New START Treaty lowered the number of deployable nuclear warheads and missiles that each side is allowed to possess and placed limits on each side's deployed and nondeployed ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers.[96] In January 2021, newly elected U.S. President Joe Biden and Putin agreed to extend the New START treaty for five years.

The treaty is significant in that it demonstrates that the United States and Russia have been able to establish mutually accepted rules for behavior in specific areas in the more-recent post–Cold War period, despite frictions on broader political issues. As one of the few remaining formal bilateral agreements bounding U.S. and Russian behavior, the New START Treaty has likely provided some measure of stability in the specific areas it governs. That said, given the soured state of U.S.-Russian relations since its ratification, it is unlikely that the agreement has acted as a broader stabilizing force between the rivals, although this is difficult to say with certainty.

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[93] Andrew T. Wolff, "The Future of NATO Enlargement after the Ukraine Crisis," *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 5, September 2015, p. 1105.

[94] As reported in Christopher Clark and Kristina Spohr, "Moscow's Account of Nato Expansion Is a Case of False Memory Syndrome," *The Guardian*, May 24, 2015. See also Brad Stapleton, "Montenegro and the Folly of NATO Expansion," *National Interest*, December 4, 2015.

[95] Michael Rühle, "NATO Enlargement and Russia: Myths and Realities," *NATO Review*, July 1, 2014.

[96] "Russia Prepared to Extend Nuclear Treaty, Putin Says," CNBC, July 16, 2018.

Last, the United States and Russia have been unable to agree on norms governing new arenas of competition, such as space and cyberspace. On space, the two sides are far apart on the nature of one another's activities and what can be done to avoid a space arms race.[97] On cyberspace, multilateral talks have broken down because of disputes between Western countries on the one hand and Russia and China on the other over normative frameworks for this domain. Meanwhile, little progress has been made since the 2016 U.S. presidential election on bilateral norms that might prevent such an incident in the future.

Contextual Factors

This component of the theoretical framework suggests eight additional factors that help govern the stability of a strategic rivalry. We assessed the salience of each factor to the emerging U.S.-Russia rivalry and found that three contextual factors were less relevant for this particular case:

- *Objective costs of aggression.* Essentially, this factor has remained a constant since the Cold War because of the mutual strategic (nuclear) vulnerability in the relationship.
- *Contestation over resources.* As top global energy producers, the United States and Russia have not competed directly over resources in the post–Cold War period. In recent years, the two rivals have competed over markets for natural gas, but this market competition has been mostly a peripheral element of the strategic competition.
- *Means to react proportionally.* Both the United States and Russia have a wide range of economic, intelligence, diplomatic, and military tools to deploy in reaction to one another's actions without escalating to direct conflict. Although there is significant divergence in the strength of these tools, given the relative U.S. power, none of the instability in the relationship has been driven by a Russian (or U.S.) inability to respond proportionally. Conversely, the periods of stability have also not been a function of the capacity to react proportionally.

Removing these variables left five contextual factors that we assessed in detail for their effects on the stability of the emerging U.S.-Russia rivalry.

Military Offense-Defense Balance

In recent years, Russian conventional capabilities have recovered, making it possible for Moscow to conduct operations in Ukraine since 2014. Although these capabilities could not plausibly be used against the United States directly, U.S. allies on Russia's borders are theoretically at risk.

Russia's ongoing military modernization efforts and the experience of Ukraine and Syria have contributed to important shifts in the structure and operations of Russia's armed forces. Ground forces have acquired new units and platforms, enabling rapid mechanized interventions along Russia's western border, particularly on the border with Ukraine. Maneuver ground forces played a decisive role in Russia's military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine and remain a major cause of concern to Western military planners because of the regional imbal-

[97] Yleem D. S. Poblete, "Remarks on Recent Space Activities of Concern," speech delivered at conference on disarmament, August 14, 2018.

ance of ground forces in the Baltic Sea region.[98] It is often argued that Russia's conventional superiority in the region, combined with its increasingly assertive use of force, is destabilizing regional security and could even provide the incentive for military adventurism. On the whole, however, at the strategic level, MAD continues to make it unfeasible for either rival to engage in armed aggression against the other. Russia has behaved differently toward NATO and non-NATO neighbors precisely because an attack would risk escalation to direct conflict with the United States.

Domestic Interest Groups

The United States and Russia have had a relatively insignificant trading and investment relationship in the post–Cold War era. As a result, no powerful domestic economic constituency in either country has a significant stake in stabilizing the rivalry.

The economic relationship between the United States and Russia is rather weak because the two countries are not natural trading partners.[99] In 2016, the total trade in goods amounted to $20.3 billion, or just 3 percent of the U.S.-China trade in goods. Meanwhile, U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in Russia plummeted from $13.1 billion in 2013 to $2.95 billion in 2016. Survey data from the American Chamber of Commerce in Russia put the FDI figure at $57.8 billion in 2017,[100] which is considerably higher than the official estimate and could indicate stronger business links than the official data suggest. Still, according to the same survey, more than 80 percent of American companies doing business in Russia started their business there ten years ago or earlier, suggesting that there were relatively few new entrants into the Russian market even prior to the imposition of U.S. sanctions in 2014.

Economic interdependence between the United States and Russia was dramatically weakened by several rounds of sanctions in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's meddling in the U.S. presidential election in 2016, and the attempted assassination of a former Russian spy in the UK in 2017. Cooperation in banking, project financing, and advanced technologies for oil and gas exploration dwindled. Russia maintains an extensive economic relationship with the EU, which remains Russia's largest trade partner and largest foreign direct investor. Although Russia's economic interdependence with the United States is relatively minor, Russia's economic ties with the EU could serve as a stabilizing factor in the U.S.-Russia relationship to the extent that domestic interests in Russia seek to preserve its EU ties, assuming that the United States and the EU maintain a common position vis-à-vis Russia.

In sum, the magnitude of the economic relationship between the United States and Russia has been and will likely remain insufficient for the formation of strong domestic interest groups that have a stake in the relationship and can act as a stabilizer. Economic sanctions and countersanctions are further weakening these groups, to the extent they exist, and strengthening domestic constituencies that benefit from the sanctions (such as domestic agricultural producers in Russia) and thus have an interest in maintaining a hostile relationship. However,

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[98] Scott Boston, Michael Johnson, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, and Yvonne Crane, *Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2402, 2018; David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1253-A, 2016.

[99] Eugene B. Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, and Andrew S. Weiss, "Trump and Russia: The Right Way to Manage Relations," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2017, p. 12.

[100] GfK, "Investments and Import to Russia, 2nd Survey," 2017.

the remaining business ties between the EU and Russia, especially in the energy sector, might have a limited stabilizing effect on the U.S.-Russia competition because they create powerful lobbies (e.g., Gazprom) interested in preserving a stable economic relationship with the West.

Prioritization of Status, Honor, and Prestige

Russia's great-power status is a core element of national identity for elites and masses alike. This priority has proven problematic for the stability of the U.S.-Russia rivalry.

Post-Soviet Russia inherited the Soviet elite as its decisionmaking class, and that group has harbored expectations about the country's place in the world. The Russian people, according to opinion polls, also yearn to be citizens of a great power. Russia's great-power aspirations and its special responsibility as a major nuclear power are enshrined in its main strategic documents and often feature in leadership speeches.[101] Russia's most ambitious foreign policy endeavors, such as the Syrian campaign, are, to a significant extent, motivated by the desire to reassert Russia's status as a great power.[102] In short, status has been a key driver of Russian behavior.

Russia's quest for status, honor, and prestige puts it on a collision course with the United States by creating heightened expectations of reciprocity and motivating further foreign policy actions that are meant to underscore Russia's status as a great power. At the same time, certain aspects of Russia's pursuit of status might have a beneficial, stabilizing effect on the relationship. For example, Russia supports the UN system because it reinforces Russia's status as a great power because of its veto power on the Security Council. Russia is also engaging with other international institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and is willing to participate in the elements of a U.S.-led global economic order that do not threaten Russia's security or undermine its influence.

Existence of a Common Enemy

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the United States and Russia appeared to have a common enemy. For a few years, confronting terrorism became the main channel of cooperation between the two countries. President Putin was the first to call President Bush in the hours after the attacks. Russia facilitated the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban. Rejecting the advice of his generals, Putin did not initially resist U.S. basing in post-Soviet Central Asia. As one former U.S. official put it, "Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2001 marked the closest alignment of U.S. and Russian interests, and Russian support was as important as that of any NATO ally."[103]

However, despite rhetorical commitments to opposing a common enemy and no longer viewing each other as enemies (at least until 2014), counterterrorism proved of limited utility in stabilizing the rivalry. The main role of counterterrorism has been to force the rivals to maintain some level of communication and cooperation. Counterterrorism cooperation still

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[101] President of Russia, "O Strategii natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii," December 31, 2015; President of Russia, *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2016.

[102] Dmitri Trenin, "Highs and Lows: Russia's Foreign Policy at the Start of 2018," Carnegie Moscow Center website, February 2, 2018.

[103] Andrew C. Kuchins, "That Brief U.S.-Russia Strategic Partnership 15 Years Ago? New Interviews Reveal Why It Derailed," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2016.

serves as an aspiration for those seeking a positive agenda for the relationship, even if concrete steps toward that end often prove elusive.

It is telling that U.S.-Russia cooperation on counterterrorism seemed to reflect the overall state of the relationship, not affect it. For example, just before the Obama administration's 2009 reset of relations, Moscow had sought to oust the United States from Manas, Kyrgyzstan, the last remaining U.S. base in Central Asia. In the context of the reset, Moscow came to support that U.S. presence and even to allow military flights over its own territory for men and materiel en route to Afghanistan. However, once relations deteriorated in 2014, U.S.-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan ceased again.

Still, counterterrorism has proven enough of a common concern to allow heads of intelligence agencies on both sides to maintain contacts even during low points in the relationship. In fact, working-level channels have been used to stop attacks. So, while not determinative of outcomes in the relationship, the existence of a common enemy does have some, if only diffuse, effect.

Interdependence

The relative dominance of the West in the global economy and Russia's integration within it has made it challenging for Moscow to engage in overt acts of aggression toward the United States and its allies.

The imposition of successive rounds of sanctions on Russia since 2014 has demonstrated the extent of Moscow's dependence on the Western-dominated global financial system and economic integration with the West more broadly. Sanctions have, arguably, had little effect on policy but have hit Russia's economy, with estimates of lost GDP ranging from 1 to 2 percent annually.[104]

That brake on Russia's growth came about only as a function of Russia's prior integration with the West. Russia relied on a range of imports, investment (both direct and portfolio), know-how, and joint ventures to maintain its economic growth. Even though a number of these ties have been severed, Russia remains economically dependent on the West. More than four years after the first round of sanctions, the threat of legislation on new sanctions in August 2018 sent the Russian ruble's value tumbling. By the nature of sanctions, of course, each one that is imposed cuts one more tie that binds Russia to the West. Moscow will be loath to restore these ties, given the liability they represent. Over time, therefore, this brake on potential Russian aggression is likely to become less effective.

Perceptual Factors

The various policies that the United States and Russia have adopted, along with developments in the national and geopolitical contexts, have contributed to mutual perceptions that are highly inconsistent with long-term stability. We next itemize the five perceptual factors.

[104] For one estimate, see Konstantin A. Kholodilin and Aleksei Netšunajev, *Crimea and Punishment: The Impact of Sanctions on Russian and European Economies*, Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, 2016.

Perceived Revisionism

Does one rival see the other as intent on overthrowing its political system and the international order?

The current dominant view in each country is that the other side seeks not only to affect its politics and even overthrow its government but also to upend the international status quo.

Among the two rivals' elites, perceptions of the other side have varied significantly over the course of the post-Soviet period. Many in the United States saw Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s as weak, irrelevant, or both, and there was no sense that Moscow was a revisionist actor. For most of that period, the United States was seen as a potential partner and even ally with Russia and as a key supporter of its reform process. The two sides frequently declared that they did not see each other as enemies. In 1992, then-presidents Yeltsin and George H. W. Bush declared that "Russia and the United States do not regard each other as potential adversaries. From now on, the relationship will be characterized by friendship and partnership founded on mutual trust and respect and a common commitment to democracy and economic freedom."[105] Sixteen years later, presidents Putin and George W. Bush declared that

> the era in which the United States and Russia considered one another an enemy or strategic threat has ended. We reject the zero-sum thinking of the Cold War when "what was good for Russia was bad for America" and vice versa. Rather, we are dedicated to working together and with other nations to address the global challenges of the 21st century, moving the U.S.-Russia relationship from one of strategic competition to strategic partnership. . . . We are determined to build a lasting peace, both on a bilateral basis and in international fora, recognizing our shared responsibility to the people of our countries and the global community of nations to remain steadfast and united in pursuit of international security, and a peaceful, free world.[106]

Under the surface, however, perceptions were already shifting. Moscow viewed the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 as indications that Washington was prepared to act unilaterally and (in Russia's view) in violation of international law when it chose to do so. By the end of the 2000s, Moscow had come to view the United States as a unilateralist-revisionist, determined to impose its will on the international system, including by force. As Putin said in his infamous Munich speech in 2007:

> Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force—military force—in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. . . .
>
> We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. . . . One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this? . . .
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> And of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe.[107]

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[105] George H. W. Bush and Boris N. Yeltsin, "Presidents Bush and Yeltsin: 'Dawn of a New Era,'" *New York Times*, February 2, 1992.

[106] White House, "U.S.-Russia Strategic Framework Declaration," press release, April 6, 2008.

[107] Vladmir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," February 10, 2007.

Before this view became more widely shared later, the interlude of the Obama-Medvedev reset did manage to mitigate this perception somewhat. Obama's greater commitment to multilateralism seemed to herald a change in U.S. foreign policy that was welcome in Moscow. But then, the U.S. and allied implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which was passed (thanks to a Russian abstention) in March 2011 and which authorized the use of force to protect civilians in Libya, convinced many in Moscow that little had changed. Russia saw that resolution as providing for a limited intervention; instead, the intervention facilitated the overthrow of Muammar al-Qaddafi's regime.

The nature of these interventions—regime change—came to be seen as a deliberate American policy that could have direct consequences for the Russian government: The Russian regime could be targeted. This perception deepened with the color revolutions in post-Soviet Eurasia. Moscow came to interpret these uprisings next door as tools of U.S. policy to remove sitting governments that pursued policies counter to U.S. interests; to replace them with figures who would do the Americans' bidding; or, if all else failed, to sow sheer disorder. The Russian military developed a detailed schematic for this purported policy, beginning with U.S. government sponsorship of efforts to train opposition movements and moving through the process of delegitimizing sitting governments, sparking protests, and so on until the final act of installing a puppet regime.[108] It became the consensus view in Moscow that the United States was fomenting color revolutions in post-Soviet Eurasia as a nonkinetic means of engineering the same result as in Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq: regime change. For Moscow, the struggle became further linked to preserving its own domestic stability, since it was widely taken as gospel truth that political change in the neighborhood could be used to undermine the foundations of the Russian government itself.

This perception of a U.S. intention to overthrow the Russian government hardened in 2011 and 2012. First, the negative U.S. reaction to Putin's decision to return to the Kremlin, announced in September 2011, was seen as questioning the legitimacy of his future presidency. Second, in response to a deeply flawed election cycle, Russians took to the streets in large numbers to protest in winter and spring 2011–2012. Putin and his inner circle saw the hand of the West at work. Tensions deepened as a result. As one senior Russian diplomat put it, "The U.S. wants regime change and that is the core of its Russia policy."[109] This perception of a U.S. intention to overthrow the Putin government colored Russian reactions to future events, contributing significant instability to the relationship.

Most important, Putin and his advisers seem to have concluded that the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine resulted in part from a Western plot to install a loyal government in Kyiv that would move Ukraine toward the EU and even NATO. Although no Western conspiracy in this simplistic form existed, the truth was not much better for Russia: Individuals from the customary hotbeds of Ukrainian ethnonationalism dominated the new Ukrainian administration, and it sought to sever ties with Russia and move the country toward the West. The response—the invasion and annexation of Crimea and intervention in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine—has created a lasting degree of instability in the rivalry. The economic sanctions implemented by the United States in the years since have been perceived in Moscow as economic warfare intended to undermine Russia's political stability.

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[108] Valerii Gerasimov, "Tsennost' nauki v prognozirovanii," *Voenno-promyshlennyi kur'er*, March 5, 2013.

[109] Senior Russian diplomat, interview with the authors, Moscow, December 2017.

Conversely, until Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014, the consensus in the United States was that Russia had neither the power nor the ambition to be a revisionist actor. Since then, however, perceptions have shifted dramatically. With the blatant violations of international law in both Crimea and eastern Ukraine, Russia came to be seen as seeking to overthrow the existing international order. This view was compounded by Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Indeed, the current U.S. perception of Russian revisionism seems to conflate both a desire to overthrow the U.S.-led international order and a plot to undermine the foundations of the U.S. political system. In January 2017, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power delivered her final official speech on the subject of "how the Russian government under President Putin is taking steps that are weakening the rules-based order that we have benefited from for seven decades."[110] In April 2018, U.S. National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster noted that "Russia has used old and new forms of aggression to undermine our open societies and the foundations of international peace and stability."[111]

Perceived Defense Against Existential Threat

Does one rival believe that it has the ability to counter potential aggression from the other?

Russia's increasing concerns about the viability of its nuclear deterrent have injected instability into the relationship. Furthermore, both sides now believe that their existential security is threatened by one another's cyber capabilities.

Moscow is growing increasingly concerned about the long-term viability of its nuclear deterrent in light of U.S. military-technological advances. This is perhaps as much a perceptional variable as it is an objective reality. Current U.S. capabilities are certainly not capable of blunting Russia's ability to retaliate after an attempted disarming first strike. However, Russia's security community has a tradition of making worst-case assumptions about the future and basing policy on them. For example, the quantity of U.S. BMD interceptors currently deployed is dwarfed by Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal. But without limitations on U.S. BMD deployments, Moscow operates on the assumption that Washington could both develop more-capable BMD systems and deploy them in quantities capable of mopping up a retaliatory strike. The same assumption goes for PGS missiles, which are still in development.

Both sides worry about each other's ability to pose an existential threat using cyber tools. The Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election created the perception of a vulnerability in the United States, which has been compounded by continuing reports of ongoing interference and the government's seeming inability to stop it. Reports of Russian penetration of the power grid and other critical infrastructure have created additional fears that Moscow could inflict significant harm on the U.S. homeland with cyber means in the context of a conflict.[112] Russia, meanwhile, seems to believe that it has significant vulnerabilities in the cyber domain as well. The government has conducted readiness exercises to respond to a scenario in which Russia is cut off (by the United States) from the rest of the internet.

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[110] [Samantha] Power, "Russia: The Threat, the International Order, and the Way Forward," *Foggy Bottom* (Archive), January 18, 2017.

[111] H. R. McMaster, "Russian Aggression Is Strengthening Our Resolve," keynote address, 100 Years of U.S.-Baltic Partnership: Reflecting on the Past and Looking to the Future, Atlantic Council dinner meeting, April 3, 2018.

[112] David E. Sanger, "Russian Hackers Appear to Shift Focus to U.S. Power Grid," *New York Times*, July 27, 2018.

Perceived Respect

Does one rival perceive that the other accords it due respect?

The stability of the rivalry has been affected negatively by a persistent U.S. unwillingness to accord Russia the respect to which it feels entitled.

For much of the post-Soviet period, Russia was not regarded as a true peer rival in Washington. In the 1990s, this was understandable, given Russia's economic dire straits. But the U.S. tone reflected a perception of Russian infantilism that was vividly immortalized in the 2003 memoir of former U.S. diplomat Strobe Talbott, who named an entire chapter of his book "the spinach treatment" to refer to pushing Russian officials to swallow painful economic reforms (comparing Russia to a recalcitrant child at the dinner table who refuses his vegetables).[113] This attitude has persisted in various forms. According to one former official, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald "Rumsfeld saw Russia as a second-rate power; not worth a hill of beans."[114] President Obama famously dismissed Russia as a "regional power."[115]

Having now acknowledged Russia as one of two strategic competitors in the 2017 NSS and 2018 NDS, the United States has afforded Russia some of the respect it has long sought. But Moscow seeks more than just acknowledgment as an adversary; it wants the United States to negotiate on all matters of concern. From Moscow's perspective, Washington is far more inclined to punish Russia using sanctions, not to compromise with Russia at the negotiating table. Indeed, much of Russia's recent aggressive behavior can be interpreted as efforts to compel the United States to bargain. Thus far, such efforts have largely failed.

Extreme Measures Seen as More Costly Than Beneficial

Does each rival consider extreme measures to be more costly than beneficial?

Moscow has undertaken ever-more-assertive policies since 2014. Arguably, such actions as the interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the poisoning of a former spy with a banned nerve agent in the UK indicate a willingness to engage in extreme measures. The same is true, to a certain extent, in the United States, as unprecedented economic and diplomatic sanctions have been imposed in response to Russian behavior.

Given Russia's recent track record of taking ever-more-assertive measures toward the United States and its allies, it seems clear that the cost-benefit analysis in Moscow regarding escalatory moves has changed, with 2014 being a watershed moment in this regard. Before then, despite some tensions and frequent disagreements, neither side was willing to take extreme measures against the other. Russia's decision to annex Crimea—an extreme action by any measure—was one that it could have taken at any time since 1991; the majority of the population of the peninsula would have been supportive, and Ukraine's military would not have been able to stop even the unreformed Russian force. The decision to annex Crimea in March 2014, which seems to have been made independently from the initial decision to invade the peninsula, was made with not just Ukraine in mind. Moscow clearly understood that its relations with the West would never be the same after the annexation. Putin himself framed his actions in these terms:

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[113] Talbott, 2002.

[114] Kuchins, 2016.

[115] Scott Wilson, "Obama Dismisses Russia as 'Regional Power' Acting out of Weakness," *Washington Post*, March 25, 2014.

> In the case of Ukraine, our Western partners crossed the line, conducting themselves crudely, irresponsibly and unprofessionally. After all, they were fully aware that millions of Russians live in Ukraine and Crimea. They must have lost all their political instincts and even common sense not to foresee the consequences of their actions. Russia was pushed to a point beyond which it could no longer retreat. If you compress a spring as tightly as possible, eventually it will snap back hard. You must always remember that.[116]

In short, Putin and his inner circle concluded that the benefits of the annexation would outweigh the costs of the downturn in relations with the United States that would inevitably result. The change in risk tolerance most likely reflected a sense of existential threat stemming from the Maidan revolution and, subsequently, the U.S. and EU sanctions that were implemented in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. Both cemented a view in Moscow that the United States seeks to overthrow the Russian government, either by posing direct security threats by installing proxies along its borders or by weakening Russia's economy to spark either a palace coup or a popular uprising. As this view about U.S. objectives became a consensus in Moscow, the calculus about taking extreme measures changed. This new calculus seems to have guided a number of key Russian decisions in the years since. Moscow's willingness to interfere in the U.S. presidential election in 2016 is the most prominent example. At a basic level, those who gave the go-ahead for the operation were willing to risk it coming to light to obtain whatever gains they hoped to achieve. The decision to attempt the assassination of Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military intelligence officer living in the UK who had been convicted of treason in Russia and then exchanged in a spy swap or, rather, the decision to do so using a banned nerve agent fits the pattern as well. Clearly, this changed cost-benefit calculus has proven highly destabilizing to the broader relationship.

The U.S. response to these Russian moves has been relatively measured; direct actions taken against Russia have largely been economic and diplomatic. However, the economic sanctions imposed on Russia have grown increasingly extreme since 2014. The scale of such sanctions against Russia is unprecedented not only in the bilateral relationship, but also in the history of U.S. sanctions policy. Russia's GDP was over twice the size of the *combined* GDP of all other countries that were subject to active U.S. sanctions programs when the sanctions began in 2014. Russia's economy is small relative to the U.S. economy, but on a purchasing power parity basis, it was the sixth-largest economy in the world in 2017. The Obama administration imposed personal, sectoral, and lending restrictions using existing legislative authorities. In August 2017, however, the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act created a much more draconian sanctions regime—and limited the executive branch's ability to roll back existing measures. From the U.S. perspective, these measures are also largely seen as more beneficial than costly, a perception that is adding to the instability in the rivalry.

Enough Mutual Understanding to Avoid Disastrous Misperceptions

Is there enough mutual understanding to avoid disastrous misperceptions?

There seems to be a growing chasm in mutual understanding between the two rivals. The deepest chasm concerns views about one another's objectives. In Washington, the mainstream view is that Russia is a highly revisionist actor, which seeks to upend the existing international order and undermine U.S. democratic institutions. In Moscow, there is a consensus that U.S.

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[116] Vladimir Putin, "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii," speech, March 18, 2014.

policy is aimed at overthrowing the Russian government. These exaggerated threat perceptions lead both sides to exaggerate the implications of one another's moves. One senior Russian official cited "negative expectations"—the idea that "no matter what we do, the Americans won't respond positively"—as a major hindrance to stability.[117] Equally, in Washington, an apocryphal quote attributed to Lenin—"Probe with bayonets; if you meet steel, stop. If you meet mush, then push."—is often invoked in reference to Putin, suggesting that his government has an insatiable ambition for expansion of influence that can be stopped only by force.[118] Both sentiments have some basis in the reality of the bilateral confrontation of recent years. But there is scant evidence to suggest that either country's objectives vis-à-vis each other are so limitless. In short, while direct conflict has thus far been avoided, a lack of mutual understanding has increased the possibility of miscalculation.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the stability of the emerging U.S.-Russia rivalry and situated it within the framework described in Chapter Three. It appears that *all* eight categories of national policies are now pushing this rivalry toward destabilization. The following five primary policy drivers of destabilization have emerged as central to the troubling dynamic in bilateral ties:

- *Military capabilities.* Russia views U.S. deployment (and potential future deployment) of particular categories of military capabilities, particularly BMD, as an existential threat.
- *Military restraint.* There has been decreasing restraint on both sides, especially Russia's, with its greater willingness to use force in regional crises and to unleash its cyber capabilities directly against the United States. In response, the United States has enhanced its posture near Russia's borders.
- *Acceptance of one another's legitimacy.* Russian aggression against Ukraine has precipitated U.S. questioning of the legitimacy of the Russian government, with open U.S. calls for undermining political stability in Russia.
- *Competition on peripheral issues.* Particularly following successive rounds of EU and NATO enlargement and both institutions' reach further east, the locus of the competition is now in Russia's immediate neighborhood. The rivalry is playing out in post-Soviet Eurasia, a region Moscow has long signaled to be vital to its national interests (not peripheral).
- *Creation of and compliance with norms and rules.* There has been an erosion of written and unwritten norms. Key elements of the arms control infrastructure have collapsed; norms governing new domains have not been established; and unwritten understandings regarding acceptable behavior are absent.

The three remaining sets of national policies seem to have aggravated the underlying instability rather than being its immediate cause:

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[117] Senior Russian official, interview with the authors, Moscow, December 2017.

[118] See, for example, Sergey Aleksashenko, Pavel Baev, Michael O'Hanlon, Steven Pifer, Alina Polyakova, Angela Stent, Strobe Talbott, and Thomas Wright, "Restoring Equilibrium: U.S. Policy Options for Countering and Engaging Russia," transcript of an interview by Bruce Jones, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, January 2018.

- *Communication channels.* There has been a breakdown of CBMs and intergovernmental communication channels. The collapse of these ties between working-level officials in both governments has made crisis management more challenging and has led to more-acute threat perceptions.
- *Personal relationships.* There is a lack of working relationships at the highest level. Constructive interpersonal relationships between U.S. and Russian presidents have been important stabilizing factors at times, but they have not prevented significant downturns.
- *Management of allies and proxies.* There is an inability to manage the behavior of close partners or allies. A recent example is the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons.

Three of the eight contextual factors continue to be important stabilizing factors:

- *Military offense-defense balance.* The mutual strategic vulnerability of nuclear deterrence continues to make direct armed conflict between the rivals highly unlikely.
- *Interdependence.* Russia remains dependent on the U.S.-dominated global economic infrastructure. Although sanctions have lessened the ties that bind Russia to the global economy, Moscow still depends on trade, investment, and financial ties with the West. This factor does not stop Russia from taking necessary steps to ensure its security but does affect the cost-benefit calculation for moves that could produce a backlash.
- *Existence of a common enemy.* Although shared counterterrorist objectives have not overcome other differences in the relationship, these objectives do serve as something of a common ground of last resort and are the cause of cooperation even during periods of high tension.

Two additional contextual factors have worsened the current instability, although they are not as central as the policy drivers described earlier:

- *Prioritization of honor, status, and prestige.* Russia's preoccupation with its great-power status is a seemingly immutable element of its strategic culture. This preoccupation has, at times, challenged stability because the United States is loath to grant Russia its desired status.
- *Domestic interest groups' influence.* There is a lack of prostability interest groups. Given the relative paucity of the bilateral economic relationship, no particularly significant set of domestic economic actors in either country has a major stake in the stability of the bilateral relationship.

None of the key perceptions auger well for the stability of the rivalry:

- Each rival sees the other as deeply revisionist vis-à-vis the international order and intent on threatening their respective domestic political systems.
- Each rival perceives itself as existentially threatened by the other in the cyber domain.
- Washington remains resistant to the give-and-take on core issues that Moscow seeks; Russia thus continues to believe that the United States is unwilling to accord it the respect it feels it deserves.
- Increasingly, both sides, particularly Russia, act as though the costs of taking extreme measures are outweighed by the benefits.

- In part because of the breakdown of communication channels, there is little mutual understanding, and both rivals see each other as innately and immutably hostile.

In short, there are significant grounds for concern about the stability of the U.S.-Russia rivalry. Of the 21 variables in our theoretical framework, 18 are pertinent to the emerging U.S.-Russia rivalry, and 15 of those indicate trends toward instability. Given the negative dynamic in nearly all these variables, the future seems likely to be even worse. However, our research does suggest that several environmental factors, such as mutual strategic vulnerability, will remain buffers to direct conflict between the rivals (although they cannot rule it out completely). Moreover, the history of the U.S.-Russia rivalry is complex and nonlinear. There were periods, particularly from 1991 until the mid-2000s, when the rivalry was stable. Although events since 2014 have changed the fundamentals and made it impossible to return to the status quo ante, this history does suggest that the rivalry is not fated to remain in its current state. Movement to a more stable, sustainable path would require compromises from each side—such as Russian withdrawal from eastern Ukraine and restraint in political meddling within democracies alongside U.S. and EU sanction relief—that at the moment seem highly unlikely. But they are not impossible, and it could be argued that each side's vital interests would be served by such a trajectory.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Emerging U.S.-China Rivalry, 1996–2019

Of all the countries in the world, China holds the greatest potential to compete with the United States over the long term. The 2017 NSS identified China as a strategic competitor, noting the country's formidable economic and military power and its clear ambitions to assume a more prominent leadership role in Asia and globally. The deepening international competition, especially in the post–Tiananmen Square era of rapid economic growth coinciding with stronger CCP rule, has occasionally been sparked by various crises. Tensions spiked in 1996, during the Taiwan Strait crisis; in 1999, when U.S. military forces mistakenly targeted a Chinese embassy while conducting bombing operations in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia; and again in 2001, when a U.S. reconnaissance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet off Hainan Island. In these cases, U.S. authorities succeeded in restoring relations with China after a period of bilateral strain, in part because of a shared appreciation of the value of stable, cooperative ties. But an increasing parity between the two giants has fueled strategic competition and exacerbated long-standing disputes. In an environment of persistent strain and deepening suspicion, the risk of miscalculation in a crisis could be increasing.

In this chapter, we evaluate the relative stability or instability of the U.S.-China rivalry.[1] We start with the premise that competition might be inevitable, but conflict need not be. If a competition can be steered in a stable direction, the two countries might be able to sustain the competition in a manner that minimizes the risk of conflict. On the other hand, if the rivalry is allowed to develop in a dangerously unstable manner, the risks of disastrous miscalculation and conflict could grow. Following the framework outlined in previous chapters, we will first evaluate the *national policies* governing the stability of the rivalry, next the *contextual factors* governing the stability of the rivalry, and then the *perceptual factors* that weigh directly on the prospects of stability for the rivalry. A concluding section will draw from the preceding sections to assess the relative stability of the U.S.-China strategic competition.

In the process, the analysis of these many variables relies on our concept of stability as defined by the two essential factors included in our definition of stability and mentioned in all the case study chapters: agreement with a mutually understood status quo and a degree of resilience, an ability to return to an equilibrium aftershocks. In these terms, the analysis in this chapter comes to a similar conclusion as that of the Russia assessment: The U.S.-China competition is beginning to display significant signs of *in*stability along both characteristics. The two countries' commitment to a meaningfully shared status quo has declined in both the economic and security realms at the same time as various factors, including growing mutual

[1] The research reported here was completed in September 2019, followed by security review by the sponsor and the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs.

threat perceptions, have reduced the inherent resilience of the relationship. As we will contend, developments in many variables in the framework support this basic assessment. In terms of how we understand stability, then, the U.S.-China rivalry gives significant cause for concern.

National Policies

National security policies in both China and the United States can both reflect and fuel perceptions of threat and competition. To assess how these policies affect strategic competition, we examine the eight types of policies in our theoretical framework: (1) deployment of military capabilities to ensure security, (2) restraint in use of military doctrines and capabilities that could signal aggressive intent, (3) signaling acceptance of one another's legitimacy, (4) competing only on peripheral issues, (5) maintaining communication channels, (6) cultivating personal relationships between national leaders, (7) managing allies and proxies to avoid crises, and (8) creating and complying with norms and rules.

Military Capabilities

Nuclear weapons form the ultimate guarantee of security by virtue of their unmatched destructive power, a fact that receives continued emphasis from U.S. and Chinese policymakers. According to DoD's 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, nuclear weapons "make essential contributions to the deterrence of nuclear and non-nuclear aggression" and will continue to do so, barring an unlikely "fundamental transformation of world order."[2] Chinese military thinkers have drawn similar conclusions. The 2013 edition of *The Science of Military Strategy*, an authoritative volume compiled by the Military Strategy Research Department of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Academy of Military Sciences, noted the critical role nuclear weapons play in "ensuring [China's] unwavering status as a great nation, safeguarding core national interests from infringement, and creating a secure environment for peaceful development."[3] In terms of sheer quantity and quality, the U.S. nuclear arsenal dwarfs that of China.

Both U.S. and Chinese defense policymakers also view conventional deterrence as a necessary complement to nuclear deterrence. In the United States, the concept of *strategic deterrence* has been expanded beyond nuclear forces to include nonnuclear forces.[4] Similarly, Chinese policymakers view conventional deterrence and nuclear deterrence as jointly falling under the aegis of *integrated strategic deterrence*.[5] According to the PLA's *Science of Military Strategy*, conventional deterrence offers greater flexibility than nuclear weapons—especially with rapidly improving precision-strike capabilities in conventional arms—and is thus capable of forming a "powerful deterrence means for achievable political objectives."[6]

The U.S. military is universally considered the most powerful fighting force on the planet. No other country possesses capabilities that match U.S. technological prowess, combat experi-

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2 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, Washington, D.C., February 2018, pp. 6, 18.

3 Military Strategy Research Department, PLA Academy of Military Sciences, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 3rd ed., Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013, p. 148.

4 Michael S. Gerson, "Conventional Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age," *Parameters*, Vol. 39, No. 3, Autumn 2009.

5 Michael S. Chase and Arthur Chan, *China's Evolving Approach to "Integrated Strategic Deterrence,"* Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1366-TI, 2016, p. 13.

6 Military Strategy Research Department, PLA Academy of Military Science, 2013, pp. 137–138.

ence, and ability to rapidly project sizable forces across the globe. Taking the Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index as one example, U.S. military capability topped the list with a score of 94.6, followed distantly by China with a 69.9.[7] Previous RAND research has shown that, across a variety of critical areas, China's military power continues to lag behind that of the United States and will do so for the near future.[8] However, the same research indicates that China has no need to catch up to challenge the U.S. ability to conduct effective operations in areas closer to the Chinese mainland.[9] Indeed, China has invested heavily in anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities designed to impede U.S. military intervention in a conflict scenario on its periphery.[10] Each country also appears to regard the other as a potential conventional threat, judging by increases in defense spending on weapons and platforms that appear designed, at least in part, with the other country in mind.[11]

Neither the United States nor China possesses a reliable means of initiating a destructive military attack on the other with impunity. While the former possesses a larger and more capable inventory of nuclear weaponry, the latter's small nuclear arsenal is sufficient for deterrent purposes, as even these few missiles could inflict a devastating retaliation (although many expect China to eventually pursue nuclear modernization and expansion of its arsenal). On the conventional front, U.S. military advantages remain vulnerable in the region along China's maritime periphery, owing to the latter's extensive A2/AD capabilities. Although the United States retains an overall advantage at the global level, China's capabilities at the regional level are strong enough to pose a credible threat to the U.S. ability to operate unhindered.

The lack of a decisive advantage and the relative inability for either side to contemplate a quick and easy military victory thus provide a stabilizing influence on the competition between Washington and Beijing. Leaders and military officials on both sides appreciate the destructive potential of major war in the nuclear age and seek to use tools of statecraft that avoid such large-scale conflict. On the other hand, in a pattern of destabilizing arms races seen in some previous cases, the increasing defense spending on weapons and platforms designed to fight the rival in a dyadic competition is likely to fuel threat perceptions on both sides and exacerbate the strategic competition. Given recent evidence in the modernization programs of both sides, this dynamic now appears to be underway.

Military Restraint

Military doctrine offers authoritative guiding principles for the employment of military forces. Some scholars assert that such doctrine can play a role in signaling aggressive or benign intent,[12]

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[7] Lowy Institute, *Asia Power Index*, data set, 2018.

[8] See Eric Heginbotham, Michael Nixon, Forrest E. Morgan, Jacob L. Heim, Jeff Hagen, Sheng Li, Jeffrey Engstrom, Martin C. Libicki, Paul DeLuca, David A. Shlapak, David R. Frelinger, Burgess Laird, Kyle Brady, and Lyle J. Morris, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power 1996–2017*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-392-AF, 2015.

[9] Heginbotham et al., 2015.

[10] See Timothy Heath and Andrew S. Erickson, "Is China Pursuing Counter-Intervention?" *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Fall 2015.

[11] Scott Neuman, "China Announces Largest Military Spending Increase in 3 Years," NPR, March 5, 2018; Jeff Daniels, "Trump's 2019 Defense Budget Request Seeks More Troops and Firepower to Deter Threats," CNBC, February 12, 2018.

[12] Evan Braden Montgomery, "Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma: Realism, Reassurance, and the Problem of Uncertainty," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Fall 2006, pp. 151–185.

and defensively oriented doctrines might be a sign of a stable competition. But making use of publicly available doctrine to assess the stability of a relationship has inherent flaws because states are predisposed to describe their "goals and actions in defensive, normative terms at the expense of transparency and analytical consistency."[13] As an example, neither the publicly avalaible U.S. nor the Chinese military doctrine mentions the other as an adversary, even though both militaries likely had the other in mind when developing the doctrine.

Inferences about PLA doctrine can be gleaned from authoritative PLA publications, from leadership statements, and from developments in China's military modernization. According to U.S. analysts, such sources indicate that China is pursuing "counter-intervention" capabilities at the military operational level.[14] These capabilities—which include A2/AD capabilities—are designed to raise the risk and costs of a potential U.S. military intervention in the region.[15] Given that the United States maintains alliance-like commitments to potential adversaries of Beijing, China's pursuit of counter-intervention capabilities against the United States should not come as a surprise. However, authoritative Chinese documents and military writings exercise some restraint by generally avoiding the direct mention of the United States as a potential military adversary.

Beyond doctrines, the activities of both the U.S. and Chinese militaries also offer evidence of restraint. Across the potential hot spots for U.S.-China military confrontation—the East and South China seas and Taiwan—the United States has avoided provocative confrontations with China. In the South China Sea, the United States has refrained from harassing or attacking Chinese forces that are based on the region's disputed maritime facilities, even though U.S. officials have strongly criticized such facilities. Instead, U.S. military forces have engaged in freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) meant to challenge excessive maritime claims impartially.[16] The same restraint is evident in the East China Sea, where the potential for conflict is greater because of statements from U.S. leaders that alliance obligations extend to Japanese administrative control of particular islands.[17] Despite the increasing frequency of close-in encounters between Japanese and Chinese ships and aircraft in the region, the United States has refrained from deploying military forces in opposition to those of China. On the matter of Taiwan, U.S. military forces avoid exercises, port calls, and other high-profile actions that could undercut Washington's commitment to upholding a One-China policy.

China has also exercised restraint in its military activities, at least until recently. Although the concept of counter-intervention is designed to deter or defeat U.S. military intervention, Chinese forces otherwise have not taken any action to provoke or directly threaten U.S. military forces. China has not attacked any U.S. forces or otherwise attempted to drive them out of the region. Although incidents do occur, such as the occasional dangerous intercept, U.S. military assets traversing China's periphery are largely unmolested.[18] Any Chinese attempt to

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[13] Heath and Erickson, 2015, p. 147.

[14] Heath and Erickson, 2015, p. 147.

[15] Heath and Erickson, 2015, p. 148.

[16] DoD, *Annual Freedom of Navigation Report, Fiscal Year 2017*, report to Congress, Washington, D.C., December 31, 2017.

[17] Ryan Hass, "Risk of U.S.-China Confrontation in the East China Sea," Brookings Institution website, December 20, 2017.

[18] Idrees Ali, "Chinese Jets Intercept U.S. Surveillance Plane: U.S. Officials," Reuters, July 24, 2017.

restrict lawful passage through international sea lanes or airspace would represent a sharp escalation and dramatically elevate the risk of a clash with U.S. forces. Additionally, recent Chinese naval exercises near Taiwan, and U.S. countersignaling moves, seem to indicate a lessening of restraint in that highly sensitive area.[19]

Chinese employment of so-called gray-zone capabilities in the South and East China Seas might also be understood as an indication of restraint. By primarily utilizing assets from its Coast Guard and maritime militia instead of naval forces, China seeks to advance its aims in a manner that minimizes the risks of unwanted military conflict and potential U.S. military intervention.[20] In this regard, recent incidents in which Chinese naval vessels sailed dangerously close to U.S. Navy ships represent a disturbing potential sign of a less stable pattern of activities in this sphere.[21] Such provocations becoming standard practice would signal a worrisome escalation of Chinese behavior and create risks of unintended clashes.

Two military areas with potential for instability in the near term are the space and cyberspace domains. The importance of these two domains in modern warfare is well documented by U.S. and Chinese policymakers. According to China's 2015 defense white paper, "outer space and cyber space have become new commanding heights in strategic competition."[22] The 2017 U.S. NSS draws similar conclusions.[23] Given the relative novelty and many uncertainties of the space and cyberspace domains compared to the more-established domains of land, sea, and air, there is a troubling absence of rules and norms governing warfare in the new domains. This absence of clear agreements greatly heightens the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation that could cause a military crisis in either of the two domains to escalate.

Overall, then, the United States and China have demonstrated a significant degree of restraint in their military doctrines, concepts, and activities, which has helped stabilize the relationship to some degree. There are some signals that each side is now prepared to undertake more aggressive and belligerent activities and that, as the rivalry escalates, publicly stated doctrines could also become more provocative. The trend appears to be in the direction of a less stable relationship in this variable.

Acceptance of One Another's Legitimacy

In a context in which a rival state withholds recognition of another—such as the case of U.S.-China relations before normalization in 1979—the likelihood of instability in the rivalry markedly increases because of the absence of stabilizing factors, such as formalized channels of communication and other mechanisms present in the normal conduct of bilateral relations between states. Without diplomatic recognition, the rival may not have recognized the right of its counterpart to exist. From the founding of the PRC in 1949 to its normalization of relations with the United States in 1979, relations between Washington and Beijing were hostile to the

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[19] Minnie Chan, "China Announces Surprise Live-Fire Taiwan Strait Drills After Massive Navy Parade," *South China Morning Post*, April 12, 2018.

[20] For an overview of Chinese gray zone activities, see Scott W. Harold, Yoshiaki Nakagawa, Junichi Fukuda, John A. Davis, Keiko Kono, Dean Cheng, and Kazuto Suzuki, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Deterring Gray Zone Coercion in the Maritime, Cyber, and Space Domains*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CF-379-GOJ, 2017.

[21] Associated Press and Carl Prine, "Pacific Fleet Says Chinese Destroyer Came Dangerously Close to Navy Ship," *Navy Times*, October 2, 2018.

[22] State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, Beijing, May 2015.

[23] White House, 2017b, pp. 31–32.

extreme, with the two sides directly clashing during the Korean War and indirectly during the Vietnam War.

However, recognition is merely the baseline for signaling acceptance of legitimacy. Two countries that recognize each other do not necessarily maintain stable relations, as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine demonstrates. The actions of one country can be construed as threatening to the legitimacy of the other despite the existence of formal diplomatic ties. Although the United States does not recognize as legitimate the separatist movements active in Tibet and Xinjiang and acknowledges China's sovereignty in these regions, its outspokenness on human rights violations in Tibet, Xinjiang, and elsewhere in China is perceived as interference in China's internal affairs and a threat to its sovereignty.[24] On the larger international stage, Beijing's efforts to expand its role in the world order signal to Washington that the former is not satisfied with the world order that the latter leads.

As Beijing's reactions to recent events in Hong Kong makes clear, the CCP remains exceptionally sensitive about issues of domestic security and perceived manipulation of its political system by outsiders. Chinese official statements and unofficial writings make clear that Beijing retains a significant degree of concern about an alleged U.S. intent to interfere in Chinese domestic affairs with the goal of overturning CCP rule and promoting a democratic transition. Broadly speaking, however, official U.S. policy has sought to allay these concerns, broadcasting many signals of acceptance of the essential legitimacy of the Chinese government. At least until recently, evidence suggests that Chinese governments had some moderate confidence in the essential admission of their legitimacy by the United States.

In sum, the matter of each country signaling legitimacy and acceptance of the other has, until recently, generally favored stability in the U.S.-China relationship. Diplomatic recognition forms the baseline for said signaling, and, in this regard, both the United States and China are in fulfillment of this basic requirement. Compared with the days when neither side recognized the other, prior to normalization in 1979, the prospects of open warfare have considerably decreased, and the avenues of cooperation have vastly expanded.

Yet a trend of growing mutual revisionism may be underway, in which China is increasingly determined to challenge perceived U.S. dominance of the international order and value-promotion efforts, while the United States is more committed to confronting what it sees as an ideological challenge. The risk now seems very real of a rapid decline in the degree of mutual legitimacy and recognition in the relationship, with an attendant growth in instability.

Competition on Peripheral Issues

The choice to compete on peripheral issues and in peripheral areas, as opposed to areas of core interest, is a hallmark of a stable rivalry. Rival states are less likely to escalate tensions if disputes between them remain cloistered from interests deemed critical to a nation's survival.

The United States and China compete with one another on multiple fronts. On the sensitive matter of Taiwan, the United States has consistently opposed Taiwan independence; however, Beijing will continue to construe such actions as U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and support for Taiwan's democratic system of governance as efforts to thwart reunification and, by

[24] Susan V. Lawrence, *U.S.-China Relations: An Overview of Policy Issues*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R41108, August 1, 2013.

extension, Beijing's sovereignty over all its claimed lands.[25] U.S. opposition to China's claims in the South China Sea—areas Beijing views as indisputably part of China—are also perceived as undermining the territorial integrity of the Chinese state. One area in which competition is especially pronounced is in the shaping of global and regional affairs. In President Xi's words, China seeks to become "a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence."[26] As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has generally opposed U.S. measures perceived as threatening a nation's sovereignty.[27] Since the founding of the People's Republic, it has espoused a new world order based on mutual respect for each nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefits, and peaceful coexistence.[28] In regional affairs, China is actively seeking to challenge U.S. dominance in Asia. It has established China-centric multilateral institutions, such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the BRICS Bank (for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as alternatives to those that underpin U.S. power. China's regional designs were further fleshed out when China's foreign ministry published a white paper on Asia-Pacific security cooperation in early January 2017.[29] The white paper represents China's first official policy document describing how it views its leadership role in Asia and outlines "a three-part strategy to build an alternative architecture, normalize U.S. acceptance, and enforce regional compliance with Chinese leadership preferences through rewards and punishments."[30] Such pronouncements are in direct opposition to how the United States views its role in the region.[31]

Competition is also intensifying in areas of economics and trade. Multiple U.S. administrations have described economic prosperity as a vital national interest.[32] For China, maintaining "the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development" is a "core national interest."[33] Although divisions on economic and trade issues are not new in the U.S.-China relationship, they became especially prominent during the Trump administration and have remained tense and conflictual, with each side accusing the other of unfair and predatory trade practices.

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[25] For the CCP, preventing Taiwan independence is a matter of political survival. See Zhang Pinghui, "Xi Jinping Warns Communist Party Would Be 'Overthrown' If Taiwan's Independence Push Left Unchecked," *South China Morning Post*, November 4, 2016.

[26] Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," speech delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017.

[27] Peter Ferdinand, *The Positions of Russia and China at the UN Security Council in Light of Recent Crises*, Brussels: European Parliament, 2013.

[28] "Backgrounder: Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," *China Daily*, April 22, 2015.

[29] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation," January 11, 2017.

[30] Timothy Heath, "China Intensifies Effort to Establish Leading Role in Asia, Dislodge U.S.," *China Brief*, Vol. 17, No. 2, February 6, 2017.

[31] Heath, 2017.

[32] For example, see White House, 2017b, p. 17.

[33] State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's Peaceful Development*, Beijing, September 2011.

Finally, friction continues to fester on the ideological front. The 2017 NSS contains myriad negative references to China's system of governance while affirming a commitment to liberal democracy.[34] In the meantime, China is positioning itself to offer its own system of economic growth sans political liberalization as a model for developing countries. In President Xi's words at the 19th Party Congress, China is "blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization," with its governance model becoming a "new option for other countries and nations who want to speed their development."[35] This suggests that China sees its own model of governance as an alternative to the one the United States champions. However, it remains unclear the extent to which China seeks to export its ideology or merely to use such rhetoric to boost the legitimacy of CCP rule.

This discussion has not covered all facets of the U.S.-China competition but makes clear that the competition includes a wide range of issues. Both the United States and China seek to advance their interests in ways that could come at the expense of the other. However, it is worth noting areas in which both sides have refrained from aggressive competition. Neither side seeks to undermine the government or the way of life of the other, as the United States and the Soviet Union arguably did during the intensely ideological years of the early Cold War. Neither have the United States and China engaged in the type of relentless nuclear arms race that typified the most threatening and dangerous period of U.S.-Soviet rivalry. The United States continues to avoid challenging Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan, even while upholding its security obligations to the island. Even in the maritime regions, the United States has refrained from taking a position on the ownership of disputed islands and reefs in the South and East China seas, although it has stepped up FONOPs and patrols to uphold free passage. That said, persistent disagreements over the status of Taiwan and over Chinese claims in the East and South China seas remain potentially dangerous flashpoints that could destabilize the bilateral relationship. In short, competition between the two countries has expanded to a growing variety of domains and issues, but both sides continue to refrain from the most aggressive competitions on interests vital to the survival of the either side.

Communication Channels

In recent decades, the United States and China have seen a significant increase in summits, communication channels, agreements, and joint exercises. Despite the increased engagement, the government-to-government exchanges and interactions remain vulnerable to the broader dynamics of the relationship. Downturns and tensions tend to curb official exchanges and cool the pace of cooperation. Official exchanges and engagements can thus be viewed as playing a helpful role in amplifying positive relations during periods in which relations are already largely cooperative. The engagements by themselves are unlikely to reverse tensions, but they can help provide offsetting influences that could ease strains. Official channels also provide a vital venue for communication in a crisis, which could help both sides avoid disastrous miscalculation. On the other hand, during periods of greater tension—such as the environment as of this writing—channels of communication tend to fray, with one or both sides declining many avenues for bilateral dialogue.

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[34] The White House, 2017b.

[35] Xi, 2017.

Until recently, lines of communication between Beijing and Washington were limited. After normalizing relations with the PRC in the 1970s, the United States began to expand senior-leader engagements and limited sales of military equipment as part of a partnership against the Soviet Union. But military cooperation halted in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. As relations got back on track in the 1990s, the two governments began to explore ways of increasing communication and official dialogues. As a result, the two countries have developed a system of hotlines, senior level meetings, and other mechanisms of communication and management of issues.

Hotlines

Hotlines are direct communication links between equivalent offices in two countries designed to coordinate policy on sensitive areas and manage crises. Despite the potential utility of hotlines in managing and de-escalating from crisis situations, the United States and China have only recently begun to explore the use of hotlines. American interest in a hotline with China stemmed from its experience with the U.S.-USSR communication system built during the Cold War. However, U.S. and Chinese leaders agreed to establish a presidential hotline only in 1997; even then, the Chinese refused to accept President Clinton's call after the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.[36] A military-to-military hotline allowing calls to be placed to the Zhongnanhai Telecommunications Directorate was established in 2008, but this did not involve top political leaders and, thus, was of limited appeal to Chinese authorities. According to media reports, this hotline was used only four times between 2008 and 2014.[37] In 2015, the two countries agreed to improve the existing military-to-military crisis-management hotline and to establish a cybersecurity hotline to coordinate policy and avoid crises in cyberspace.[38] That November, the two sides agreed to create a space hotline, enabling the two governments to notify one another of space activities and possible collisions and to handle crises in orbit.[39] In 2017, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford traveled to China to set up a hotline between the Pentagon and PLA headquarters, to provide direct communication at the three-star level in the event of a crisis.[40] In theory, hotlines can provide a critical means of communication in a crisis that can help reduce the risk of miscalculation. The fact that the two countries have established hotlines at multiple levels signals that both governments want to manage friction and minimize the risk of unwanted escalation. However, the potential stabilizing impact of hotlines is mitigated, to some effect, by the fact that the hotlines remain untested.

Dialogues and Summits

Perhaps more important than hotlines, for the purpose of building trust, have been the frequent dialogues and summits between high-level leaders from both countries. Currently, the most

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[36] Robert Pape, "A Hotline to Cool Asian Crises," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2014.

[37] Pape, 2014.

[38] "US, China Agree to Establish Military Hotline, Rules for Air-to-Air Encounters," *Taipei Times*, September 27, 2015; White House, "President Xi Jinping's State Visit to the United States," fact sheet, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Press Secretary, September 25, 2015a.

[39] Sam Jones, "US and China Set Up 'Space Hotline,'" *Financial Times,* November 20, 2015.

[40] Ben Werner, "New U.S., Chinese Military Communications Agreement Follows Years of Naval Engagement," *USNI News*, August 16, 2017.

significant and regular forum for U.S. and Chinese officials to express their concerns and to cooperate to address them is the U.S.-China comprehensive dialogue inaugurated by presidents Trump and Xi during their 2017 Mar-a-Lago summit to replace President Obama's Strategic and Economic Dialogue.[41] The Comprehensive Dialogue includes four annual cabinet-level meetings: the Diplomatic and Security Dialogue, the Comprehensive Economic Dialogue, the Law Enforcement and Cybersecurity Dialogue, and the Social and Cultural Issues Dialogue. However, only the first of these met in 2018.

This profusion of top-level government meetings has been mirrored in the military sphere as well. In November 2017, the Pentagon and the PLA launched a three-star–level Joint Staff Dialogue Mechanism to discuss issues of concern to both militaries. In 2017, the talks centered on North Korea.[42] The establishment of a new senior military dialogue has occurred alongside the persistence of long-standing annual U.S.-China Defense Policy Coordination Talks, in which American generals and officials from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and theater combatant commands meet with their Chinese counterparts to discuss cooperation, CBMs, and other issues.[43] Biannual meetings are also held to review and discuss the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement. In addition, there are annual meetings for each side to notify the other of major planned military exercises, maneuvers, and defense policy changes.[44] Recently, however, senior defense talks have been significantly curtailed as a result of the overall tension in the relationship.

Military CBMs

In 2014, the two sides concluded an agreement on two military CBMs. The Notification of Major Military Activities Memorandum of Understanding requires each side to inform the other of major military actions, policy changes, and publications. Notably, this notification may take place after a military action has occurred.[45] The other (and perhaps even more significant) CBM is the Memorandum of Understanding on the Rules for Behavior for Safety in Air and Maritime Encounters. In this document, both the U.S. and Chinese militaries agreed to have their air and naval units abide by international standards when operating in close proximity to prevent accidents, such as the 2001 collision of a U.S. surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter jet.[46] This agreement might have contributed to a reduction in the number of incidents in which Chinese ships or aircraft have initiated unsafe maneuvers near U.S. military vessels or aircraft, although such incidents have persisted despite the signing.[47]

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[41] White House, "Statement from the Press Secretary on the United States-China Visit," press release, April 7, 2017a.

[42] Jim Garamore, "U.S., Chinese Military Leaders Sign Agreement to Increase Communication," press release, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, August 15, 2017.

[43] Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017*, annual report to Congress, Washington, D.C., 2017, p. 87.

[44] Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017; John Liang, "U.S., Chinese Military Officials Meet for Defense Policy Coordination Talks," *Inside Defense*, February 2, 2018.

[45] Bonnie Glaser, "A Step Forward in US-China Military Ties: Two CBM Agreements," webpage, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative website, Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 11, 2014.

[46] Glaser, 2014.

[47] Zhou Bo, "What If Chinese and American War Ships Collide with Each Other?" *China-US Focus*, September 15, 2017; Ankit Panda, "Unplanned Encounters in the South China Sea: Under Control?" *The Diplomat*, January 26, 2016.

Summary

The maturing of bilateral relations—reflected in the expanding array of senior-leader policy-discussion venues, coordination mechanisms, and other means of sharing concerns and addressing tensions—should provide a stabilizing influence on competition between the two large and powerful countries. However, the stabilizing influence of these mechanisms should not be overstated. The dialogues and coordination mechanisms remain immature and untested, unlike the more established and routinized counterparts that characterized U.S. relations with the Soviet Union. Moreover, while diplomatic summits and coordination mechanisms can facilitate management of routine tensions and encourage stable ties in peace, they remain at the mercy of broader strategic dynamics. For example, the United States suspended all military-to-military contacts with China in the wake of the violent 1989 Tiananmen crackdown; more recently, China suspended military-to-military ties in 2010 in response to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and suspended high-level discussions on cyber issues in 2014 to protest the U.S. indictment of five PLA officers for cyberespionage.[48] From 2014 to 2017, meetings between civilian and military leaders have both proliferated and become less likely to be canceled because of political tensions. Since then, however, communication has been curtailed in terms of both frequency and quality as tensions have increased, as demonstrated by the U.S. decision to disinvite China to the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises and China's recent habit of ignoring U.S. requests for military-to-military talks.[49] These mechanisms remain hostage to the overall relationship: During periods of severe tension, as is the case today, China has rebuffed many efforts at senior leader or military-to-military dialogue, and the senior official meetings that do take place tend to be mainly exercises in airing grievances.

Personal Relationships

The area of interpersonal relationships is one in which Washington and Beijing have made unambiguous progress. It is difficult to imagine two geographically distant countries with more interpersonal contact than the United States and China. Beyond the level of senior officials, millions of private Chinese citizens have lived in the United States for years as students, and millions more Americans and Chinese nationals have visited one another's homelands. The relationships and familiarity that these experiences generate could help promote positive perceptions among both populations, thereby undercutting demand for more hostile policies.

The effects of such relationships on stability, however, are difficult to know. One pattern that emerges from previous cases is that hostile and suspicious personal relations among senior leaders can undermine stability, but good relationships cannot necessarily overcome, on their own, larger structural, material, political, and ideological factors. The latter reality appears to characterize U.S.-Chinese relations today: What appear to have been good interpersonal contacts between the two presidents have not slowed the momentum toward greater rivalry and confrontation in areas ranging from trade to the South China Sea.

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[48] Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL32496, October 27, 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China Reacts Strongly to US Announcement of Indictment Against Chinese Personnel," May 20, 2014; Shannon Tiezzi, "US Admiral: China 'Very Interested' in RIMPAC 2016," *The Diplomat*, August 27, 2015.

[49] Tiezzi, 2016; Megan Eckstein, "China Disinvited from Participating in 2018 RIMPAC Exercise," *USNI News*, May 23, 2018.

Beyond the realm of senior officials, the two countries enjoy a robust exchange of people and visitors. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, there were 2.97 million Chinese visitors to the United States in 2016, and that number is expected to grow to 4.54 million by 2022.[50] About 1.66 million Americans visited China in 2016.[51]

These short-term visitors are joined by hundreds of thousands of Chinese students studying in American universities and a smaller number of Americans studying in the PRC. In the 2016–2017 school year, 350,755 Chinese youths studied in U.S. higher education institutions.[52] Although demographic data are a bit spotty, there is evidence that these are mostly the children of middle-class and elite families—with urban, well-educated, wealthy parents—who receive financial support from home.[53] It is difficult to determine how studying in America affects the views of Chinese students toward the United States and their own country. Some studies suggest it is associated with reduced satisfaction with China,[54] some say it is linked with greater support for the United States,[55] and others find that it is correlated with greater satisfaction with China.[56] As for American students, almost 24,000 studied in China in 2017.[57]

Although the vibrant people-to-people interactions between the United States and China are generally perceived as a source of stability in the bilateral relationship, they can also fall victim to broader bilateral tensions. In the United States, there has long been concern over the intelligence role of Chinese nationals based in the country. Much of the debate centers on economic espionage, as evidenced by multiple incidents involving the illegal transfer of sensitive technologies.[58] A growing debate exists over the intelligence role of Chinese students studying in the United States.[59] In China, authorities have cracked down on Western reporters and visitors whom they suspect of being hostile agents.[60] American businessmen have also reported increasingly hostile sentiments among their Chinese counterparts.[61] Thus, while the people-to-

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[50] U.S. Department of Commerce, "2016 Monthly Tourism Statistics: Table C—Section 5: India, Japan, South Korea, PRC (Excel HK), ROC (Taiwan)," International Trade Administration, National Travel and Tourism Office webpage, July 2017.

[51] Shan Jie, "Record Number of Chinese, US Tourists Visit Each Other's Country in 2016," *Global Times*, January 11, 2017.

[52] Tara John, "U.S. College: Enrolled International Students Top 1 Million," *Time*, November 14, 2016; Alice Shen, "Chinese Students Still Drawn to US Universities, but Growth Rate Slowing," *South China Morning Post*, November 14, 2017. Although the absolute number of Chinese students coming to the United States has increased, the growth rate of the Chinese student population has dropped.

[53] Shen, 2017; Center on Religion and Chinese Society, *Purdue Survey of Chinese Students in the United States: A General Report*, West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University, November 15, 2016.

[54] Zhonglu Li and Shizheng Feng, "Overseas Study Experience and Students' Attitudes Toward China: Evidence from the Beijing College Students Panel Survey," *Chinese Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 2017, pp. 27–52.

[55] Tea Leaf Nation Staff, "Do Years Studying in America Change Chinese Hearts and Minds?" *Foreign Policy*, December 7, 2015.

[56] Center on Religion and Chinese Society, 2016.

[57] Natalie Marsh, "China Sees 11% Growth of International Student Enrolments," *PIE News*, March 28, 2017.

[58] For example, see Zach Dorfman, "How Silicon Valley Became a Den of Spies," *Politico*, July 27, 2017.

[59] Ana Swanson and Keith Bradsher, "White House Considers Restricting Chinese Researchers over Espionage Fears," *New York Times*, April 30, 2018.

[60] Michael Auslin, "China's Crackdown and Control Spreads to Foreigners," *Forbes*, April 28, 2016.

[61] Lucy Hornby and Tom Mitchell, "China Warned over Hostility to Foreign Business," *Financial Times*, June 7, 2016.

people relationships are generally perceived as a source of stability in the U.S.-China relationship, they are not entirely immune from the destabilizing factors.

Experts have long dismissed the potential stabilizing effects of interpersonal relations among military leaders, noting that U.S. and Japanese military officers had extensive and sometimes warm friendships with each other prior to the start of a murderous war in the Pacific. Although the U.S.-Chinese interpersonal relations at the official and elite levels can facilitate cooperation in times of peace, the influence of this factor in times of hostility or strained relations can be doubted. The importance of interpersonal relations among the public, by contrast, deserves emphasis. Perceptions of the public provide a demand signal for cooperative or antagonistic policies, which senior leaders must address. Thus, the high level of interaction among the peoples of the United States and China should be counted as a stabilizing factor, although the growing suspicion and distrust in one country toward visitors from the other could be seen as a troubling development.

Management of Allies and Proxies

In a stable rivalry, it is expected that the primary rivals will attempt to regulate the behavior of their allies so as to prevent actions that might exacerbate tensions or threaten to draw an ally into conflict with the primary rival. Assessing the ways in which Chinese and American management of such allies demonstrates restraint remains an admittedly challenging task because of the often-sensitive nature of discussions by top officials on the topic. Although both nations have often discouraged allies from taking provocative action, they have also provided economic and military support, which might have emboldened their allies. The United States has occasionally encouraged its allies to take action that China sees as aggressive and offensive, although it could be argued that such actions help deter the PRC from its own aggressive moves.

Perhaps the most sensitive partnership in the Sino-U.S. relationship is the one between Taiwan and Washington. The United States has long opposed Taiwan making any formal declaration of independence, which could lead to a Taiwan-PRC conflict that escalates into a U.S.-PRC conflict.[62] At the same time, Washington has periodically sold arms to Taiwan, which has infuriated Beijing. Although Chinese officials claim that these sales embolden Taiwanese independence activists to push for a permanent split with Beijing, experts disagree on what effect such moves have on Taiwanese behavior.[63] Trends in U.S. policy regarding Taiwan suggest an increasing willingness to court warmer ties with the island, even at the risk of antagonizing Beijing. The 2018 NDAA,[64] for example, directs DoD to expand military engagement and joint training with Taiwan. It also calls for regularizing arms sales and increasing senior officer exchanges.[65] These directives build on Washington's dispatch of a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State to Taiwan and the Department of State's request for U.S. Marines to be stationed

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[62] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Taiwan," fact sheet, September 13, 2017b.

[63] Christian Shepherd and Ben Blanchard, "China 'Outraged' by $1.42 Billion Planned U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan," Reuters, June 29, 2017; Richard C. Bush, "Thoughts on U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan," Brookings Institution website, January 14, 2014a; Wei-Chin Lee, "US Arms Transfer Policy to Taiwan: From Carter to Clinton," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 9, No. 23, 2000, pp. 53–75.

[64] Pub. L. 115-91, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, December 12, 2017.

[65] "The 2019 National Defense Authorization Act: Key Sections on Taiwan and China," *Taiwan Sentinel*, July 27, 2018.

at the diplomatic compound in Taiwan.[66] Such measures have further infuriated China and stand in marked contrast to past policies. In short, U.S. actions and decisions related to Taiwan in recent years have exacerbated tensions and added instability to a part of a relationship that had experienced stability in the 2000s.

Regarding the disputed Senkaku Islands, the United States has discouraged symbolic Japanese actions that would offend China while providing diplomatic and military support for concrete Japanese actions that reassure the ally but anger Beijing. U.S. officials have discouraged Japanese officials' visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, a move that is seen in China and Korea as supportive of Japan's militarist past.[67] The United States has also declared that it takes no side on the issue of territorial ownership of the Senkaku Islands. In fact, Washington reportedly advised the Japanese government against purchasing the islands in 2012, a move that angered China and led to heightened tensions between the two rival claimants.[68] At the same time, U.S. officials have reiterated their treaty-bound obligation to defend Japan and stated that this includes defending Japan's administrative control of the Senkaku Islands, a stance that Beijing has roundly condemned.[69] The U.S. position arguably raises the risk of entanglement in a conflict between China and Japan, but it is also possible that such statements help discourage Chinese aggression.[70]

The U.S. relationship with South Korea has also increased tensions with Beijing. The deployment of the Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) ABM system has been a particularly sore point. American officials have gone to great lengths to assure their Chinese counterparts that THAAD is meant only to defend South Korea from a North Korean attack and is incapable of endangering China's nuclear strike capabilities, but Beijing remains convinced that the placement of THAAD's radar system is a threat to China's nuclear capabilities.[71] Beijing has vented its frustration to Seoul in the form of a variety of coercive economic measures.[72] Meanwhile, the United States is attempting to convince South Korea and Japan to make their antimissile systems part of an integrated regional missile defense system, which some PLA thinkers worry could be a prelude to the creation of a NATO-like alliance in Northeast Asia.[73] Unlike arms sales to Taiwan, which merely deter Chinese aggression against a U.S. ally, the deployment of THAAD and the possible creation of an integrated, U.S.-led regional missile shield seem to increase the likelihood of exacerbating an arms race, which would add instability to the U.S.-China competition.[74]

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66 Ryan Browne, "Exclusive: State Department Risks China's Ire with Request for US Marines in Taiwan," CNN, June 29, 2018.

67 "Japan Defence Minister's Visit to War-Linked Shrine Also Irks US," *South China Morning Post*, December 30, 2016.

68 "U.S. Urged Japan to Consult with China Before 2012 Senkakus Purchase," *Japan Times*, January 31, 2016.

69 Ankit Panda, "Mattis: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty," *The Diplomat*, February 6, 2017a.

70 Lily Kuo, "Will a Tiny, Submerged Rock Spark a New Crisis in the East China Sea?" *The Atlantic*, December 9, 2013.

71 DoD, "U.S. to Deploy THAAD Missile Battery to South Korea," release, Washington, D.C., July 8, 2016; Ankit Panda, "THAAD and China's Nuclear Second-Strike Capability," *The Diplomat*, March 9, 2017b.

72 Liu Zhen, "Why South Korea's Promises on THAAD and a US-Japan Alliance Are So Important to China," *South China Morning Post*, November 8, 2017.

73 Zhen, November 8, 2017.

74 There is a chance that the creation of an integrated missile shield could deter Chinese missile strikes on U.S. bases in Korea and Japan, but it has not deterred Chinese economic actions against South Korea. It is also possible that the shield

In the South China Sea, the United States has actively encouraged its allies to engage in FONOPS through waters the PRC claims as its own territory, angering Beijing. Britain and France have already conducted FONOPS within waters claimed by China.[75] As with arms sales to Taiwan and the commitment to help Japan defend the Senkakus, this move has increased tension between China and the United States, although it could also serve to deter Chinese aggression. The United States will likely continue its FONOPS with or without foreign support, so a lack of allied cooperation would probably not reduce tensions, while stronger international participation in the FONOPS could make China more hesitant to interfere with them for fear of greater international isolation and perhaps even horizontal escalation.

China has few allies, but its relationship with North Korea has caused some friction with the United States. In the 1950s, China's commitment to the viability of the regime in Pyeongyang led to conventional conflict between the two rivals, and there is still concern that any large-scale conflict or crisis in North Korea could once again draw them into an armed confrontation, especially if the United States and South Korea rush to achieve the latter's longtime goal of reunification.[76] To prevent conflict, the United States and South Korea have made repeated attempts to work with China on plans for a joint response to any such crisis, but China has been unwilling to participate thus far.[77] Although China often sees U.S. aggression as the primary reason for North Korea's nuclear program, China has supported the goal of denuclearization on the peninsula.[78] China has also generally opposed strict sanctions on North Korea, which could endanger regime stability, leading some American officials to label China as Pyeongyang's "enabler," despite Beijing's frequent calls for North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons.[79] This issue's net effect on the U.S.-China rivalry likely favors stability. Although the rivals disagree on issues related to North Korea, they fundamentally share the goals of denuclearization and the avoidance of war on the peninsula. China supported, for example, President Trump's efforts to ease tensions with North Korean President Kim Jong Un during a summit in 2018.

The role of allies in precipitating conflict between great powers is well known. In the case of the United States and China, both sides have shown restraint, but the deepening rivalry is polarizing the Asia-Pacific region and exacerbating disputes between China and its neighbors. The United States has continued to balance its obligations to its allies with reassurances to China that it holds no hostile intent. However, recent U.S. actions aimed at bolstering the defensive capabilities of countries in disputes with Beijing have strained relations. China has stepped up coercive diplomacy and shown little flexibility in its dealings with Taiwan, Japan, southeast Asian countries, and India. The result has been a deepening of tensions over longstanding flashpoints. The risk of war remains low, but the possibility of a crisis or miscalcula-

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would cause the Chinese to target South Korean and Japanese air defense sites in addition to U.S. bases in the event of a conflict. This is not to say that the United States would be wrong in continuing to push for the creation of an integrated missile shield in Northeast Asia; it is possible that the strategic and operational benefits would outweigh the costs of a slight increase in friction between the United States and China.

75 Richard Javad Heydarian, "Europe Lends America Muscle in South China Sea," *Asia Times*, June 6, 2018.

76 Richard C. Bush, "China's Response to Collapse in North Korea," *Brookings Institution*, January 23, 2014b.

77 Bush, 2014b.

78 Eleanor Albert, "Understanding the China-North Korea Relationship," Council on Foreign Relations website, March 28, 2018.

79 Benjamin Brown, "Russia, China Are North Korea's 'Enablers,' Tillerson Says," Fox News, July 29, 2017.

tion in these areas could be growing. In particular, the potential is growing for an ally or proxy to take provocative actions that create a crisis between the United States and China—one that would demand unprecedented degrees of crisis management skill on both sides.

Creation of and Compliance with Norms and Rules

The United States and China have struggled in this area, with China ignoring or challenging many norms of international behavior that the United States has sought to enforce and support. However, both sides remain committed to key fundamental norms, and both have shown some restraint in advancing their contrasting views of contested norms.

Strategically, both sides have different views of how states should cooperate to ensure their own security. The United States focuses primarily on military alliances and partnerships with various states in the region, most of which have been in place since the end of World War II.[80] There have been some indications that the United States hopes to encourage its regional partners to work with one another more closely, although not as replacements for U.S. alliances.[81] Although China has not openly called for the immediate dissolution of America's existing alliances in the region, it does view them with great suspicion and is strongly opposed to their expansion into multilateral security arrangements.[82] Rather than the strengthening and expansion of this U.S.-led system of military alliances, China has advanced a contrasting vision of security—a "New Asia Security Concept"—defined by a network of multilateral dialogue mechanisms. It also includes a focus on economic development and nontraditional security rather than traditional military and strategic security.[83]

One area of particular friction between China and the United States has been the military's rights of maritime navigation and overflight.[84] China frequently contests the broad U.S. interpretation of the rights of warships and military aircraft to operate in and over the oceans near its borders. This dispute has resulted in several dangerous intercepts of U.S. reconnaissance planes by Chinese fighters and in the EP-3 aircraft collision with a Chinese jet fighter off Hainan Island in 2001.[85] Moreover, the rivals disagree on the norms related to maritime claims. China has voiced general support for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea but has rejected the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea rulings on Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.[86] The United States has been highly critical of what it considers

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[80] Ash Carter, "Asia-Pacific's Principled Security Network," speech delivered at 2016 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, June 4, 2016; David C. McCaughrin, "What Does China's 'New Asian Security Concept' Mean for the US?" *The Diplomat*, January 21, 2017.

[81] William Choong, "The Revived 'Quad'—and an Opportunity for the US," International Institute for Strategic Studies website, January 10, 2018; Cary Huang, "US, Japan, India Australia . . . Is Quad the First Step to an Asian Nato?" *South China Morning Post*, November 25, 2017.

[82] Kristian McGuire, "China-South Korea Relations: A Delicate Détente," *The Diplomat*, February 27, 2018.

[83] Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation," speech delivered at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai, China, May 21, 2014.

[84] Xi, 2014; Carter, 2016.

[85] Lynn Kuok, "China Can Learn from Soviet Approach to the Law of the Sea," Brookings Institution website, March 27, 2018; "US Says Sorry, China to Free Crew," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2001.

[86] Tom Phillips, Oliver Holmes, and Owen Bowcott, "Beijing Rejects Tribunal's Ruling in South China Sea Case," *The Guardian*, July 12, 2016.

illegal and coercive Chinese actions in the South China Sea, such as its large-scale land reclamation of previously uninhabited reefs and shoals.[87]

China and the United States also disagree over norms for the use of nuclear weapons, perhaps the most important strategic issue in any modern rivalry, although neither has directly threatened the other with such weapons. The United States has long maintained that it can legitimately use nuclear weapons in response to a biological, chemical, or conventional attack on itself or its allies.[88] China, on the other hand, has historically asserted that it will use nuclear weapons only in response to a nuclear attack.[89] Although this discrepancy does not cause much friction in the modern U.S.-China relationship, any discrepancy between views of nuclear norms cannot be taken lightly—especially given the possibility of a military crisis.

Trade has proven to be another growing area of contention between the rivals. Both nations have joined the WTO and publicly support its norms and rules, although U.S. companies have long complained of frequent Chinese transgressions of WTO regulations.[90] China has also lodged WTO complaints against the United States, particularly in light of the tariffs imposed by the United States since 2018.[91] In theory, this could be a case of two countries being divided by common norms, since both countries implicitly recognize WTO norms by trying to enforce them against their counterparts. However, the United States has filed almost twice as many WTO cases against China as China has filed against the United States, and five of the 12 cases that China filed against the United States were counter-counterresponses to U.S. antidumping or countervailing duties that Washington had levied in response to Beijing's perceived unfair trade practices.[92]

Americans widely blame Chinese subsidies and protections for a global glut in steel and other commodities.[93] Chinese industrial and economic policies, such as Made in China 2025, commit Beijing to use policy levers to cultivate "national champion" firms to compete with Western companies internationally and set specific targets for the percentage of key domestic markets that should be controlled by Chinese firms. Such policies have drawn criticism from U.S. firms, which hope to have a more-even playing field when competing with their Chinese counterparts.[94] Thus, while both countries agree with WTO laws in principle, the United States is far more active in enforcing them against China than China is against the United States.

Investment is another area in which each side publicly invokes the same norm—in this case, greater market freedom—but frequently accuses the other of violating the norm. Although

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[87] Carter, 2016.

[88] Marc Finaud, "China and Nuclear Weapons: Implications of a No First Use Doctrine," *Asia Dialogue*, April 3, 2017.

[89] Finaud, 2017.

[90] Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2012.

[91] Tom Miles, "U.S. and China Tussle at WTO over Legality of Trump Tariffs," Reuters, March 27, 2018.

[92] WTO, "Disputes by Member," webpage, undated. Only three of the 22 cases Washington filed against China were related to Chinese antidumping actions.

[93] Joe McDonald, "China Shrinks Steel Industry Slowly, Drawing Western Ire," *Chicago Tribune,* March 12, 2018.

[94] U.S. Chamber of Commerce, *Made in China 2025: Global Ambitions Built on Local Protections,* Washington, D.C., 2017. Although these companies frequently criticize Chinese protectionism, some (though certainly not all) also push for protective measures within the U.S. domestic market.

both governments agree that national security is a valid reason for protecting some industries or companies from foreign investment, the United States generally views this exception to the free market norm far more narrowly than does China, as evidenced by their bilateral investment treaty negotiations.[95] China has cut off many areas of its economy to foreign investment and placed tight restrictions on other areas, often requiring investors to transfer intellectual property or to enter a joint venture with a local partner.[96] U.S. officials have been particularly critical of Chinese investments or regulations designed to gain control over intellectual property as being driven by the state's strategic objectives rather than by business considerations.[97] Chinese companies also criticize U.S. national security investment and export restrictions, though these restrictions tend to be much more limited than China's investment restrictions.[98]

U.S. and Chinese differences over intellectual property, national security, and trade came to a head in 2018, when the United States announced punitive tariffs against a wide range of Chinese industries, driven in part by concern about technology theft. But the budding trade war was preceded by tensions in 2015, when U.S. officials put increasing pressure on Beijing to halt its practice of using government or military cyber espionage units to steal intellectual property, trade secrets, and business secrets from U.S. firms and then give them to Chinese companies to improve economic competitiveness. Although the U.S. government believes that cyber operations in military or intelligence activities are legitimate, it argued that states should not use military or intelligence cyber capabilities to interfere in the private sector.[99] China tacitly recognized this norm when it denied the charges instead of arguing that its actions were legitimate. In 2015, presidents Xi and Obama signed a cybersecurity agreement, which was followed by a reduction in the number of cyberattacks against U.S. companies.[100] Even so, recent cyberattacks on U.S. financial and law firms stemming from Chinese government entities have continued.[101]

Human rights is another area of contested norms. Beijing has signed and ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and has signed but not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Beijing has also signed treaties to ban racial discrimination and torture.[102] However, Beijing's frequent violations of human rights, despite these commitments, are a source of tension in the relationship.[103]

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[95] David Lawder, "China Misses Deadline for 'Negative List' Investment Offer to U.S.," Reuters, April 1, 2016.

[96] Office of the United States Trade Representative, *Findings of the Investigation into China's Acts, Policies, and Practices Related to Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, and Innovation Under Section 301 Under the Trade Act of 1974*, March 22, 2018.

[97] Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018.

[98] Lieberthal and Jisi, 2012.

[99] Adam Segal, "The US-China Cyber Agreement: New Beginning or Tactical Pause?" Observer Research Foundation website, October 15, 2016.

[100] FireEye iSight Intelligence, *Red Line Drawn: China Recalculates Its Use of Cyber Espionage*, Milpitas, Calif., 2016; Doug Olenick, "U.S.-China Cyber Agreement: Flawed, but a Step in the Right Direction," *SC Media*, January 24, 2017.

[101] Sam Kim, "China Hacks U.S. Firms for Financial Information, FireEye Says," Bloomberg, April 4, 2018.

[102] "Suppressed in Translation," *The Economist*, March 17, 2016; Human Rights in China, "UN Treaty Bodies and China," webpage, undated.

[103] Gardiner Harris, "U.S. Human Rights Report Labels Russia and China Threats to Global Stability," *New York Times,* April 20, 2018; Zach Dorfman, "The Disappeared," *Foreign Policy*, March 29, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Despite these differences, the two countries share a commitment to fundamental norms, such as the illegitimacy of military aggression to resolve disputes. The countries also generally uphold peaceful methods to address disagreements, although China has shown a growing willingness to use more-coercive methods to impose its will on its neighbors. China has largely supported the system of international trade, although it has pushed for incremental revisions. And China's involvement in the UN and other international government-to-government organizations—such as the G7, G20, IMF, and World Bank—underscores its commitment to many shared norms related to global governance and trade. In sum, the policy variable of norms and rules likely plays a mixed role in fueling stability or instability in the U.S.-China competition: Although both sides appear ready to continue respecting several foundational norms of the postwar order, they clash on so many important, if secondary, norms that the effect of this variable is likely to be destabilizing rather than stabilizing. The *perception* on each side is that the other routinely violates key norms, and this is likely to fuel an intensified rivalry.

Assessment of National Policies

The national security policies of China and the United States reflect several incongruous patterns. In general, both countries have adopted policies that demonstrate restraint and contribute to stability in the bilateral relationship. However, a deepening competition in recent years has loosened these restraints and unmoored policies that promote stability; both countries have increased their arms buildups aimed partly at one another. Official documents and military writings continue to avoid direct mentions of the other country as an adversary, but the concepts and doctrines discussed leave little doubt that each military regards the other as a potential threat. The United States and China have refrained from challenging the core interests that could undermine the existence of one another's governments, but disputes have expanded across virtually all policy domains. Mechanisms and venues of communication to facilitate official dialogues and to manage crises have increased in scale and scope, but they remain untested and at the mercy of overall tensions. Both countries have exercised restraint regarding their allies and proxies, but actions taken to shore up their security partnerships have exacerbated suspicions. Rules and norms similarly feature areas of agreement, such as the importance of nonaggression, and expanding areas of disagreement, including those related to trade, cyberspace, maritime claims, and navigation rights. These countervailing trends give policymakers in both countries reasons to suspect one another of being competitors and threats, raising the risk of instability in the rivalry.

Contextual Factors

Key variables in the national and geopolitical context can ameliorate or exacerbate instability in the U.S.-China rivalry. This section will examine the eight contextual variables from our theoretical framework.

People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on March 11, 2016," press release, March 11, 2016.

Military Offense-Defense Balance

Because of their geographic distance, the United States and China are predominantly capable of militarily threatening one another only with air and naval assets; strategic forces; or cyber, space, or information strikes. This subsection briefly surveys the balance of conventional, nuclear, space, and cyber forces and of influence operations.

Conventional Forces

U.S. forward-deployed forces in Japan and throughout Asia pose a potential direct threat to the Chinese homeland, a power-projection capability China lacks. Despite China's rush in recent years to build a blue-water navy, a lack of basing near U.S. territory limits the reach of the PLA naval and air forces. However, China's acquisition of antiship ballistic missiles; antiship cruise missiles; submarines; surface ships; aircraft; and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems enables the PLA Navy to pose a severe A2/AD threat against any potential U.S. intervention in a conflict over Taiwan or other hot spots in the South and East China seas.[104] Moreover, years of rapid military modernization have increased China's military advantage over some U.S. allies and proxies, most notably Taiwan. Although Japan retains a technologically superior force, Chinese gains have narrowed the gap with Japan considerably. In sum, the combination of rapid Chinese modernization gains and slower growth in the military forces of the United States and its Asian allies has shifted the balance of military power from one that overwhelmingly favored the United States in the 1990s to one that is more contested in the first quarter of the 21st century.

Nuclear Forces

As of 2018, China maintained about 260 to 280 nuclear warheads, but the United States still enjoyed a significant numerical advantage over China in terms of nuclear warheads, with an estimated ratio of 13:1.[105] In recent years, China has been steadily improving its nuclear capabilities by introducing new road-mobile ICBMs—the DF-31 (CSS-9) and DF-31-A—and the Type 094 *Jin*-class ballistic missile submarine, capable of carrying 12 JL-2 ballistic missiles with a range of 7,400 km. China is also developing next-generation road-mobile ICBMs, SSBNs, and SLBMs and might be working on an air-launched dual-capable ballistic missile. Nuclear weapons carry sufficiently destructive power that even China's limited arsenal is likely to suffice for traditional deterrence purposes. However, reports that the United States is exploring the fielding of low-yield tactical nuclear weapons in Asia potentially introduces an unsettling degree of instability in this domain.[106]

Space Forces

China and the United States remain among the world's premier powers in terms of military assets and capabilities in space. Both countries maintain large inventories of space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems that could support military operations. The U.S. Global Positioning System, for example, aids military platforms in navigation and tar-

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[104]For a recent overview of China's naval modernization, see Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for US Navy Capabilities: Background and Issues for Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL33153, August 1, 2018.

[105]Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Chinese Nuclear Forces, 2018," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2018.

[106]Michael R. Jordan, "U.S. Plans New Nuclear Weapons," *Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2018.

geting. China has its own version, Beidou, which fulfills similar functions for the PLA. Both countries also operate satellites that collect images and monitor electronic signals from varying orbits.

The U.S. military's dependence on space-based assets to carry out large-scale combat operations around the world remains a vulnerability that China is very much aware of. To exploit this vulnerability, China's military has developed an array of antisatellite weapons, ranging from jammers to direct ascent kinetic kill vehicles. In 2007, China destroyed a derelict satellite in its first kinetic antisatellite test.[107] Both countries have carried out additional tests to refine their antisatellite capabilities.[108] Both countries have also reorganized their militaries to improve the ability to track space objects and defend space assets.[109]

In sum, both countries have stepped up their investments in capabilities to monitor, defend, and attack space-based assets. Neither side has a decisive advantage, however, and most experts agree that an all-out space war could prove hugely destructive to global economic activity because of the problems associated with space debris and the difficulty of separating some military and civilian-economic functions, such as global positioning. The potential cost and risks of warfare in space impose a significant deterrent to either side's rashly launching such an attack. However, the increasing investments in threatening space-based capabilities raise fears and perceptions of hostile intent in both countries.

Cyber Forces

Both militaries recognize the importance of computer networks for modern warfare. Technologically advanced militaries, such as those of the United States and China, rely on computer networks for communication and command-and-control functions. Military computer information networks remain vulnerable, however, to intrusion, manipulation, and degradation from hacking and other means, especially unclassified systems connected to the public internet.

The vulnerability of civilian computer networks and information systems to hacking and cyberattacks has been well documented. Major infrastructure, logistic, and financial systems that contribute significantly to domestic economic growth and stability carry significant vulnerabilities that could be targeted in wartime. Reports that Russian hackers have begun to probe and test the information networks that control U.S. electric grids underscore the weakness and dangers of military attack on civilian networks.[110] In response to these realities and risks, the militaries of China and the United States have organized units to strengthen both defense and attack capabilities in cyberspace. China's establishment of the Strategic Support Force in 2015 included units dedicated to cyber warfighting.[111] Similarly, the United States elevated its Cyber Command, established in 2009 as a division of Strategic Command, to a four-star combatant command in 2018.[112]

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[107] Carin Zissis, "China's Anti-Satellite Test," Council on Foreign Relations website, February 22, 2007.

[108] "Fearful After China's Anti-Satellite Tests, Pentagon Launches Space Command Center," *South China Morning Post*, May 10, 2016.

[109] Kevin Pollpeter, Michael Chase, and Eric Heginbotham, *The Creation of the Strategic Support Force and Its Implications for Space Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2058-AF, 2017.

[110] Sanger, 2018.

[111] Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017.

[112] Lisa Ferdinando, "Cybercom to Elevate to Combatant Command," press release, U.S. Department of Defense, May 3, 2018.

As with space forces, the inherent vulnerabilities of cyber networks and the investments both countries have made in cyber capabilities raise the risks of large-scale devastation of an all-out cyber war. Among the nightmare scenarios, experts warn that cyberattacks could bring down power grids, undermine financial markets, and cause civilian deaths by disrupting air traffic control.[113] These dangers provide incentives for both militaries to exercise restraint in operating cyber units. However, the growing capabilities on both sides fuel the perceptions of threat in both countries, and the spiraling expansion of cyber forces raises the degree of instability in this domain.

Influence Operations

U.S. suspicions of Chinese influence operations have increased sharply in recent years, as news accounts spread of Chinese efforts to bribe and blackmail Western officials, manipulate public opinion, and coerce activists in Australia, New Zealand, and other countries.[114] After numerous congressional hearings on the topic of Chinese influence operations, the 2018 NDAA directed DoD to report on such activities.[115]

For its part, China has long harbored suspicions that the United States promotes gradual liberalization within China and democratization reforms that could erode the CCP's rule. Under President Xi, the party has stepped up crackdowns on liberal dissidents and other Western influences within the country.[116] In sum, each side has increased investments in government and political organizations to combat the political influence of the other side. The threat these activities pose to the fundamental stability and political integrity of either country remains doubtful, but the activities have exacerbated distrust and resentment in both countries.

In particular, Chinese influence operations directed at Chinese citizens living abroad, ethnic Chinese citizens of other countries, and the political decisionmaking processes of other nations have sparked a rising concern in the United States and elsewhere that China is determined to reach into other societies and extend its ability to influence public and policy discourse in directions more favorable to China. This is already destabilizing U.S.-China relations as legislators and journalists in Washington raise the alarm about Chinese influence-seeking. Because of the intense political focus on the sanctity of democratic processes under the shadow of Russia influence efforts, this issue has a rapidly growing potential to undermine stability in the relationship.

Objective Costs of Aggression

Historically, nations waged war in part to secure territory and resources to power economic growth, but such motivations have less salience among industrialized nations that rely more on manufacturing and services. Norms against aggression and imperial subjugation have further reduced the potential value of large-scale war. These and other drivers have likely underpinned

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[113] Paul Dreyer, Therese Jones, Kelly Klima, Jenny Oberholtzer, Aaron Strong, Jonathan William Welburn, and Zev Winkelman, *Estimating the Global Cost of Cyber Risk*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2299-WFHF, 2018; Richard Clarke, *Cyber War: The Next Threat to National Security and What to Do About It*, New York: Ecco, 2012.

[114] Anne-Marie Brady, *Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities Under Xi Jinping*, Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, September 18, 2017.

[115] Pub. L. 115-91, 2017; Gregory Poling, "Congress Fires a Warning Shot to China with Defense Budget," *The Hill*, August 6, 2018.

[116] Auslin, 2016.

a striking decline in the incidence of interstate war since the Cold War, especially among industrialized societies.[117]

Scholars have long recognized that trade interdependence can also play an important role in restraining interstate conflict.[118] Numerous studies have argued that the economic ties between China and the United States act as a counterbalance to the security tensions and help maintain a cooperative relationship between the two countries. A 2017 RAND Perspective argued that the economies of China and the United States are linked to each other and that this mutual dependency can be "an immensely powerful deterrent, in effect a form of mutually assured economic destruction."[119] The cost of aggression extends to the military domain as well. Both countries, as advanced industrial states, field large militaries equipped with technologically advanced equipment and weapons, all of which are enormously expensive. The cost of waging conventional war with such weapons and equipment against a peer competitor is likely to prove prohibitively expensive. Moreover, both countries retain formidable nuclear arsenals that could inflict widespread destruction on the adversary. Given the potential losses in national income, lives, and national treasure, to say nothing of the threat of annihilation, both sides face a powerful incentive to avoid major war, which places a stabilizing influence on the rivalry.

Yet despite the deep and broad trade and investment relationship between the United States and China, the increasing tensions over trade and investment have reduced the benefits that both sides can gain from their economic interdependence. A growing trade war between the United States and China and the imposition of additional restrictions on FDI in both countries could encourage decoupling of the two economies and could reduce the perceived benefit of economic cooperation.[120] The expansion of disputes across domains and the risks of miscalculation in the South China Sea and elsewhere also raise the possibility that leaders in both capitals could respond rashly in a crisis and escalate into an unwanted conflict. Indeed, the expansion of Chinese gray-zone tactics in the maritime domain suggests that Beijing might be willing to tolerate risk in a smaller-scale conflict, even while seeking to avoid the devastating consequences of larger-scale war.

In short, the United States and China have little incentive to consider aggressively attacking the other, given the extraordinarily high risks of economic disruption, loss of life, and potential losses of national treasure. However, the increasing tensions have spurred officials in both countries to explore the use of military force at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, in the forms of Chinese gray-zone coercion and of mutual skirmishing in the cyber domains.

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[117] Steven Pinker, "The Decline of War and Conceptions of Human Nature," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2013.

[118] Dale C. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1996.

[119] James Dobbins, Andrew Scobell, Edmund J. Burke, David C. Gompert, Derek Grossman, Eric Heginbotham, and Howard J. Shatz, *Conflict with China Revisited: Prospects, Consequences, and Strategies for Deterrence*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-248-A, 2017.

[120] James K. Jackson, *The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS)*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL33388, March 13, 2018, pp. 34–38; Rana Foroohar, "New Investment Rules Will Squeeze US-China Flows," *Financial Times*, August 17, 2018; Steve Holland and David Lawder, "Trade Dispute Escalates as Trump Threatens $100 Billion More in China Tariffs," Reuters, April 5, 2018.

Domestic Interest Groups

Constituencies in both countries are divided over the rivalry. Trade interdependence has built constituencies, especially in the business and consumer sectors, that favor cooperative, stable bilateral ties. The U.S. enactment of tariffs in 2018 has proved divisive among American business owners. Some companies, such as those that relied on Chinese-manufactured components or Chinese purchases of agricultural products, have faced losses of revenue, customers, or even bankruptcy because of the tariffs. Other companies, such as U.S. domestic manufacturers of steel, have welcomed the measures. In China, the tariffs have also proven divisive. Although manufacturers have worried about lost markets and although consumers fear price increases on coveted imported goods, government authorities have upheld an unyielding stance in the trade war.[121]

In both countries, government officials, military leaders, and foreign policy elites have adopted tougher stances on contentious issues regarding their rivals, but generally have shied away from advocating aggressive measures that could elevate the risk of war. A new foreign NGO law that took effect in China in 2017 has spurred some U.S. researchers, experts, and activists to adopt a more critical stance toward China.[122] Moreover, Chinese efforts to curb foreign academic partnerships, strengthen ideological education in Chinese colleges, and crack down on "irrational" outbound investment have reduced the ranks of moderate voices and encouraged criticism of the United States and the West.[123] In the United States, national security considerations and the antiglobalization agenda on both extremes of the political spectrum have bolstered voices critical of China as well. Although the business community provides a sturdy influence in favor of stable, cooperative ties, recent trends in each country have expanded a constellation of interests that support harder-line policies against the other.

Prioritization of Status, Honor, and Prestige

The quest to raise China's status, honor, and prestige on the international stage is a key characteristic of President Xi's tenure. What is often referred to as his Chinese Dream encompasses the desire to be rich, powerful, and respected. This desire is often contrasted with what the Chinese government calls the century of humiliation—a period between 1839 and 1949 when China lost control of portions of its territory. This historical period is often invoked in intellectual debates about interstate competition and China's role in the international system. Although the CCP maintains that the foundation of the New China in 1949 officially ended the century of humiliation, the transition is yet incomplete.

In particular, a number of territorial issues have to be resolved before China's recovery from the past humiliations will be settled. The most important of these issues is reunification with Taiwan and, to a lesser extent, the resolution of maritime claims in the South and East China seas. "The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation"[124]—President Xi's signature notion of China's future—is not possible without reestablishing control over Taiwan; strengthening control over Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong; and recovering China's historical sphere of

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[121] Colin Dwyer, "U.S. and China Impose New Tariffs as Trade War Escalates," NPR, August 23, 2018.

[122] Tom Hancock, "China Law Puts Foreign NGOs Under Tighter Control," *Financial Times*, April 22, 2018.

[123] Richard Partington, "China Moves to Curb Overseas Acquisitions as Firms' Debt Levels Rise," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2017.

[124] "China's Long March to National Rejuvenation," *Financial Times*, September 29, 2019.

influence along its borders and in the adjacent seas. Notably, the need to develop a powerful military that can fight and win wars is often linked to the idea of national rejuvenation and, implicitly, correcting the historical injustice by means of territorial reunification.[125] This narrative is reiterated in the popular culture and in the intellectual world, contributing to heightened expectations among Chinese leaders to deliver on these promises because the absence of democratic elections makes performance the only source of government legitimacy.

Although most components of the Chinese Dream and great rejuvenation are not in direct conflict with U.S. interests, an aggressive pursuit of national reunification could be highly destabilizing, especially if China resorts to military means to establish control over Taiwan or to resolve territorial disputes in the South and East China seas. Barring such developments, China's pursuit of status, honor, and prestige might become a stabilizing factor in the relationship, to the extent that China pursues its status goals through its roles in existing international institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF, or through regional economic integration and China-led multilateral initiatives, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Contestation over Resources

In previous eras, competition for arable land or key resources provided an incentive for some political leaders to pursue aggression. However, the emergence of a global market economy has weakened this incentive. Such countries as China and the United States can use peaceful means to gain access to resources and markets for economic growth. Occasionally, one or the other country has pursued strategies to protect its access to vital resources that have spurred tension. In particular, China's economic strategies that encompass protectionism and state-coordinated global expansion in key technological and natural resources sectors are at the center of U.S.-China disagreements and have added to bilateral strains.[126] Similarly, China has criticized the United States for blocking Chinese access to advanced technologies that Beijing seeks to upgrade the nation's competitiveness. Despite the current tensions over trade and investment, however, competition for scarce resources and technologies has played a limited role in fueling instability.

Existence of Common Enemy

Cooperation against shared threats has historically relaxed tensions and encouraged stability in bilateral relationships. In the Cold War, for example, common enmity toward the Soviet Union led to the U.S.-China rapprochement of the 1970s. Following the 9/11 terror attacks, the two countries cooperated in a limited manner against the threat of international terrorism. In late 2001, President Jiang Zemin promised unconditional support in combating terrorism in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but China did not participate in the U.S.-led coalition to fight al Qaeda in Iraq.[127]

In recent years, the United States and China have lacked the stabilizing influence of a common threat. Instead, U.S. efforts to draw down its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan have coincided with a bolstering of its strategic focus on China. In 2011, the United States

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[125] "China Focus: 'Be Ready to Win Wars,' China's Xi Orders Reshaped PLA," *Xinhua News*, August 1, 2017.

[126] White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, *How China's Economic Aggression Threatens the Technologies and Intellectual Property of the United States and the World*, Washington, D.C., June 2018.

[127] Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Counterterrorism Cooperation: Issues for U.S. Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL33001, 2010.

announced the Rebalance to Asia initiative, aimed in large part at countering Chinese power. In the 2018 NSS, the United States identified China as a strategic competitor, and the subsequent NDAA provided funding for defense spending to counter threats emanating from China.[128]

Chinese media have stepped up criticism of the United States as a destabilizing influence in Asia and the international environment. President Xi has pointedly rebuked the United States for strengthening its alliances in Asia, stating that Asian countries should be responsible for providing security in Asia.[129] In sum, the lack of a common enemy has been a destabilizing influence on the rivalry between China and the United States.

Interdependence

Economic interdependence between the United States and China has been one of the defining features of the bilateral relationship since China's opening in 1978. American firms built a significant part of their supply chains in China, attracted by low labor costs and by access to a domestic market that, for some of them, became the largest. Chinese companies gained technological expertise from their cooperation with American companies. As trade proliferated and China grew richer, it started buying U.S. government debt, thus financing America's consumption and increasing its current account deficit. In time, China became the largest foreign holder of U.S. debt, thus acquiring a stake in America's economic future. Despite the growing pressures to break up the interdependence, protect the U.S. technological edge, and reduce China's reliance on foreign technology, both countries maintain robust economic and people-to-people relationships that could provide a cushion in case of a security crisis. Moreover, as the two largest national economies in the world, China and the United States are well aware that major conflict could generate major blowback in the form of devastation to the global economy.

The deep interdependence, combined with the dangers of military escalation of any conflict, impose strong constraints on hostile actions. Each side might be tempted to bolster competition and to pressure the other with economic and other measures, but neither has shown a willingness to risk major war, in part because of the high potential cost and risk of the disruption to their mutual interdependence.

On the other hand, the rise of a seemingly intense technological competition between the United States and China is already generating instabilities in the strongly interdependent economic and technological relationship. The U.S. government and many American businesses are increasingly concerned about Chinese technology theft, state-led technological competition, and targeted efforts in such areas as artificial intelligence, fifth-generation wireless capabilities, and some associated social surveillance systems. Well beyond the current disputes over trade reciprocity, these specific conflicts over technology—both the fairness of Chinese development techniques and their effects on liberal values—have added a new element of conflict to the relationship. They represent areas in which interdependence is causing friction rather than offering stabilizing ballast to the rivalry.

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[128] Pub. L. 115-232, John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, August 13, 2018.

[129] Adam Liff, "China and the U.S. Alliance System," *China Quarterly*, Vol. 233, March 2018.

Means to React Proportionally

Overall, both the United States and China command a vast array of economic, diplomatic, and military tools for use in the course of competition. The sheer size and strategic depth of both countries provide ample opportunities for proportional reaction to each other's actions. On the other hand, there is a notable asymmetry in certain domains and geographic areas of competition. For example, in the case of trade, China's ability to retaliate against U.S. tariffs is limited by the size of U.S. exports to China, so Beijing might have to resort to action against U.S. companies operating in China.[130] Conversely, while the United States has the ability to take action against China on trade, the United States likely has fewer levers over FDI because the overall stock of American FDI in China is much larger than the stock of Chinese FDI in the United States is. In the same vein, China might be able to weather a brief military conflict with the United States close to the Chinese shore, while the United States maintains the upper hand when it comes to virtually any region that is farther away from China.[131]

In sum, both countries have the necessary means to react proportionally, but the reaction might not always occur in the exact same domain as the action because of differences in national endowments. It is thus difficult to determine the effect that this factor will have on the stability of their rivalry. On the one hand, both nations have many tools for calibrated escalation; on the other, many of these tools could lead to escalation into new domains.

Assessment of Contextual Factors

The contextual variables generally suggest sources of stability for the U.S.-China rivalry. Recent developments have increased tensions and, in some cases, elevated the dangers of instability, but the two countries do not appear to be near a tipping point that would drive them into aggressive, antagonistic competition. Both countries possess strategic weapons and strong military capabilities that render them confident of their abilities to deter threats to their existence. Their possession of nuclear weapons and economic interdependence raise the potential cost and risk of major war to exorbitant levels. Objective cost factors generally favor stability because the two relatively developed nations do not face the incentives for major war that characterized past zero-sum competitions. The two countries compete within the context of a global market system that provides ample opportunity to secure resources and markets peacefully and efficiently. The two countries maintain highly interdependent economies that would suffer enormous disruption in the event of conflict. Moreover, the global economy would likely suffer severe blowback if the world's two largest economies should war against one another.

Yet recent developments have increased instability in the rivalry. Perceived ideological competition is rising, and the role of political and social influence-seeking and trade disputes has contributed to a sense of growing confrontation and a reduced focus on shared interests. Domestic constituencies of foreign policy elites, government officials, and military leaders are forming in favor of harder-line policies. The absence of a common enemy has removed a powerful influence in favor of stability and enabled a deepening antagonism. As the United States has been winding down its involvement in wars in the Middle East, it has refocused attention on China as a strategic competitor. China's efforts to deepen Asia's integration has similarly

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[130] "China's Response to the Trade War Can Hit US Technology Industry Where It Hurts Most," *South China Morning Post*, July 12, 2018.

[131] Heginbotham et al., 2015.

encouraged criticism of U.S. efforts to bolster its influence in Asia as a major obstacle to Beijing's strategic ambitions.

Perceptual Factors

This section reviews the perceptions the rivals have of one another, as influenced by the national policies and contextual factors outlined earlier. This review of the five perceptual factors suggests that the broadly held perceptions in both China and the United States generally reflect characteristics that favor stable competition, although distrust and suspicion have increased.

For each factor, we present a detailed assessment, then an overall assessment ranging from high to medium to low. *High* indicates that the perception is widely held among influential decisionmakers and elites and a majority of the public. *Medium* indicates that, although some among officials and elite opinionmakers might hold the view, it is at most the view of a large minority. *Low* indicates that officials are unlikely to hold the perception and that few, if any, opinionmakers do. Among the populace, a small minority of people might have the perception.

Perceived Revisionism

Does one rival see the other as intent on overthrowing its political system and the international order?

Broadly speaking, the answer appears to be not yet, but the trend is running in the direction of such perceptions of existential risks. U.S. and Chinese documents have increasingly characterized one another as competitors. While avoiding extreme characterizations of enemy states, officials in each country have grown pointed in their criticism of the other country and the threats it poses. The 2017 NSS accused China, which it labeled a "revisionist great power" and "strategic competitor," of seeking to "displace the United States" in Asia.[132] That document marked a sharper, more adversarial tone than the previous U.S. government initiative, which had avoided the language of "strategic competition" but similarly sought to balance Chinese power.[133] The 2018 NDAA, which passed with strong bipartisan support, authorized a slew of measures to counter perceived threats from China. The bill strengthened oversight of Chinese investment plans by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, banned PLA involvement in the RIMPAC exercise, expanded funding for platforms that could be deployed to the Pacific theater, and mandated reporting requirements on Chinese espionage and influence operations activities.[134] As these provisions suggest, U.S. perceptions of an increasingly broad array of threats emanating from China have grown considerably in official circles over the past few years.

Chinese officials and documents similarly acknowledge a growing competition with the United States. The 2015 defense white paper described an "intensifying competition" between the great powers.[135] Officials have obliquely criticized U.S. strategic behavior for exacerbating issues of instability or fomenting conflict around the world. In a 2014 interview, Qian Lihua,

[132] White House, 2017b, p. 45.

[133] White House, "Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific," fact sheet, November 16, 2015b.

[134] David Welna, "Defense Budget Shifts Military's Focus from Terrorism to China and Russia," NPR, August 5, 2018.

[135] State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015.

Director of Foreign Affairs in the Ministry of Defense, set forth China's principal threats. He listed disputes over sovereignty and territorial rights and hot spots along the periphery as of highest concern. He also noted "strategic adjustments" by the United States and Japan, including the strengthening of alliance relations, which he described as "adding strategic pressure" on China.[136] In 2014, President Xi indirectly rebuked the United States for seeking to bolster its security leadership in the region, stating, "It is for the people of Asia to uphold the security of Asia."[137] Officials have singled out for criticism the U.S. predilection for unilateral military action, which Beijing fears could someday be turned against China. Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated in 2014 that the main obstacles to the promotion of international rule of law rested with countries that practiced "hegemonism, power politics and all forms of 'new interventionism'"—all thinly veiled references to the United States.[138]

More in the U.S.-China rivalry than in the U.S.-Russia one, these mutual perceptions of revisionism often focus on economic disputes even more than geopolitical ones. But in both rivalries, each side has the same concern: that the other is seeking a fundamental transformation of the international order and direct harm to the first side's way of life. Tensions have increased notably in economic domains that had traditionally been areas of convergence between the two countries. In recent years, Washington sharpened criticism of Chinese theft of U.S. intellectual property and technologies, and the U.S. government enacted tariffs partly over this issue in 2018.[139] Tensions have increased over disagreements about China's status as a market economy and over Chinese efforts to dominate advanced industries through such initiatives as the "Made in China 2025" initiative.[140] U.S. officials have criticized perceived Chinese coercion and provocative behavior.[141] Other officials have stepped up demands that China follow the rules of the road on trade and other issues.[142]

In short, views among officials in both countries reflect a sense of intensifying competition and an increasingly pervasive sense of threat spanning economic, political, and security issues. This indicator is still assessed as low on the perceptual scale, but it is clearly rising.

Perceived Defense Against Existential Threat

Does one rival believe that it has the ability to counter potential aggression from the other?

Both countries appear to feel confident that they possess the capability to ensure their most vital security interests against attack, most notably their own territorial integrity. Both countries, separated by a vast ocean, have reason to feel confident in their ability to counter potential aggression, at least against their homelands. Neither country has threatened to seize territory from the other.

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[136]Xiong Zhengyan, "Qian Lihua: We Cherish Peace, but Fear No War," *Outlook*, March 13, 2014, pp. 34–37.

[137]Xi Jinping, 2014.

[138]Timothy R. Heath, "Understanding China's Fourth Plenum: A Continuation of Foreign Policy by Other Means," *National Interest*, November 11, 2014.

[139]Lesley Wroughton and Jeff Mason, "Trump Orders Probe of China's Intellectual Property Practices," Reuters, August 14, 2017.

[140]Bruce Stokes, "Will Europe and the United States Gang Up on China?" *Foreign Policy*, February 3, 2016.

[141]Ben Brumfield, "U.S. Defense Chief to China: End South China Sea Expansion," CNN, May 30, 2015.

[142]Jason Reed, "Barack Obama Tells Xi Jinping that China Must Improve Its Human Rights Record," *Telegraph*, February 15, 2012.

Taiwan remains a partial exception, since China considers the island to be an integral part of its territory. But as with other plausible scenarios involving clashes in the South and East China seas, conflict contingencies in the Taiwan Strait present both sides with a significant degree of uncertainty about the likely outcome, leaving each side somewhat wary of its prospects. For the moment, interestingly, this uncertainty appears to be supportive of stability: Neither side can be confident of its prospects in any major conflict that requires it to project power great distances.

Despite these seemingly stabilizing baseline perceptions—that large-scale aggression is out of the question and that more-limited contingencies cannot be safely undertaken—mutual fears are rising rapidly as each country has come to perceive a more immediate and intense threat from the other. Perceptions of threat have intensified on military issues related to cyberspace and space and on political and social issues related to influence operations. U.S. commentators frequently declare that China poses the greatest threat to the United States and its position in world affairs.[143] That both countries have decided to build up military commands and units to operate in space and cyberspace highlights the growing sense of vulnerability and concern about the ability to defend against aggression in these domains. U.S. officials have identified China as a top source of threat for espionage. In June 2018, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation called China the "broadest, most significant threat to the United States."[144] The 2018 NDAA, which cut funding for language training at schools that accept Chinese government funding for Confucius Institutes, and the congressional hearings on Chinese efforts to co-opt and coerce academic establishments underscore a deepening sense that Chinese influence operations endanger basic freedoms in the United States and other Western societies. In China, authorities have stepped up a harsh crackdown on Western NGOs, traveling scholars, and other intellectuals because of the suspicion that they threaten social stability and the CCP's authority. In each case, fears are growing that the other side seeks to harm political stability, and officials are acting to counter that possibility.

Therefore, while each side appears to perceive that it does have the ability to counter aggression from the other, this has not allayed a more general perception of rising fear about security on both sides. The result begins to look very much like a classic security dilemma, in which one side views every action the other takes as threatening and in which every vulnerability of one's own is seen in the most worrisome possible light. As the theoretical literature and a number of previous case studies have suggested, such a generalized perception of fear and vulnerability is traditionally associated with unstable rivalries.

These mutual threat perceptions have extended to Chinese ambitions in regional sovereignty claims. In terms of potential territorial aggression, U.S. officials have frequently blamed China for aggravating tensions with its construction of artificial islands and its assertive and aggressive behavior toward its neighbors in the South China Sea. By contrast, Chinese officials and commentators describe China's actions as reactive and defensive. They blame the United States and its military actions in the South China Sea for promoting tension and attempting to cement U.S. hegemony.[145] Chinese military leaders have made a clear distinction between

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[143] Josh Rogin, "Russia Fever is Distracting the United States from the China Threat," *Washington Post*, July 25, 2018.

[144] Tara Francis Chan, "FBI Director Calls China the 'Broadest, Most Significant' Threat to the US and Says Its Espionage Is Active in All 50 States," Business Insider website, July 19, 2018.

[145] David J. Firestein, "The US-China Perception Gap in the South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, August 19, 2016.

freedom of navigation, which they state China does not oppose, and "close-in military surveillance," which they criticize.[146] Likewise, in the East China Sea, U.S. authorities have claimed to uphold a neutral stance on the Senkaku Islands. U.S. officials criticized China's establishment of an air defense identification zone in the East China Sea as provocative.[147] However, Chinese officials and commentators regard U.S. actions and statements as clearly favoring Japan's side. Chinese officials have also defended the zone as an appropriate response to Japanese actions.[148] In both cases, however, the territory in question involves desolate islands, and both sides have ample military capability to defend their interests against potential aggression.

In sum, although there is little evidence that the national leaders, elite opinionmakers, or the publics in either country regard the other as an existential threat, uncertainty and anxiety are growing over the risks of perceived aggressive behavior or inadvertent escalation in specific domains, such as trade, cyber, space, and the maritime domain. None of these issues in itself threatens the security of the governments of either country. However, the possibility cannot be discounted that some of the disputes could escalate to a level that harms the economies and security of the two countries. Moreover, long-standing flashpoints raise the risk that miscalculation in an incident could result in an escalation spiral. Overall, therefore, this indicator is assessed as medium—and again, like the first perceptual indicator, worsening.

Perceived Respect

Does one rival perceive that the other accords it due respect?

In public, senior leaders and government officials in both countries have characterized each other in wary but generally positive and respectful tones. During his 2017 visit to Beijing, President Trump pledged that the two countries faced an "incredible opportunity to advance peace and prosperity" and "achieve a more just, secure, and peaceful world."[149] At his first summit at Mar-a-Lago, President Trump hailed "tremendous progress" in the relationship with China.[150] The U.S. Department of State's website states that the United States "welcomes a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China playing a greater role in world affairs and seeks to advance practical cooperation with China."[151] Even when the U.S. government introduced the Rebalance to Asia under President Obama, the Department of State emphasized a desire to foster a "more durable and productive relationship" with China.[152]

Similarly, Chinese senior officials have consistently described the United States in respectful terms and expressed a desire for cooperation. During President Trump's November 2017

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[146] "Senior Chinese Military Official Calls for Enhanced Strategic Mutual Trust Between China, U.S.," Xinhua Net, June 3, 2017.

[147] Kurt Campbell, "Maritime Territorial Disputes and Sovereignty Issues in Asia," testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Washington, D.C., September 20, 2012.

[148] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang's Remarks on US Comments on China's Establishment of the Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea," press release, November 25, 2013.

[149] Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, "Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of China at State Dinner," press release, Washington, D.C.: The White House, November 9, 2017.

[150] Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump After Meeting with President Xi of China," press release, Washington, D.C.: The White House, April 7, 2017.

[151] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with China," fact sheet, September 13, 2017a.

[152] White House, 2015b.

visit to Beijing, President Xi vowed that the two countries would "pursue friendship and win-win cooperation."[153] Even amid a deepening trade dispute in 2018, authorities emphasized the common interests the countries shared and the importance of cooperation. In commenting on trade discussions, for example, Ambassador Cui Tiankai called for "concerted efforts" to address shared concerns, adding that "China hopes the U.S. economy will continue to prosper."[154]

The governments of China and the United States generally treat one another with considerable respect. Therefore, this indicator is assessed as high, which is a stabilizing score in this case.

Extreme Measures Seen as More Costly Than Beneficial

Does a rival consider extreme measures to be more costly than beneficial?

As noted earlier, the advent of the nuclear age has dramatically changed the calculus of potential gains from highly aggressive action, given the unaffordable costs of nuclear war. China's nuclear inventory may be smaller than that of the United States, but it is sufficient to give the leadership confidence in the country's ability to retaliate. Even so, Chinese leaders and analysts soberly recognize the dangers of nuclear warfare and advise against rash actions that could precipitate such a disastrous conflict. Indeed, the PLA's entire doctrine of "limited, local war" aims, in part, to manage conflict at a lower level of escalation and thereby minimize the risks of nuclear war.[155] The United States, similarly, has avoided any statements or actions that might suggest a willingness to rashly employ nuclear weapons against China in a contingency.

Beyond the level of nuclear war, China also fears the potential devastation of major war, especially one involving the United States. Chinese leaders have repeatedly and consistently insisted that the country will "never seek aggression" and that it upholds a "peaceful path of development."[156] Consistent with this principle, Beijing has avoided aggressive military attacks over disputed territorial and sovereignty claims with Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, others in the South China Sea, India, and Japan in the East China Sea.

Yet, at the same time, China has in recent years indicated a growing willingness to endure high costs to enforce its claims. It has also elevated the importance of disputed territories. This suggests a changing calculus. China might still seek to avoid paying the immense cost of major or nuclear war over disputed territory, but its embrace of gray-zone and other paramilitary efforts to alter the status quo short of war suggests a growing tolerance for some cost.[157]

Simultaneously, the United States has shown a growing shift in its assessments of the potential costs and benefits of confrontation with China. Although similarly signaling a disinclination to rashly engage in major war with China, U.S. policy under the Trump administration has taken a noticeably harder line and articulated a stronger willingness to endure costs to uphold the interests of the country and those of its allies and proxies. As of this writing, reports

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[153] Trump, 2017.

[154] "Chinese Ambassador Says China-U.S. Trade Balance Will Not Last in Long Run," Xinhua Net, May 13, 2018.

[155] Eric Heginbotham, Michael S. Chase, Jacob L. Heim, Bonny Lin, Mark R. Cozad, Lyle J. Morris, Christopher P. Twomey, Forrest E. Morgan, Michael Nixon, Cristina L. Garafola, and Samuel K. Berkowitz, *China's Evolving Nuclear Deterrent: Major Drivers and Issues for the United States*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1628-AF, 2017.

[156] State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2011.

[157] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, Carlisle, Pa.: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2015.

persist of divisions in the government, however, and U.S. military forces have remained cautious in their behavior in the South China Sea and other hot spots, making an evaluation of actual changes in the strategic calculus difficult.[158]

In sum, there is little evidence that officials, commentators, or the publics in either China or the United States support the exercise of highly destabilizing or destructive measures to achieve goals related to territorial or sovereignty claims or to shape a regional order. In both countries, a shifting international environment and intensifying rivalry have spurred reconsideration of potential costs and benefits. As of this writing, however, the hardening stance has remained modest, and the fear of escalation to major or nuclear war continues to impose a significant restraint. This indicator is assessed as low, which is stabilizing in this case.

Enough Mutual Understanding to Avoid Disastrous Misperceptions

Is there enough mutual understanding to avoid disastrous misperceptions?

The unsettled nature of politics in both countries and the intensification of disputes over a broadening range of issues raise the risk that misperceptions may be growing. China's turn to strongman rule under President Xi stunned many Western leaders and has fueled skepticism and suspicion about the country's leadership. Meanwhile, President Trump's willingness to impose tariffs and fight a trade war has infuriated many Chinese, fueling a perception that the United States seeks to weaken China. According to a poll conducted by the government newspaper *Global Times*, a large majority of the Chinese public believes the United States intends to pursue a containment policy.[159]

Polls provide evidence of a growing trend toward distrust and fear. A 2017 survey by the Committee of 100 found that 55 percent of Chinese had a favorable impression of the United States—a slight decline from 59 percent in 2012. Among Americans, fewer than half, or 48 percent, had a favorable view of China—a decline from 55 percent in 2012. Trust had declined more, however, with only 15 percent of Chinese saying China should trust America, down from 36 percent in 2012. According to the survey, 61 percent of Chinese respondents believe the United States seeks to prevent China's rise. Both sides regarded each other's military as threatening. Among U.S. respondents, 73 percent viewed China's military as a threat, while 78 percent of Chinese saw the U.S. military as a threat. Most worrisome of all, 50 percent of Chinese and 39 percent of Americans believed that war between the two countries could occur within ten years.[160]

In sum, the risk of misperception has grown in recent years, owing to deepening tensions over trade and other issues and the turn toward unexpected domestic politics in both countries. A hardening stance on many disputes seen in both countries raises the risk that fear and distrust may cloud the judgment of leaders in a crisis, raising the risk of miscalculation. However, the governments have so far avoided the type of demonizing rhetoric that has accompanied the most acrimonious rivalries. The popular views in each country show a trend toward distrust, but a considerable number of positive views still remain toward the other country. This indicator is assessed as medium.

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[158] Ana Swanson and Jim Tankersley, "Trump Trade Officials Will Present a Hard Line in China, But Internally They Are Divided," *New York Times*, May 2, 2018.

[159] Gu Di and Liu Xin, "78% Chinese Believe West Intends to Contain China," *Global Times*, December 30, 2015.

[160] Committee of 100, "US-China Public Perceptions: Opinion Survey 2017," webpage, 2018.

Assessment of Perceptual Factors

In sum, the perceptions in both China and the United States have been mostly stable but have recently trended toward instability. Although both countries acknowledge one another's legitimacy and importance, both also regard each other with increasing suspicion and distrust. The governments of both countries have avoided language that could stir up public hatred and enmity but have offered increasingly blunt characterizations of one another as competitors and potential sources of threat. Among the foreign policy elites who influence policymaking, opinion appears to be consolidating in favor of harder-line approaches. Perhaps the most important counterinfluence against the hardening perceptions has been that of the publics. Polls suggest the people of both countries regard one another with a mixture of both positive and negative views. Unfortunately, the same polls suggest trends are moving toward heightened threat perceptions. The risk is growing that views on both sides could harden toward animosity. The aggravation of trade-related disputes and feuding over long-standing sore points, such as Taiwan and the South China Sea, could deepen hostile perceptions. Under such conditions, a militarized crisis in China's near seas could crystallize suspicion and distrust into enmity.

Conclusion

The strategic competition between China and the United States has intensified to a level not seen since the Cold War. The two countries compete for influence and leadership on a broad range of issues, from security and political influence to trade and investment. The competition has expanded beyond the Asia-Pacific region to the global level.

There are reasons to worry about the future trajectory of the contest. The conditions underpinning the rivalry favor an intensification of competition and antagonism. China is rapidly becoming a near peer of the United States in terms of the size of its economy. As China upgrades its economy and sheds low-cost industries, the economic competition will intensify. Fearful of losing this competition, U.S. authorities face a strong incentive to clamp down on Chinese efforts to acquire sensitive technologies and to carry out unfair economic practices. As a result, the two countries remain locked in an escalating trade war, and Washington has mirrored Beijing in enacting policies to protect sensitive sectors and technologies. China's pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative also threatens to marginalize the United States in a China-led globalization. U.S. officials have responded accordingly by outlining an Indo-Pacific strategy.

Most of the eight national policy variables in our theoretical framework now appear either to be directly tending toward destabilization of the U.S.-China rivalry or to be showing at least a mixed picture with growing elements of potential instability. These ambiguous and unstable patterns give policymakers in both countries reasons to suspect one another of being competitors and threats, raising the risk of instability in the rivalry:

- *Military capabilities that provide for essential security.* Both countries possess strategic weapons and strong military capabilities that render them confident of their abilities to deter threats to their existence. China's military has grown rapidly and currently boasts some of the most advanced platforms and weapon systems in the world. Although still untested, the increasing array of capabilities poses a formidable threat to the U.S. ability to operate near China's periphery. Both countries have stepped up their investments in military capabilities aimed partly at one another. In traditional maritime and air domains, the two

countries continue to add advanced lethal missiles, ships, and aircraft. Both countries have also stepped up preparations for conflict in space and cyberspace, in part because of anxieties over key vulnerabilities in those domains. U.S. officials have reportedly considered fielding low-yield tactical nuclear weapons in the Asia-Pacific theater. Although each side ought to have confidence in its ability to provide for its vital security interests, taken together, these and related trends have all the hallmarks of an emerging arms race across several domains of military capability, of the sort that has typically been associated with unstable rivalries.

- *Military restraint.* Both countries have adopted policies that demonstrate restraint and contribute to stability in the bilateral relationship. However, a deepening competition in recent years has loosened these restraints and unmoored policies that promote stability. Although official documents and military writings continue to avoid direct mentions of the other country as an adversary, the concepts and doctrines discussed leave little doubt that both militaries regard one another as potential threats, and this mutual threat identification is becoming clearer all the time. Each seems increasingly willing to undertake directly confrontational military deployments and activities in contested areas.
- *Signaling acceptance of legitimacy.* In the most important terms, China and the United States have taken many steps to acknowledge each other's basic sovereignty and legitimacy as great powers. Neither is in any way formally committed to the other's illegitimacy or to undermining its stability. However, an undercurrent of such existential competition is increasingly present in a debate that, on both sides, has begun to consider whether the United States and China can adequately function in an international system that includes the other as currently constituted. Additionally, CCP leadership remains highly sensitive to perceived U.S. efforts to call into question the legitimacy of its system of governance.
- *Competition only on peripheral issues.* The United States and China have refrained from challenging the core interests that could undermine the existence of the other's government. It is true that U.S. policy on Taiwan is seen by many in Beijing as challenging a core national interest, but the sides have managed that disagreement relatively effectively. However, recent years have seen disputes expand across virtually all policy domains, and some areas that had previously been viewed as secondary—such as trade disputes and political influence-seeking—have now moved to the top of the list of issues of concern for both sides. The competition is rapidly losing the flavor of being over peripheral issues.
- *Communication channels.* Officials in both countries have sought to establish institutions and mechanisms to manage tensions and handle crises. Over the past few decades, both governments have dramatically expanded the number and variety of official venues for coordinating policies and managing differences. However, all these mechanisms remain largely nascent and untested, and the tenor and tone of official engagements tend to reflect that of the overall bilateral relationship. Moreover, communication has been attenuated in the past two years as the overall relationship has grown increasingly contentious.
- *Building personal relationships at various levels.* A dense network of such relationships has emerged across various levels of the U.S.-China relationship, both within government and, indeed, especially beyond it. These could provide some stabilizing ballast to the rivalry. But there is evidence that the U.S.-China relationship will reflect the dominant historical pattern on this variable: Although bad relationships can uniquely subvert a stable rivalry, good personal ties between senior officials cannot rescue a relationship that is being destabilized by many other strategic, political, economic, and ideological factors.

- *Management of allies and proxies.* Both countries have exercised restraint regarding their allies and proxies, but actions taken to shore up their security partnerships have exacerbated suspicions. Both sides have allies and proxies that are capable of unsetting the stability of the rivalry by taking positions that push the United States and China into new confrontations.
- *Creation of and compliance with norms and rules.* Rules and norms feature areas of agreement, such as the importance of nonaggression, and areas of disagreement, such as those related to trade, cyberspace, maritime claims, and navigation rights. Over the past three decades, the trajectory on this variable has been highly incomplete but largely positive, with the United States and China joining many organizations, processes, and venues that placed both under the aegis of shared norms and rules. A significant overhang of that progress exists today, but each is now increasingly focused on rule and norm violations by the other side rather than on areas of common interest. Moreover, in an objective sense, China's conduct since 2013 in areas ranging from cyber intrusions to intellectual property theft to human rights practices appears to demonstrate a growing willingness to act in its own interest even in contravention of established norms.

Three of the eight contextual factors in our theoretical framework suggest sources of stability for the U.S.-China rivalry:

- *Military offense-defense balance.* Broadly speaking, the survivable nuclear deterrents both sides possessed, each side's robust military capabilities, and the relative immunity of both homelands continue to provide an essential, top-level military balance that appears to be characterized by defensive dominance. This principle does not, however, apply to all forms of aggression below the threshold of war, such as cyberattacks. In the event of a large-scale crisis, the premium on striking first could become significant. But the overall rivalry is not characterized by a dangerous level of offense-dominance.
- *Objective costs of aggression.* The mutual possession of nuclear weapons and economic interdependence raise the potential cost and risk of major war to exorbitant levels. These objective cost factors generally favor stability because the two relatively developed nations do not face the incentives for major war that characterized past zero-sum competitions.
- *Interdependence.* The two countries compete within the context of a global market system that provides ample opportunities to secure resources and markets peacefully and efficiently. The two countries maintain highly interdependent economies that would suffer enormous disruption in the event of conflict. Moreover, the global economy would likely suffer severe blowback if the world's two largest economies should war against one another.

Three other contextual factors, however, suggest sources of instability for the U.S.-China rivalry:

- *Domestic interest groups' influence.* Domestic constituencies of foreign policy elites, government officials, and military leaders are forming in favor of harder-line policies.
- *Status considerations.* China's determination to reestablish what it views as its rightful place in world politics, overcoming a century or more of perceived humiliation at the hands of Western imperialism and hegemony, creates grievances and conspiracy-based thinking that add fuel to the rivalry and risk destabilizing it.

- *Existence of a common enemy.* In theory, the two nations could make common cause against the shared threat of climate change, although current U.S. policy appears to rule out such cooperation. China's ideological affinity with Russia means that it will not see the United States as a partner against that potential enemy. This absence of any common enemy deprives the relationship of a potential influence in favor of stability and enables a deepening antagonism.

Two of the five perceptual factors in our theoretical framework indicate a medium degree of concern:

- *Perceived defense against existential threat.* The governments of both countries have avoided language that could stir up public hatred and enmity but have offered increasingly blunt characterizations of one another as competitors and potential sources of threat. Among the foreign policy elites who influence policymaking, opinion appears to be consolidating in favor of harder-line approaches.
- *Enough mutual understanding to avoid disastrous misperceptions.* Polls suggest that the peoples of both countries regard one another with a mixture of both positive and negative views. The same polls suggest trends are moving toward heightened threat perceptions. The aggravation of trade-related disputes and feuding over long-standing sore points, such as Taiwan and the South China Sea, could deepen hostile perceptions. A militarized crisis in China's near seas could crystallize suspicion and distrust into enmity.

In general, the perceptual shift toward distrust and hostility has increased markedly since 2015, but many of the trends were well underway beforehand, especially since the 2008 global financial crisis weakened the collective might of Western economies. Officials and foreign policy elites in both China and the United States have advanced the furthest in regarding one another as competitors and threats. Officials have shown an increasing willingness to publicly criticize the other country's behavior, and commentators in both countries have urged harder-line measures to bolster national competitiveness and to reduce vulnerabilities. Popular opinion in each country has shown a more mixed view of the other, but trends point to a hardening stance over time as well. Nevertheless, perceptions in all sectors have so far avoided the extremely antagonistic views that characterized Cold War views between the United States and the Soviet Union.

A comprehensive assessment provides reason for concern that the U.S.-China rivalry could be trending toward instability and volatility. The two countries are unavoidably locked in a deepening competition at the regional and global levels. Disputes might not be existential, but they appear to be spreading across virtually all domains and have grown intractable and acrimonious. Both countries have shown restraint in handling disputes, whether over Taiwan, maritime sovereignty, or trade. But statements from top leaders, confrontational trade and other policies, and continued military buildups have loosened that restraint and suggest a deepening trend toward mutual distrust.

This adds up to a disturbing portrait when assessed against the two basic elements that constitute our conception of stability: a mutual commitment to an agreed status quo and a degree of resilience to shocks and ability to return to an equilibrium. Developments on many critical variables now appear to be undermining stability in both categories. The United States and China have increasingly divergent views of the acceptable status quo—in economic, secu-

rity, and geopolitical terms. The relationship seems increasingly subject to crises and misperceptions that represent something close to the opposite of a resilient relationship with a tendency to return to the mean. As noted here, there are still forces for stability in each of these categories. But our basic conception of stability suggests that there are intense reasons for worry about the future stability of the U.S.-China relationship.

CHAPTER NINE

Overall Findings and Implications for the U.S. Army

The 2017 U.S. NSS and 2018 NDS identify strategic competition as a major theme of the emerging international environment. One important question about the emerging competition is how to manage it without unwanted escalation and risk of conflict—that is, how to preserve some degree of stability in the rivalries that are likely to grow more intense. In this research, we surveyed literatures on rivalry, competition, and stability to develop a tentative framework of factors likely to be conducive to stable rivalries. We then reviewed evidence from historical rivalries and the Cold War period to test for the roles of those variables to the degree that available evidence allows. We also applied these variables to the emerging U.S.-China and U.S.-Russia rivalries to evaluate the status of those relationships.

In this concluding chapter, we review some of the lessons learned in the research, beginning with our understanding of the basic concepts involved—rivalry and stability. We review the lessons of the pre–Cold War and Cold War case studies, in particular the variables they highlight as being most important to determining the stability of a strategic rivalry. We summarize the basic findings of the Russia and China cases about the current status and trajectory of the relationships. Finally, we discuss the implications and propose recommendations for the Army that we derived from these lessons.

Basic Themes and Variables

The research turned first to an assessment of the essential concepts at the foundation of the analysis, beginning with competition and rivalry. Our research revealed the concept of *international competition* to be badly undertheorized and poorly defined, offering few well-articulated historical comparisons. The closely related concept of *strategic rivalry*, on the other hand, is well defined and has been used to analyze dozens of historical cases. There is a rich literature assessing the variables that affect rivalries. And because our research focused on bilateral U.S. relations with Russia and China and the requirements for keeping them stable, centering on stable rivalries turned out to be an effective way to answer our central research questions.

Broadly speaking, an enduring rivalry is one characterized by recurrent militarized disputes between states. The major risk with setting a quantitative threshold of militarized disputes for qualifying a relationship as a rivalry in the way that is common in studies of civil and interstate war is that important phases of strategic rivalries—or entire rivalries—might be excluded.[1] Therefore, as noted in Chapter Two, Thompson proposed additional qualitative

[1] Thompson, 2001.

metrics to define rivalries, using the less tangible but likely equally important aspects of rivalry built around subjective threat perception. When two states *believe* themselves to be engaged in a rivalry, Thompson suggested, such a condition exists. Most scholars have since followed Thompson in incorporating metrics related to mutual threat perception into their conceptualizations of strategic rivalry.[2]

The literature diverges over whether states must possess roughly equal capabilities to engage in a strategic rivalry. In general, the consensus is that strategic rivalries are more likely to develop and endure when states perceive that they have a relatively equal distribution of power than when they perceive a stark power differential.

In sum, our analysis of the literature on rivalry suggests four features that tend to define a strategic rivalry among major powers:

- a history of past conflict
- the perception of mutual hostility, lack of trust, and expectation of conflict
- recurring disputes over the same issues; inability to solve essential disputes
- similar relative power distribution.

These factors exist to a certain degree in current U.S. relations with China and Russia—although, it must be noted, not necessarily to the same degree that these factors have existed in past rivalries between geographically proximate states that have persistently gone to war, such as Great Britain and Germany or China and Japan. For example, the United States is not contiguous with either of its current rivals; it does not have a history of persistent conflict with either; and, at least with Russia, the power distribution is dissimilar.

We then turned to the concept of stability to determine the factors that make for stable versus unstable rivalries. Our research suggested that a strategically unstable relationship would be one that is inherently escalatory and nonlinear, in which small actions tend to produce large results (or, put another way, in which actions generate overreactions). It would be a situation that is constantly surging away from a mean or equilibrium and perpetually risking conflict.

In contrast, the literature suggests that two fundamental characteristics define a stable strategic rivalry—the practical, day-to-day nature of a relationship that is fundamentally stable as opposed to one that harbors a continual risk of crisis and war. The first is the mutual acceptance of a shared status quo, which will not involve all aspects of the strategic situation but must have some critical mass of elements. The second is an essential resilience or equilibrium that allows the relationship to absorb discontinuities and return to the mean rather than spiraling out of control. We defined these variables in Chapter Three.

More broadly, we surveyed the literature for factors or variables that have historically and empirically been associated with stable rivalries characterized in part by these two overarching factors and, more generally, by the absence of conflict. We sought to gather all the variables that we could find that appeared to be theoretically and empirically related to stability as defined in the literature, then examined their relative importance by applying them to cases. We discussed these variables in Chapter Three. We assembled them into a framework of factors (see Figure 3.1). This framework served as our analytical tool to examine the historical case studies, the Cold War period, and the emerging U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China rivalries. The following sections survey the basic lessons from these analyses.

[2] Thompson, 2001.

Lessons from Historical Case Studies

The historical case studies of rivalries conducted for this study offer several important lessons that highlight a number of variables from the original framework as being especially important. Because these cases come from very different contexts, any lessons inferred from each case cannot be automatically applied to other situations. Nonetheless, we did find a degree of commonality among the historical cases in terms of their implications for stability or instability. At the end of this section, we summarize the lessons of these cases for which variables appear most important in determining the stability of a rivalry.

The Anglo-German Rivalry

This case demonstrates the importance of the top two perceptual factors in a rivalry: whether each side believes the other seeks the collapse of its system and whether each side believes it can counter the existential threat. British perceptions of existential security-threatening levels of German revisionism accelerated dramatically in the 1901–1902 period, when interpretations began to harden that the German naval program was intended to directly threaten the security of the British Isles. This perception was asymmetric—Britain's lack of sizable ground forces meant that it posed no existential military threat to Germany—but this one-way perception still created substantial instability in the relationship. This aspect of the rivalry shows the degree to which specific capability developments can jeopardize stability: British security relied entirely on its naval supremacy, and so the German shipbuilding program came to be viewed as an existential threat to British security.

Thus, the Anglo-German case study provides strong support for the proposition that perceptions of the adversary as fundamentally revisionist and as threatening to existential security are closely correlated with levels of stability in the competition. When rivals are perceived as having both the intent and the capability to threaten one another's existence, it should not surprise us if the competition between them becomes unstable. States would be taking tremendous risks to treat such a situation as business as usual and should be highly incentivized to change it, even at the risk of war.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that this case also provides evidence of a correlation between instability and a third perceptual factor: that extreme measures are no longer viewed as overly costly. This third correlation, however, might not be causal. Instead, the acceptance of extreme measures could be driven by the perception that at least one state in the rivalry has both the intention and the capacity to threaten the existential security of the other. In such a situation, a willingness to resort to extreme measures, such as war, could be an understandable response.

The other two key perceptual factors, whether the adversary is viewed as legitimate and whether there is sufficient mutual understanding to avoid misperception, are not as clearly associated with the observed changes in the stability of the Anglo-German rivalry. In this case, both sides viewed one another as essentially legitimate governments, and both states seemed to have a deep, if imperfect, understanding of one another.

The most central lesson of this case, therefore, relates to the dangers for all great powers of threatening the existential security of another. Signaling both the intent and capability to undermine another state's security should be expected to trigger a destabilizing reaction that could increase the risk of war. The nature of this destabilizing reaction could vary, but the Anglo-German case suggests that it can involve unexpected and historically unprecedented

behavior. German decisionmakers were convinced that Britain would never reconcile with its colonial rivals, France and Russia, and would never dramatically reduce its overseas naval presence to defend the home islands—key assumptions that might make the success of a German naval challenge seem plausible. In the face of the German threat, however, Britain took both of these steps to safeguard its existential security, and Germany decisively lost the naval arms race and disastrously drove Britain into the arms of Germany's most dangerous Continental rivals.

These lessons are likely to hold for all states, be they rising or declining powers. In the current environment, such states as China or Russia should be mindful that, if they develop capabilities and demonstrate an intent to threaten U.S. existential security, their assumptions about U.S. policies and limitations might not hold. But similarly, as the current most powerful state in the international system, the United States should understand how its potential to threaten other states might cause *them* to react unexpectedly in response. For example, wary of U.S. and NATO expansion into its perceived sphere of influence and of U.S. support for regime change and color revolutions in nearby states, Russia has frequently challenged U.S. assumptions in response, particularly with its illegal annexation of Crimea and interference in U.S. elections.

States should therefore be cautious about the military capabilities they build and the aggressive intent they might signal to undermine a rival's security. Vulnerable states are likely to be extremely sensitive to perceptions of aggressive intent. Moreover, it could be difficult for such states to walk back threats or professions of hostility once they are issued. Stable competition between rivals requires a degree of diplomatic, political, and military restraint when the capacity exists to threaten one another's existential security.

This case also illustrates the potentially destabilizing influence of allies and proxies. Partly out of fear of each other, Britain and Germany strengthened their relationships with and reliance on other powers, creating a competing set of alliance blocs. These blocs limited the freedom of Britain and Germany to build constructive relations with each other at the risk of being perceived as abandoning their allies. Rather than acting as shock absorbers, these alliances functioned as accelerants of direct conflict between the two states.

The Sino–Soviet/Russian Rivalry

The history of the Sino-Soviet rivalry has several implications for current competitions. First, this case suggests that status considerations—especially relative ones—represent one of the most crucial factors in whether a rivalry is stable or unstable. Both China and the Soviet Union were extremely sensitive to their relative status, with Chinese great-power ambitions driving much of the instability in their relationship from the 1950s to the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union lost the Cold War and ceased to exist as a political entity. Status considerations surpassed ideological ones and even drove an ideological wedge between the two countries, with China presenting itself as the true inheritor of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist principles and portraying the Soviet Union as a revisionist power that had sold out to the West. The importance of status for both China and Russia is likely to drive their individual relationships with the United States and to effect the stability of both the Sino-American and Russo-American competitions.

Second, while positive relationships between national leaders in the Sino-Russian case had a minor effect on the stability of the rivalry and were subservient to status considerations, a competitive or negative relationship between the leaders of the two countries increased the instability of the rivalry. Leaders' personal ambitions and personal quests for status translated

into policies and measures—such as the acquisition of nuclear capabilities—that further destabilized the rivalry and increased tensions. We notice similar dynamics in the present-day rivalries between these two countries and the United States, with a number of political decisions made on behalf of Russia and China serving the personal quests for status of presidents Putin and Xi.

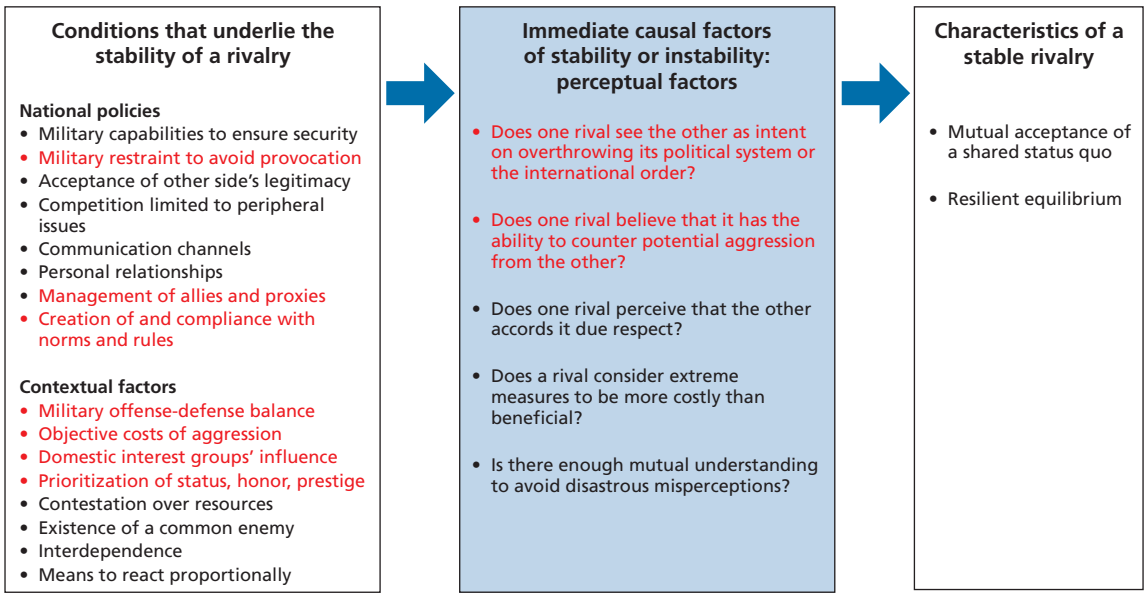
Third, Chinese domestic political divisions and rivalries were redirected externally and had a negative effect on China's relationship with the Soviet Union. Chairman Mao's attempts to consolidate power in China and eliminate his rivals in the Communist Party translated into an increase of anti-Soviet propaganda and actions, injecting further instability into the rivalry. However, on the Russian side, domestic political divisions and rival interests had less influence on Russia's external relations and, thus, on the stability of its rivalry with China.

Identifying Critical Variables

The collective lessons of the historical case studies point to several variables from the initial framework as being especially important. Figure 9.1 summarizes these, with the especially critical variables highlighted in red. (As noted earlier, we conducted in-depth research into two additional cases—the Anglo-American and Sino-Japanese rivalries—which offered additional perspectives but no unique or distinct lessons.)

These cases point to the top two perceptual variables as being, in many ways, the fulcrum around which the stability of a rivalry tends to revolve: (1) the perception that an adversary poses an existential threat and (2) the degree to which a nation believes its existential security is safeguarded by key capabilities. These two perceptions are two sides of the same coin: an essential degree of confidence (or lack thereof) about a state's security in the face of a threat. A general belief that a rival seeks existential, systemic damage is arguably the single most destabilizing perception in a rivalry—especially, but not exclusively, when that perception extends to

Figure 9.1
Key Variables in the Historical Cases



NOTE: Red text denotes the most important factors in the historical case studies.

the counterpart belief that the other side would be willing to employ major war to achieve that goal. A related implication is that threatening, or being perceived to threaten, the existential security of a rival will be inherently dangerous.

These cases also point to several underlying variables that seemed to be especially important in shaping the top two perceptions. Two of these variables point to the importance of military capabilities and doctrines that imply either defensive (and stable) or offensive (and unstable) intentions. In a number of these cases, most notably the Anglo-German case, specific weapon systems conveyed an intent to destabilize the relationship—an intent that became self-fulfilling.

These cases underscore the potentially destabilizing actions of allies and proxies, which figured in many of the intra-European crises (with smaller states dragging larger ones into crises and wars they might not have chosen themselves). The cases also suggest that a willingness to abide by certain rules and norms of a shared status quo is an important indicator of stability.

These cases point as well to the contextual factor regarding the perceived value and cost of aggression. When an aggressor comes to believe that aggression is more feasible in terms of relative costs, the restraint in a relationship declines, and instability grows. Finally, the historical cases point to two other variables that repeatedly showed their importance: domestic constituencies and status or prestige considerations.

Lessons from the Cold War

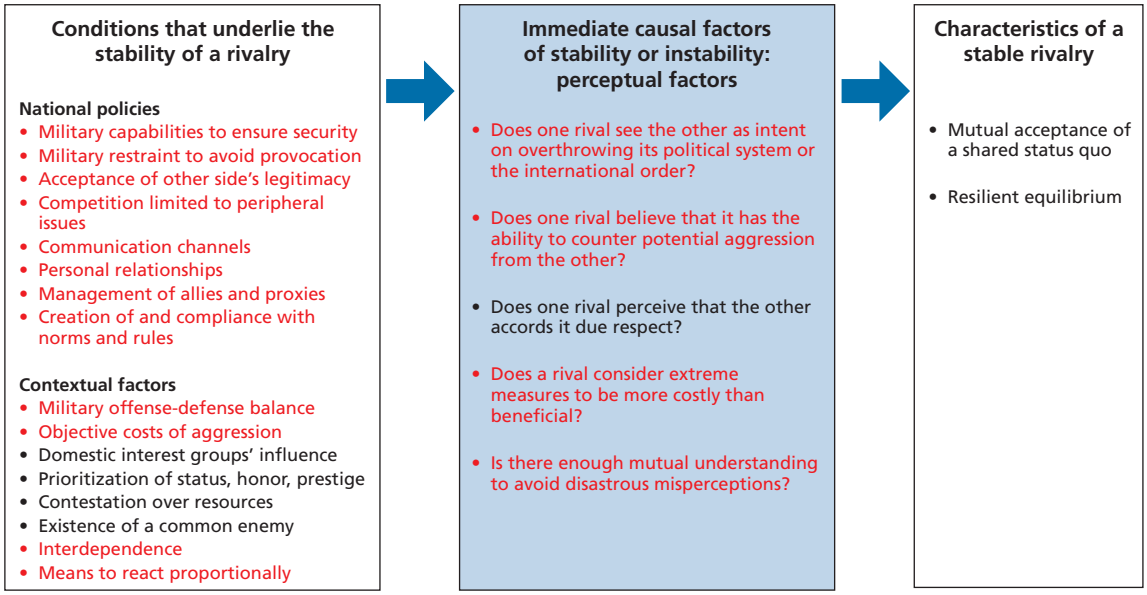
The Cold War was such a multifaceted rivalry with such significant variation in stability over various periods that drawing lessons becomes a difficult challenge. At different times, nearly all the factors in the theoretical framework played some role in the dynamics of driving stability and instability (see Figure 9.2). In the Cold War case, it is therefore somewhat difficult to distinguish a smaller number of variables with especially disproportionate effects on stability: Almost any given variable could have notable effects, given the context.

The Cold War (and the two emerging rivalries) fundamentally diverged from the rivalries of the previous era because of one key contextual factor: the fear of nuclear annihilation. The central conviction that major war was no longer a sensible instrument of statecraft never really wavered. This principle played the most essential stabilizing role in the Cold War conflict by constraining the degree of escalatory options each side believed that it could employ.

The second lesson from the Cold War is that the stable periods in the rivalry were driven by a confluence of policy decisions that led to perceptual changes. A combination of policies favoring greater restraint, increased communication, more interpersonal trust, and strong signals of acceptance of one another's legitimacy resulted in periods when the rivals saw each other as less revisionist and when both were confident in their existential security.

The Cold War offers a third lesson, one that supports and builds on closely related findings from the other historical cases: Stability is a function of a delicate dance between firmness and accommodation. American deterrent strength in drawing clear lines in Europe that Stalin could challenge only at the risk of war was essential to creating the status quo; otherwise, the Soviet Union would have been tempted to press the boundaries of Western security in much more profound ways. At the same time, the development of capabilities, doctrines, and strategies to support such firmness posed some of the greatest risks of destabilization, whether in

Figure 9.2
Key Variables in the Cold War Case



NOTE: Red text denotes the most important factors for the Cold War.

terms of specific weapon systems or overall military postures. The Cold War case suggests that stability cannot be purchased through simple resort to either end of the deterrence-reassurance spectrum.

The fourth lesson points to the chief culprit in destabilizing a strategic rivalry: the strong sense on one or both sides that the other is determined to undermine its stability and security. When a contest is seen as absolute, it is very difficult to keep it stable, because neither side believes that stability is possible in such an existential conflict. The belief in an absolute degree of contestation waxed and waned during the Cold War, but by the 1960s, the rivalry settled into a mutual sense that neither side would be willing to take decisive action.

The fifth lesson is the potentially destabilizing role of allies and proxies and how they could drag the United States and the Soviet Union into clashes that both would have preferred to avoid but that created some of the greatest risks of war throughout the period. The classic example was the Cuban Missile Crisis, born of Khrushchev's desire to protect the Cuban revolution, but there were many others, including insurrections in Eastern Europe and the maneuverings of Taiwan and North Korea.

Finally, the United States and Soviet Union frequently fell victim to so-called credibility doctrines that exaggerated threat perceptions and catalyzed overreactions to limited strategic moves. Because of these doctrines, both countries gave unwarranted significance to developments with little intrinsic importance to their interests, from the U.S. reactions in Korea and Vietnam to the Soviet actions in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan. The doctrines turned out to be engines of instability.

Findings for the Emerging U.S.-Russia Rivalry

To assess the status of U.S. rivalries with Russia and China today, we applied all the major variables from the framework to each. In each case, we assessed two related questions: What is the condition or status of each of the variables in the current rivalry, and what does the evidence from the emerging rivalry say about which of the variables appear to be having the greatest effect on the relationship?

Chapter Seven discussed the disturbing emerging instability in U.S.-Russia relations. *All* eight categories of national policies are pushing this rivalry toward destabilization. The following five areas of national policy have emerged as most influential, based on our analysis:

- The United States has deployed (and has the potential to do so in the future) military capabilities, particularly BMD, that Russia views as an existential threat.
- Restraint has decreased on both sides, but especially Russia's, with its greater willingness to use force in regional crises and to unleash its cyber capabilities directly against the United States. The United States has enhanced its posture near Russia's borders.
- The United States has questioned the legitimacy of the Russian government and openly called for undermining political stability in Russia following its aggression against Ukraine.
- The locus of the competition is in Russia's immediate neighborhood. The rivalry is playing out in post-Soviet Eurasia, a region Moscow has long signaled to be vital (not peripheral) to its national interests.
- Written and unwritten norms have eroded. Key elements of the arms control infrastructure have collapsed; norms governing new domains have not been established; and unwritten understandings regarding acceptable behavior are absent.

Three factors that seem to have prevented the relationship from tipping over the edge into direct conflict are the somewhat immutable contextual factors that are largely exogenous to national policy:

- *Mutual strategic vulnerability.* Nuclear deterrence continues to make direct armed conflict between the rivals highly unlikely.
- *Common enemy.* Although shared counterterrorist objectives have not overcome differences in the relationship, these objectives do serve as something of a common ground of last resort and are the cause of cooperation even during periods of high tension.
- *Russia's dependence on the U.S.-dominated global economic infrastructure.* This factor does not stop Russia from taking necessary steps to ensure its security but does affect its cost-benefit calculation regarding moves that could produce a domestic backlash.

None of the five key perceptual factors augurs well for the stability of the rivalry:

- Each rival sees the other as deeply revisionist vis-à-vis the international order and intent on threatening the other's domestic political system.
- Each rival sees itself as existentially threatened by the other in the cyber domain.
- Because Washington remains mostly resistant to negotiation on core issues, Russia believes that the United States is unwilling to accord it the respect it feels it deserves.

- Increasingly, both sides, particularly Russia, act as though the benefits of taking extreme measures outweigh the costs.
- In part because of the breakdown of communication channels beyond individual high-level visits that have become disconnected from the range of other communications underway, both rivals see each other as innately and immutably hostile.

These dire findings suggest there are serious grounds for concern about the stability of the U.S.-Russia rivalry. Given the negative dynamic in most of these variables—including *all* the perceptual factors—the future seems likely to be even worse. However, certain contextual factors, such as mutual strategic vulnerability, will remain buffers of conflict (although they cannot rule it out completely). Moreover, the history of the rivalry is nonlinear. There were periods, particularly from 1991 until the mid-2000s, when the rivalry was stable. Although events since 2014 have changed the fundamentals and made it impossible to return to the status quo ante, history suggests that the rivalry is not fated to remain in its current state.

Findings for the Emerging U.S.-China Rivalry

As noted in Chapter Eight, there are reasons to worry about the future trajectory of this rivalry, which appears to be intensifying rapidly. Most of the eight national policy variables in our theoretical framework now appear to be either directly tending toward destabilization of the U.S.-China rivalry or showing at least a mixed picture with growing elements of potential instability:

- *Military capabilities that provide for essential security.* Both countries possess strategic weapons and strong military capabilities that render them confident of their abilities to deter threats to their existence. Both countries have stepped up their investments in military capabilities aimed partly at one another. Although each side ought to have confidence in its ability to provide for its vital security interests, these and related trends, taken together, have all the hallmarks of an emerging arms race across several domains of military capability, of the sort that has typically been associated with unstable rivalries.
- *Military restraint.* Both countries have adopted policies that demonstrate restraint and contribute to stability in the bilateral relationship. However, a deepening competition in recent years has loosened these restraints and unmoored policies that promote stability. Although official documents and military writings continue to avoid direct mentions of the other country as an adversary, the concepts and doctrines discussed leave little doubt that both militaries regard each other as potential threats, and this mutual threat identification is becoming clearer all the time. Each seems increasingly willing to undertake directly confrontational military deployments and activities in contested areas.
- *Signaling acceptance of legitimacy.* In the most important terms, China and the United States have taken many steps to acknowledge each other's basic sovereignty and legitimacy as great powers. Neither is in any way formally committed to the other's illegitimacy or to undermining its stability. However, an undercurrent of such existential competition is increasingly present in a debate that, on both sides, has begun to consider whether the United States and China can adequately function in an international system that includes

the other as currently constituted. Additionally, CCP leadership remains highly sensitive to perceived U.S. efforts to call the legitimacy of its system of governance into question.

- *Competition only on peripheral issues.* The United States and China have refrained from challenging the core interests that could undermine the existence of one another's governments. It is true that many in Beijing see U.S. policy on Taiwan as challenging a core national interest, but the sides have managed that disagreement relatively effectively. However, recent years have seen disputes expand across virtually all policy domains, and some areas that had previously been viewed as secondary—such as trade disputes and political influence-seeking—have now moved to the top of the list of issues of concern for both sides. The competition is rapidly losing the flavor of being over peripheral issues.
- *Communication channels.* Officials in both countries have sought to establish institutions and mechanisms to manage tensions and handle crises. However, all these mechanisms remain largely nascent and untested, and the tenor and tone of official engagements tend to reflect those of the overall bilateral relationship. Moreover, there has been a significant diminishment in the quality and frequency of bilateral exchanges since 2016.
- *Building personal relationships at various levels.* A dense network of such relationships has emerged across various levels of the U.S.-China relationship, both within government and, indeed, especially beyond it. These could provide some stabilizing ballast to the rivalry. But there is evidence that the U.S.-China relationship will reflect the dominant historical pattern on this variable: Although bad relationships can uniquely subvert a stable rivalry, good personal ties between senior officials cannot rescue a relationship that is being destabilized by many other strategic, political, economic, and ideological factors.
- *Management of allies and proxies.* Both countries have exercised restraint regarding their allies and proxies, but actions taken to shore up their security partnerships have exacerbated suspicions. Both sides have allies and proxies that are capable of unsetting the stability of the rivalry by taking positions that push the United States and China into new confrontations.
- *Creation of and compliance with norms and rules.* Over the past three decades, the trajectory on this variable has been highly incomplete but largely positive, with the United States and China joining many organizations, processes, and venues that placed both under the aegis of shared norms and rules. Yet each now increasingly focuses on the perceived rule and norm violations of the other side rather than on areas of common interest. China's conduct over the last three to five years in areas ranging from cyber intrusions to intellectual property theft to human rights practices appears to demonstrate a growing willingness to act in its own interest even in contravention of established norms.

Three of the eight contextual factors in our theoretical framework suggest sources of stability for the U.S.-China rivalry:

- *Military offense-defense balance.* Both sides possess survivable nuclear deterrents possessed by both sides and have robust military capabilities of each; the relative immunity of both homelands continues to provide an essential, top-level military balance that appears to be characterized by defensive dominance. This principle does not apply to all forms of aggression below the threshold of war, however, such as cyberattacks; in the event of a large-scale crisis, the premium on striking first could become significant. But the overall rivalry is not characterized by a dangerous level of offensive dominance.

- *Objective costs of aggression.* The mutual possession of nuclear weapons and economic interdependence raise the potential cost and risk of major war to exorbitant levels. These objective cost factors generally favor stability because the two relatively developed nations do not face the incentives for major war that characterized past zero-sum competitions.
- *Interdependence.* The two countries compete within the context of a global market system that provides ample opportunities to secure resources and markets peacefully and efficiently. The two countries maintain highly interdependent economies that would suffer enormous disruption in the event of conflict. Moreover, the global economy would likely suffer severe blowback if the world's two largest economies should war against one another.

Three other contextual factors, however, suggest sources of instability for the U.S.-China rivalry:

- *Domestic interest groups' influence.* Domestic constituencies of foreign policy elites, government officials, and military leaders are forming in favor of harder-line policies.
- *Status considerations.* China's determination to reestablish what it views as its rightful place in world politics, overcoming a century or more of perceived humiliation at the hands of Western imperialism and hegemony, creates grievances and conspiracy-based thinking, which add fuel to the rivalry and risk destabilizing it.
- *Existence of a common enemy.* In theory, the two nations could make common cause against the shared threat of climate, although current U.S. policy appears to rule out such cooperation. China's ideological affinity with Russia means that it will not see the United States as a partner against that potential enemy. This absence of any common enemy deprives the relationship of a potential influence in favor of stability and enables a deepening antagonism.

Two of the five perceptual factors in our theoretical framework indicate a growing risk:

- *Perceived defense against existential threat.* The governments of both countries have avoided language that could stir up public hatred and enmity but have offered increasingly blunt characterizations of one another as competitors and potential sources of threat. Among the foreign policy elites who influence policymaking, opinion appears to be consolidating in favor of harder-line approaches.
- *Enough mutual understanding to avoid disastrous misperceptions.* Polls suggest that the peoples of both countries regard one another with a mixture of both positive and negative views. The same polls suggest trends are moving toward heightened threat perceptions. The aggravation of trade-related disputes and feuding over longstanding sore points, such as Taiwan and the South China Sea, could deepen hostile perceptions. A militarized crisis in China's near seas could crystallize suspicion and distrust into enmity.

This comprehensive assessment provides reason for concern that the U.S.-China rivalry, as of 2019, could be trending toward instability and volatility. The two countries are unavoidably locked in a deepening competition at the regional and global levels. Disputes might not be existential, but they appear to be spreading across virtually all domains and have grown intractable and acrimonious. Both countries have shown restraint in handling disputes, whether over Taiwan, maritime sovereignty, or trade. But statements from top leaders, confrontational trade

and other policies, and continued military buildups have loosened that restraint and suggest a deepening trend toward mutual distrust. The rules of the game remain incomplete and immature, and the stabilizing institutional influences that characterized the late phases of the Cold War remain undeveloped. Given the significant changes in recent years, it appears too early to determine whether the strategic competition between China and the United States has yet reached the resilient equilibrium that would be needed to absorb shocks and weather discontinuities in the bilateral relationship.

Implications and Recommendations

This analysis carries several leading implications for U.S. national security policy. These implications largely point to the importance of unintended perceptual effects of U.S. decisions and lead to several overall recommendations for U.S. defense and foreign policy with regard to the emerging U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China rivalries:

1. *A rough parity in capabilities—a military balance contributing to security—is important for stability*. This lesson emerges from a number of historical cases: Stability can benefit if both sides generate a baseline of military deterrent capability that removes temptation and underlines the risks of major aggression. This requirement for stability is the focus of current U.S. defense planning and is appropriate. Yet the lessons of this research suggest that this one requirement, if it is not to produce instability rather than stability, must be counterbalanced by a range of understandings and initiatives to pair deterrence with various forms of reassurance, even in a rivalry.
2. *The United States should take care to limit the signals that it aims to threaten the existential security of rivals*. All the case studies agree that a perception of mutual existential threat objectives is the most destabilizing single factor in a rivalry. This requirement has a number of implications: Taking care in the force structure and doctrine in the nuclear realm to avoid the perception of seeking a first-strike capability, refraining from direct support for political movements or activities that threaten the survival of the rival's government, and restraint in the deployment of provocative military capabilities near the borders of a rival.
3. *Consider the unintended effects of military capability decisions.* Our historical case studies, both pre–Cold War and Cold War, provided numerous examples of military capabilities deployed for deterrent purposes or to achieve military advantage that had significant unintended escalatory consequences. These ranged from the famous case of German naval capabilities before World War I to the Soviet deployment of missiles in Cuba. These and other examples suggest a clear lesson: The deterrent effect of capability decisions is only half of the equation. When the United States makes decisions about posture or capability development, it should also consider the effects on stability. Although a fear of being provocative should not preclude U.S. efforts to enhance its ability to conduct major combat operations, U.S. leaders must keep in mind that, in a context of escalating rivalry, the effort to prevent conflict is not about just adding capability. Rather, it involves a constant balance between improving deterrence and avoiding instability.

4. *Seek opportunities for mutual transparency, notification, and arms control*. Improved sources of information about the other side's beliefs, intentions, capabilities, and posture can have stabilizing effects by reducing uncertainty and the threat perceptions that sometimes come with it. Formal agreements for enhanced transparency would serve as forms of military restraint, both to limit the deployment of new capabilities and to create mechanisms to reduce uncertainty. New or renewed strategic arms agreements, new limits on conventional forces in key regions, and Open Skies–style accords to enhance transparency could all serve these objectives.
5. *Take seriously the need to develop formal and informal rules of the road*. The historical cases highlight the importance of multiple forms of rules and agreements to stabilize rivalries, both in general and in crisis periods. These can range from informal understandings about the conduct of exercises to hotlines to military-to-military rules of engagement to more-strategic implicit agreements, such as restraint in areas close to the borders of rivals. Intensifying the discussion of such rules will be important even as the overall rivalries deepen, particularly to clarify redlines and reduce the chance of miscalculation. Today, in the context of U.S. relationships with Russia and China, new norms are urgently needed to limit the employment of homeland-disruptive tools, such as cyberwarfare, political warfare, and informational manipulation.
6. *Take actions available to the United States to shape the international system to magnify its constraining effects*. An important component of the post-1945 world has been the set of norms and institutions the United States has helped create, which have served as a stabilizing ballast in the international system by making international status contingent on some degree of restraint. Meanwhile, the global alignment of value-sharing democracies represents another form of structural constraint that historically has been associated with stability. U.S. policy should seek to sustain and, where possible, deepen these normative and structural factors. It can do this in several ways, from renewed support for alliances to using international law and norms as the foundation for responses to specific provocations to investment in international institutions and processes that provide a stabilizing framework for dispute resolution.
7. *Look for ways to grant rivals increased status in exchange for creating a trade space for arrangements that would serve U.S. interests and enhance stability.* The major U.S. rivals today seek what they view as their rightful place in world politics as much as, or more than, specific territorial gains or damage to the United States or other democracies. If the United States is willing to offer signifiers of status in, for example, international institutions and in the ways it handles major crises and is also willing to constrain, at least slightly, its own deployments and policies out of respect for its rivals' interests, it might be able to both create a trade space for achieving other goals and reduce the incipient instability of these two rivalries.

The sum of these recommendations amounts to the basic message that, in attending to the stability of a rivalry, there is a delicate balance to be struck between deterrence and firmness on the one hand and aggressiveness and provocation on the other. Military investments can foster a cycle of instability by creating a constant cycle of apparent or feared windows of vulnerability. Reassurance alone may leave open apparent windows of opportunity that lead to conflict.

These implications and recommendations apply directly to the U.S. Army insofar as they offer insight into the general U.S. defense policy mindset that will be important for stabilizing the rivalries. This analysis carries the following additional implications and recommendations specific to the Army:

- *The Army, like all services, will serve the nation's interests most effectively if it continuously thinks in terms of stabilizing a rivalry rather than merely providing capabilities to threaten the adversary.* Historically, the highest risks of war between strategic rivals have stemmed from their fears of existential risk. The Army could pursue this goal in several ways, for example, directing that escalatory risks receive significant consideration in all Army concept development efforts and taking competitor perceptions of the threat posed by heavy ground forces seriously in designing posture. The new distinction in the 2018 NDS between blunt and surge forces and capabilities offers another way to square this circle—by using the blunt concept to design effective, credible, but nonprovocative approaches to slowing a potential enemy's advance before surge forces can arrive. This would allow the Army and the DoD to achieve key deterrent goals without stationing potentially escalatory capabilities forward.
- *Ground forces can thread the needle between effective deterrence and destabilizing provocation.* This analysis suggests that U.S. rivals are most concerned about U.S. capabilities that can reach into their homelands on short notice and with little warning, a fear that is characteristic of the nuclear era but that now also applies to nonnuclear capabilities ranging from stealthy drones to hypersonic weapons. Many components of ground force capabilities can enhance deterrence without posing such risks. Lighter ground units, levels of heavy forces insufficient to pose an offensive risk to others' homelands, rotational ground presence, and participation in train-and-advise missions or exercises can all bolster deterrence in important ways without sparking the sort of instabilities associated with more provocative capabilities. There are limits: Some ground force capabilities (e.g., potential deployment of armored brigade combat teams to the Baltics) are among the most provocative capabilities to rivals. Broadly speaking, however, ground forces can provide clear signals of commitment at levels below those that would be seen as threatening. The Army can take advantage of this role by emphasizing its role in building partner capacity, as it is doing with the new security force assistance brigades, an especially useful way of enhancing deterrence without deploying provocative capabilities forward. The Army can also intensify development of concepts and capabilities allowing smaller, lighter units to effectively defend against heavy armor or maritime assault forces. Any force design, technologies, postures, or concepts that maximize the deterrent effect of nonoffensive forces would contribute to threading this needle effectively.
- *Work diligently on military-to-military communication with Russia and China and on efforts to build useful rules of engagement and communication channels between ground forces.* The Army, as with DoD generally speaking, conducts such contacts on a regular basis, but concerns for stability in an escalating rivalry suggest the need to emphasize and institutionalize the practice to the greatest degree possible. This could include local or regional conferences of U.S. and rival army commanders, visits of heads of services, special issue-specific working groups, and other efforts. The goal should be to create as many venues as possible to get U.S. Army officers into regular dialogue with their counterparts in Russia and China. The expectation would not be that these contacts would be able to

solve major strategic disagreements on their own but that the contacts could create a basis for tamping down or resolving local or theater incidents before they spin out of control.

- *Keep in mind that arms restraints, controls, and reductions can enhance both stability and capabilities.* For example, the Army could take the lead in examining potential constraints in the deployment, posture, and capabilities of ground forces in the European region in ways that would enhance stability. Although arms restraints seem unlikely in either Europe or Asia today, nations have historically used them as means of providing security, alongside the development of credible deterrent capabilities. The Army would be well served to assess the specific types of arms restraints that might support its objectives most effectively.

These conclusions point to one overarching theme: A time of intensified competition does not call merely for persistent additions to capabilities, taking every opportunity to threaten rivals. Rivalries remain stable—and thus avoid war—for complex sets of reasons that do involve a degree of preparedness on both sides but also go beyond that. The U.S. Army, like the other services and the broader defense establishment, will increasingly have to think in terms of stability as it works to help the United States manage this challenging new era of competition.

Abbreviations

A2/AD	anti-access and area denial
ABM	anti–ballistic missile
BMD	ballistic missile defense
BPA	Basic Principles Agreement
CBM	confidence-building measure
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CFE	Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSBM	confidence- and security-building measure
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
FONOP	freedom of navigation operation
GDP	gross domestic product
GDR	German Democratic Republic
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
IRBM	intermediate-range ballistic missile
MAD	mutually assured destruction
MID	militarized interstate dispute
MIRV	multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act

NDS	National Defense Strategy
NFU	no-first-use
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
PGS	Prompt Global Strike
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SALT I	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Agreement Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SCC	Standing Consultative Commission
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SIOP	Single Integrated Operational Plan
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SORT	Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty
SSBN	ballistic missile submarine
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
THAAD	Theater High Altitude Area Defense
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization

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ARROYO CENTER

The consensus inside and outside the U.S. government is that the international system is headed for a renewed era of intense and sometimes bitter competition among leading states. The objective of this research was to assess the emerging strategic competitions between the United States and both China and Russia, examine the approaches most likely to preserve long-term stability in these competitions, and draw implications for Army capabilities and posture. To this end, the authors reviewed existing literature on rivalries, identifying variables strongly associated with stability and instability, and, based on that research, developed a framework for assessment of such rivalries. They then applied this framework to historical cases of bilateral rivalries to identify the most important factors. Finally, they leveraged this work to assess the current state of U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China relations. Their assessment suggests that there are serious grounds for concern about the stability of both the U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China rivalries. While certain contextual factors, such as mutual strategic vulnerability, will remain buffers of conflict, many of the warning signs for instability are clearly visible, and the future seems likely to be even more volatile. The report offers recommendations for the U.S. government and the U.S. Army, in particular, to manage this challenging new era of competition. One overarching theme identified is that to ensure stability—and avoid war—the policy response to this intensified great-power competition should be nuanced and go beyond merely bolstering capabilities to counter rivals.

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