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# AMERICA'S DILEMMA:

DEALING WITH MULTIPLE ADVERSARIES  
SIMULTANEOUSLY



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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>AMERICA'S ADVERSARIES</b>	<b>7</b>
Russia	7
China	8
North Korea	9
Iran	10
Sunni jihadists	11
<b>AMERICA'S ALLIES</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>THE ADVERSARIES' ADVERSARIES</b>	<b>16</b>
America and its allies	16
Internal opponents	18
One another	18
<b>DEALING WITH THE DILEMMA</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>FINAL THOUGHTS</b>	<b>23</b>

## **SUMMARY**

While the US had one principal adversary during the Cold War, it has come to face several largely separate ones in the post-Cold War era: Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and Sunni jihadists such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State. Focusing on all of these at the same time is a very difficult, if not impossible, task for America. Dramatic events as well as limited resources and attention spans often lead to an administration focusing on one such threat in particular at any given time. Doing so, however, may lead to inattention to, or underestimation of, the threat posed by other adversaries, thus allowing them to grow stronger.

This study provides a basis for understanding and addressing this issue by examining three key components of it: 1) how America's main adversaries pose a threat to American interests; 2) how different American allies identify and prioritize the threats that they face; and 3) how different American adversaries identify and prioritize the threats that they face (including those they perceive as coming not just from America and its allies, but from other sources, including one another). In light of this, the study will conclude by offering a set of guidelines for the US to keep in mind when dealing with multiple adversaries simultaneously, paying special attention to the need for the US to manage relations with its many allies, who often prioritize the threats they face differently from one another.

## INTRODUCTION

While the Cold War was a complex era involving numerous threats and conflicts, America and its allies saw themselves as facing one overarching threat during this period: the Soviet Union. Further, the USSR was a global threat, challenging America and its allies everywhere – Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. While how to counter this global threat from Moscow was hotly debated in the Cold War era, there was a general consensus – at least in policymaking circles – that the Soviet Union was indeed the main threat faced by America and its allies.

This is very different from the situation today, where America sees itself as facing not one overarching threat, but five different major threats: Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and Sunni jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State. As the threats that the US now faces are largely separate from one another, responding to them presents Washington with significant difficulties. One is that if the US focuses on combating or constraining any one of its adversaries, it may inadvertently strengthen one or more of its others.

Avoiding this problem might be possible by focusing on all threats simultaneously. Attempting to do this, however, may well overtax America's resources as well as prove ineffective in countering some, or even all, of them. Besides, dramatic events (such as the 9/11 attacks, Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014, or North Korean nuclear tests whenever they occur) tend to focus attention on the adversary that appears to be the most threatening at any given time, thus increasing the difficulty of trying to focus on all adversaries simultaneously.

Further complicating how America responds to its different adversaries are the varying priorities of America's allies. While they all feared the Soviet Union (as well as various states and groups it supported) during the Cold War, America's various allies now often have very different perceptions of which of America's adversaries are their own principal adversaries. While many of America's European allies regard Russia as the principal external threat, some of its Middle Eastern allies regard Iran as their main adversary, and some of its Far Eastern allies see China as theirs. In addition, countries that America and some of its allies regard as threats may be regarded by other allies as actual or potential partners. Hence, American prioritization of any one threat can complicate US relations with those of its allies which prioritize others. Moreover, there have also been cases where the US has sought to transform what Washington sees as former or even current adversaries into partners, upsetting longstanding American allies which still regard them as threats.

Given the potential problems posed by dealing with multiple adversaries simultaneously, it is hardly surprising that post-Cold War American foreign policy has encountered them time and again. The Clinton administration's policy of "dual containment" against Iran and Iraq simultaneously in the 1990s overlooked the fact that each was needed to contain the other, and that it annoyed many of America's allies, which not only feared neither, but wanted to trade with both.<sup>1</sup> One result of the George W. Bush administration's post-9/11 interventions, which overthrew the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Saddam

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1 F. Gregory Gause III, "The Illogic of Dual Containment". *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 2, March–April 1994, pp. 56–66.

Hussein regime in Iraq, was to enhance Iran's ability to exert influence in both countries – which was hardly Bush's intention.<sup>2</sup> The Bush administration's focus on prosecuting its War on Terror also resulted in it doing little to counter the growing assertiveness of both Russia and China.<sup>3</sup> The Obama administration's efforts to negotiate the Iranian nuclear accord resulted in some of its Gulf Arab allies fearing an overall Iranian-American rapprochement at their expense, and hedging against this through seeking improved ties with Russia.<sup>4</sup> Donald Trump's top foreign and defence policy advisers appear to be at odds about whether Islamic State, Iran, Russia, or China is America's most significant adversary. Trump himself does not seem to have a clear view on this matter.

Can the US avoid, or at least minimize, the problems it has encountered up to now in dealing with multiple adversaries simultaneously? Is there a way in which the US can avoid the danger of focusing on any one threat, thereby allowing others to grow stronger? This study will begin by examining three issues that need to be understood in order to address these questions: 1) America's main adversaries and the nature of the threat they pose to American interests; 2) the way in which different American allies identify and prioritize the threats they face; and 3) how different American adversaries identify and prioritize the threats that they face (including those they perceive as coming not just from America and its allies, but from other sources, including one another). In light of this, the study will then offer a set of guidelines for the US to keep in mind when dealing with multiple adversaries simultaneously – paying special attention to the need for the US to manage relations with its many allies, who often prioritize the threats they face differently from one another.

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2 Michael Eisenstadt, "Iran and Iraq". *The Iran Primer*, US Institute of Peace, 2015, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-iraq>, last accessed 3 May 2017; and Mohsen Milani, "Iran and Afghanistan". *The Iran Primer*, US Institute of Peace, 2015, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-afghanistan>, last accessed 3 May 2017.

3 Mark N. Katz, "The Geopolitical Context of the 'War on Terror'". Middle East Policy Council, 4 November 2010, <http://www.mepc.org/articles-commentary/commentary/geopolitical-context-war-terror>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

4 Con Coughlin, "'Schizophrenic' US Foreign Policy Pushing Arab States toward Russia, Bahrain Warns". *The Telegraph*, 8 December 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/10504011/Schizophrenic-US-foreign-policy-pushing-Arab-states-toward-Russia-Bahrain-warns.html>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

## AMERICA'S ADVERSARIES

As noted above, for the past decade the US government has deemed its main adversaries to be Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and Sunni jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State.<sup>5</sup> This list, however, is not fixed and permanent. From 1990 until 2003, Washington regarded the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq as one of its most serious adversaries (after having seen it as a partner, if not an ally, during much of the Iran-Iraq war just prior to this).<sup>6</sup> Saddam Hussein ceased to be an adversary, however, when the US-led intervention destroyed his regime in 2003. Repeating this course of action is not a realistic option for subtracting larger, more powerful countries from America's list of adversaries, however. But subtractions from the adversary list can, and have occurred through other means, including a change in policy by an existing leader, leadership and policy change in the same regime, or even internally-driven regime change. By the same token, additions to the list of adversaries can also occur through each of these means.

### Russia

While the Soviet Union had been America's principal adversary throughout the Cold War, at the outset of the post-Cold War era there were high hopes that Russia would become transformed economically and politically, and that it would become a partner or even an ally. But Russian-American relations soured as a result of disappointed Russian expectations over several issues during the 1990s, including the pace of Russian economic development, what Russians regarded as an insufficient Western contribution to it, NATO expansion, and US/NATO military action against Serbia. This process continued after Vladimir Putin came to power. Although Putin expressed strong support for the US after the 9/11 attacks and even granted his approval to America making use of military facilities in Central Asia to prosecute its intervention in Afghanistan, the Bush administration unilaterally pulled out of the 1972 Soviet-American Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and then, despite objections from Russia (and many others), intervened in Iraq. Putin took a particularly negative view of the "colour revolutions" in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), seeing them not as manifestations of internal discontent with authoritarian rulers, but as American-orchestrated putsches to install pro-Western governments in former Soviet republics, which presaged such an effort in Russia itself.<sup>7</sup>

Yet while Boris Yeltsin to begin with, and later Putin, developed an increasingly negative view of American foreign policy, the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations did

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5 The US Department of Defense's 2008 "National Defense Strategy" identified the following as "long-term challenges" to the US: "Violent extremist movements such as al-Qaeda and its associates", "Rogue states such as Iran and North Korea", and "challenges by more powerful states" (which listed only China and Russia in this category). ISIS was not mentioned because it did not yet exist, but would clearly fit into the first category. "National Defense Strategy". US Department of Defense, June 2008, pp. 2-3, <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2008NationalDefenseStrategy.pdf>, last accessed 30 May 2017.

6 Peter Hahn, "A Century of U.S. Relations with Iraq". *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, vol. 5, no. 7, April 2012, <http://origins.osu.edu/article/century-us-relations-iraq>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

7 Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014.

not really focus on Russia, but were preoccupied instead with American domestic issues, as well as with Islamist terrorism (especially after 9/11) in the foreign policy realm. Russia's 2008 intervention in Georgia, as well as recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence from it, however, began to raise concerns in Washington that relations with Moscow were going to be adversarial rather than amicable. The Obama administration, which came into office at the beginning of 2009, sought to "reset" Russian-American relations (which it blamed the Bush administration for having upset). But with Putin blaming the US (and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in particular) for the upsurge in popular discontent in Russia in 2011-12, followed by his annexation of Crimea in early 2014, support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine later that same year, and intervention in support of the Assad regime in late 2015, Russia came to be regarded by Washington as an increasingly serious adversary.<sup>8</sup> The incoming Trump administration's initial hopes for improving ties between the two countries were stymied both by an inability to overcome their differences over various policy issues, as well as growing concerns about Moscow having interfered in the 2016 American presidential elections in order to hurt Clinton and help Trump.<sup>9</sup>

Strengths that Russia possesses in posing a threat to American interests include modernized nuclear and conventional forces, an impressive hybrid warfare capacity (including the ability to launch information campaigns aimed at affecting Western elections), and a leadership willing and able to conduct quick interventions (especially, but not only, along Russia's periphery) that have often caught America and the West off guard. For its part, Russia also suffers from many weaknesses, including an overdependence on petroleum exports (especially when oil prices are relatively low, as they have been for the past few years), the continued inability to make progress in developing the Russian economy outside of petroleum and a few other sectors, a declining overall population which includes a growing Muslim community that is not well integrated into Russian society, and internal opposition to Putin's authoritarian rule, which Moscow has succeeded in containing but not eliminating (as widespread demonstrations both in 2011-12 and early 2017 have shown).

## China

After having sharply adversarial relations with the communist government when it first came to power in 1949, both when Beijing was allied to Moscow and even later when they became estranged, Sino-American relations improved dramatically in the early 1970s due to their common fear of the Soviet Union. Yet even with the diminution of the perceived threat after the collapse of the USSR, Sino-American relations remained reasonably good throughout most of the post-Cold War era. Nonetheless, there were occasions when relations between the two appeared to turn antagonistic, as in May 1999 when US forces accidentally bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the US/NATO campaign against Serbia, and in April 2001 when an American reconnaissance aircraft and a Chinese fighter jet collided near Hainan. But particularly since the rise

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8 Ibid; and Ken Dilanian, "New Cold War? Russia, U.S. Relations at Lowest Point since 1970s". NBC News, 5 October 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-cold-war-russia-u-s-relations-lowest-point-1970s-n660126>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

9 Vivian Salama and Josh Lederman, "Trump Says U.S.-Russia Relations May Have Hit 'All-Time Low'". *TIME*, 13 April 2017, <http://time.com/4737764/trump-putin-russia-relationship/>, last accessed 4 May 2017.



to power of Xi Jinping in 2012, China has pursued a far more nationalistic and assertive foreign policy. Of special concern to the US and many of its allies have been Xi's efforts to assert China's expansive claims over the South China and East China Seas at the expense of the claims of other Asian nations (all of which are American partners to varying degrees), as well as freedom of navigation through them.<sup>10</sup> Trump's phone conversation with the president of Taiwan shortly after his election threatened to upset the longstanding Sino-American agreement about there being only "one China", which Taiwan is a part of. With Beijing fearing that Taiwan would feel emboldened by Trump to declare independence from China, there was even talk of a Chinese attack on Taiwan – which, fortunately, has not (yet) materialized. The April 2017 meeting between Trump and Xi eased tensions between the two countries, but did not dispel them.<sup>11</sup>

Strengths that China possesses in posing a threat to American interests include its growing military capacity, which (unlike Russia's) is underwritten by a dynamic economy, strong trade and investment ties with many countries that do not wish to see them disrupted despite whatever concerns they may have about increasingly assertive Chinese behaviour, and the absence of a multilateral alliance among its neighbours like Russia faces in Europe with NATO (despite all of its problems). Notwithstanding its strengths, China also has weaknesses, including a rapidly ageing population whose care will consume an increasing share of its economic resources, simmering unrest within minority populations such as the Tibetans and Uighurs, as well as the Han Chinese majority, and Chinese dependence on good economic relations with other nations, which overly aggressive behaviour could seriously disrupt.

## North Korea

At the end of World War II, the previously Japanese-occupied Korean peninsula was divided by the US and USSR into what became rival regimes in South Korea and North Korea. During the 1950–53 Korean War, the US and others successfully prevented North Korea from taking over the entire peninsula, but failed to reunite the peninsula under the auspices of the South, mainly due to Chinese intervention. While the war ended with the two regimes controlling roughly the same territory that each had started with, tension has persisted ever since between the hard-line communist regime in the North and the US-backed government in the South. While both North and South were devastated economically by the Korean War, in the ensuing decades the South built an impressive market economy and also underwent a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The North, by contrast, has remained an unreconstructed communist regime which maintains rigid control over its impoverished population. Yet despite its poverty and isolation from the rest of the world, North Korea managed to acquire nuclear weapons by

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10 Thomas J. Christensen, "Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge". *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 5, September–October 2015, pp. 28–36.

11 Emily Rauhala, "Trump Now Says He Would Check with China before Another Call with Taiwan's President". *The Washington Post*, 28 April 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/trump-now-says-he-would-check-with-china-before-another-call-with-taiwans-president/2017/04/28/eac3480c-2be3-11e7-86b7-5d31b5fdc114\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.b62c65d4e852](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/trump-now-says-he-would-check-with-china-before-another-call-with-taiwans-president/2017/04/28/eac3480c-2be3-11e7-86b7-5d31b5fdc114_story.html?utm_term=.b62c65d4e852), last accessed 4 May 2017.

2006.<sup>12</sup> While US-North Korean ties have almost always been very strained, there have been periods when it seemed that some improvement was possible – including when the Clinton administration made efforts to secure a nuclear agreement with Pyongyang, and during the 2016 presidential campaign when candidate Trump and North Korean strongman Kim Jong-un made positive comments about each other. Not long after Trump’s inauguration, however, North Korea was boasting that it had developed an intercontinental ballistic missile that could reach the US, and US-North Korean relations deteriorated to the point where each side was threatening the use of force against the other.<sup>13</sup>

Strengths that North Korea possesses in posing a threat to American interests include its nuclear threat, not just to two important American allies (South Korea and Japan) but possibly to America itself, the North Korean leadership’s constant willingness to threaten to use force without seeming to care about the consequences to itself, and the willingness of China in particular to support the regime in Pyongyang for fear that its collapse would lead either to chaos on its border or to the absorption of the North into the US-allied South (much like East Germany was absorbed by West Germany at the end of the Cold War). But in addition to being relatively small and poor, North Korea’s weaknesses include its limited technical capacity (as demonstrated by the frequent failure of its missile tests), the fragility of the regime (as shown by Kim Jong-un’s purges of top officials), and signs that Chinese patience with North Korea’s bellicosity is not unlimited.

## Iran

The US and Iran have been at odds ever since the latter’s 1979 revolution overthrew a longstanding pro-American authoritarian regime and replaced it with an anti-American theocratic one led by clergymen from Iran’s predominant Shi’a sect. Since then, the US has feared and sought to oppose Iranian support for mainly Shi’a revolutionary movements in the Arab world, Iranian efforts to weaken America’s Sunni Gulf Arab allies as well as Israel, and Iranian efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. The George W. Bush administration’s overthrow of Saddam Hussein but failure to pacify Iraq allowed Iran to gain influence with that country’s Shi’a Arabs in particular.<sup>14</sup> The Obama administration made achieving a nuclear accord (in conjunction with the UK, France, Germany, Russia, and China) a top priority to advance its non-proliferation goals, but (contrary to the belief of those opposing this effort) did not expect that this would lead to a broader

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12 Daniel Wertz and Chelsea Gannon, “A History of U.S.-DPRK Relations”. The National Committee on North Korea, November 2015, [http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/US\\_DPRK\\_Relations](http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/US_DPRK_Relations), last accessed 4 May 2017.

13 Dan Blumenthal, “Trump’s Strategy of ‘Strategic Impatience’ with North Korea”. *The National Interest*, 3 May 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/trumps-strategy-strategic-impatience-north-korea-20473>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

14 Suzanne Maloney, “How the Iraq War Has Empowered Iran”. Brookings Institution, 21 March 2008, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/how-the-iraq-war-has-empowered-iran/>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

Iranian-American rapprochement.<sup>15</sup> Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, indicated that he did not want a broader rapprochement when he declared that there would be no negotiations with the US outside of the nuclear realm.<sup>16</sup> The Trump administration has adopted a decidedly more negative view of Iran, and seems more determined to combat what it sees as Tehran's regional ambitions in Yemen and elsewhere. Yet while Trump initially declared that the Iranian nuclear accord was a "bad deal" which he would "tear up", so far his administration has signalled that it would abide by it – possibly due to the realization both that Iran would be less constrained from acquiring nuclear weapons without the agreement, and that America's allies prefer the agreement to remain in effect (despite what some of them may have said about it previously).<sup>17</sup>

Iran's strengths include the loyalty of powerful internal groups including the Shi'a clerical establishment, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the *basiji* paramilitary forces, which together have been able to quell all domestic opposition; alliances with powerful external Shi'a forces including Lebanon's Hezbollah and militias in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan; and the general unpopularity of the US and its Israeli and Gulf Arab allies in much of the region. Iran's weaknesses include its inability to develop its economy despite its petroleum wealth (due in part to American and international economic sanctions, but also in part to Tehran's own counterproductive economic policies); a society with many fissures (including dissatisfied young people as well as ethnic and even sectarian tensions); and the hostility of much of the Sunni world – especially jihadist movements – towards Persians, Shi'as, and the Islamic Republic itself.

## Sunni jihadists

Since the end of the Cold War, and especially since the 9/11 attacks at the dawn of the 21st century, America has been in conflict with Sunni jihadist groups – especially Al Qaeda, its regional affiliates (such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), some of its allies (such as the Taliban), and its rivals (especially the so-called Islamic State, or Daesh). During the Cold War, however, the US had, through Pakistan in particular, supported religiously motivated Afghan resistance groups in the then joint cause of opposing the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s (without realizing at the time that these groups were as anti-American as they were anti-Soviet, or anticipating

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15 “‘The Iran deal was never primarily about trying to open a new era of relations between the U.S. and Iran,’ [Obama’s National Security Advisor] Susan Rice told me. ‘It was far more pragmatic and minimalist. The aim was very simply to make a dangerous country substantially less dangerous. No one had any expectation that Iran would be a more benign actor.’” Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Obama Doctrine.” *The Atlantic*, April 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/#5>, last accessed 22 May 2017.

16 Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, “Iran’s Supreme Leader Bans Negotiations with the United States.” Reuters, 7 October 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-us-talks-idUSKCN0S10P220151007>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

17 Tracy Wilkinson, “The Iran Nuclear Deal that Trump Once Vowed to Tear Apart Is Holding — At Least for Now”. *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-fg-pol-trump-iran-nuclear-20170419-story.html>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

how powerful they would later become).<sup>18</sup> Although the Taliban did rule most of Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, and Islamic State briefly established control over much of the Sunni regions of Syria and Iraq before losing most of it more recently, the Sunni jihadists have been different from the other main adversaries America faces in that they are not a state (although they aspire to be), but a movement (or, more accurately, movements) instead. Still, while the number of Sunni jihadists actually engaged in fighting may not be especially large, they have received significant financial and other support from numerous individuals, organizations, and even some governments (such as Pakistan) that claim to oppose them.<sup>19</sup>

Strengths that the Sunni jihadists possess include an ideology which, while being abhorrent to most Muslims and non-Muslims alike, is attractive enough to recruit significant numbers of disaffected Muslims and even non-Muslims to their cause. Part of the strength of the jihadist ideology stems from the unpopularity of American foreign and military policies within the Muslim world. Thus, while US military action that eliminates jihadist leaders in particular does serve to weaken the movement's capabilities, it can also serve to confirm the narrative of American oppression against Muslims, which helps the movement attract recruits. Weaknesses of the Sunni jihadists include their propensity for alienating their fellow Muslims through intolerance of any divergence from their own ideology, as well as their cruelty towards populations that they acquire control over (even when these may have initially welcomed them, as some Sunni Arabs in Iraq did). Another weakness of the Sunni jihadists is that there are serious rivalries within the movement (such as that between Al Qaeda and Islamic State), as well as a lack of agreement over which enemies to focus on (the US and its non-Muslim allies?, Russia?, Shi'as?, Sunni governments?, Sunni groups or individuals whom they deem insufficiently religious?).

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18 Michael Rubin, "Who Is Responsible for the Taliban?". The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 2002, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/who-is-responsible-for-the-taliban>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

19 Carlotta Gall, "Pakistan's Hand in the Rise of International Jihad". *The New York Times*, 6 February 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/opinion/sunday/pakistans-hand-in-the-rise-of-international-jihad.html>, last accessed 4 May 2017.

## AMERICA'S ALLIES

The fact that America has so many allies in so many different parts of the world means that it likewise has many partners with which to confront mutual adversaries. The problem with this, however, is that America and its allies often differ when it comes to prioritizing who they regard as adversaries. While America has five principal adversaries that it often has difficulty in ranking from most to least threatening, many of America's allies have just one or two main adversaries and regard the others either as lesser threats, or as posing no threat at all. In addition – and awkwardly for Washington – some American allies regard other American allies as threats. Finally, where an American ally is located geographically plays a major role in determining how it prioritizes adversaries.

Many European states bordering or near Russia regard it as their principal adversary, but there are some – such as Italy and Greece – that do not have the same threat perception of Moscow that America and many other European governments have.<sup>20</sup> Sunni jihadists, especially in the form of ISIS, are also of great concern in Europe.<sup>21</sup> While North Korea is recognized as constituting a threat in its neighbourhood, it is not seen as posing a direct threat to Europe. Finally, in Europe as a whole, China and Iran are regarded more as trade partners than threats.

In the Middle East, by contrast, the prioritization of adversaries by America's allies is quite different. The Israeli and the Gulf Arab governments see Iran as their primary adversary, and Sunni jihadists as a secondary one. The Egyptian, Algerian, and other Arab governments in countries more distant from Iran, where there are very few Shi'as, see Sunni jihadists as their main adversary, and Iran as only a secondary concern (if that). Like its European allies, America's Middle East allies do not see China as an adversary, but primarily as a trade partner. And unlike most of America's European allies, its Middle Eastern ones do not see Russia as an adversary either, but as a potential partner, if not an actual one. North Korea is of somewhat greater concern in the Middle

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20 In a study supported by the European People's Party Group in the European Parliament, the Czech-based European Values Think Tank classified the 28 EU member states into different categories based on how they "react to Russian aggression" ranging from fourteen (divided into three groups) that are "clearly concerned" about Russia to three deemed "Kremlin-friendly" (Greece, Italy, Cyprus). The study did not make a similar assessment of the extent to which, or even whether, EU member states regard China, North Korea, Iran, or Sunni jihadists as threats. Jakub Janda et al., "How Do European Democracies React to Russian Aggression?". European Values Think Tank Kremlin Watch Report, Prague, 22 April 2017, <http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/How-do-European-democracies-react-to-Russian-aggression-1.pdf>, last accessed 5 May 2017.

21 "Europeans Agree ISIS Is a Top Threat". Pew Research Center, 10 June 2016, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/13/europeans-see-isis-climate-change-as-most-serious-threats/epw-all-major-threats-web-version/>, last accessed 8 May 2017.

East than it is in Europe because of its missile sales to Iran. But just as with Europe, North Korea itself is not considered a direct threat in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

Some US allies in the Middle East regard other parties still as adversaries. Israel, of course, considers the Palestinians to be adversaries. They, however, pose little or no direct threat to the US, and are only a concern to Washington inasmuch as they are considered a threat by its Israeli ally. The Erdogan government in Turkey sees itself facing a number of adversaries, including the Kurds, Sunni jihadists, its erstwhile Gulenist allies, Iran to some extent, Russia, the EU, and America.<sup>23</sup> Given the mercurial nature of Turkey's increasingly authoritarian leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, it is not clear whether Turkey will remain an American ally or become anyone else's.

In Asia, many of America's allies consider China to be either their principal adversary, or one of their main ones. Such states include Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, India, and Australia. For India, Pakistan – and the Sunni jihadists it supports – are also serious adversaries. For Japan, North Korea is also a serious adversary, while Russia has often been a cause for concern. Sunni jihadists are not much of a concern for Japan, Taiwan, or Vietnam, but they are for Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and others. Pakistan and the Philippines are American allies that have befriended China – Pakistan because of their common rivalry with India, and the Philippines due to the current president's apparent hope of appeasing China while at the same time motivating the US to do more to please him for fear of losing the Philippines to China. While Pakistan has been supportive of Sunni jihadists operating in Afghanistan and Kashmir, Pakistan also faces an internal Sunni jihadist threat. With the exception of Pakistan on occasion, Asian states do not see Iran as an adversary.<sup>24</sup>

North Korea is the primary adversary of one state only: South Korea. Seoul has sought to isolate Pyongyang through befriending the latter's main supporter, China, as well as its lesser one, Russia (although it is wary of both to the extent that they help North

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22 W. Andrew Terrill, *Arab Threat Perceptions and the Future of the US Military Presence in the Middle East*. US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, October 2015, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1297.pdf>, last accessed 5 May 2017. See also Michael Herzog, "Iran Still Looms Large in Israel's Threat Perception". The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 15 July 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iran-still-looms-large-in-israels-threat-perception>, last accessed 5 May 2017.

23 Murat Yetkin, "Turkey's Foreign Relations after the Referendum". *Hurriyet Daily News*, 5 April 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-foreign-relations-after-the-referendum.aspx?pageID=449&nID=111628&NewsCatID=409>, last accessed 5 May 2017. See also Robert Pearson, "Turkey's EU Crisis". *The Cipher Brief*, 24 March 2017, <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/article/europe/turkeys-eu-crisis-1093>, last accessed 31 May 2017.

24 For overall assessments of the complicated security situation in the Asia-Pacific region, see Ashley J. Tellis et al., eds., *Strategic Asia 2015-16: Foundations of National Power in the Asia-Pacific*, National Bureau of Asian Research, Seattle and Washington, DC, 2015, and Ashley J. Tellis et al., eds., *Strategic Asia 2016-17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific*, National Bureau of Asian Research, Seattle and Washington, DC, 2016.

Korea).<sup>25</sup> South Korea does not face a significant Sunni jihadist threat, and sees Iran as an economic partner.

The problem with different American allies prioritizing different adversaries differently is that their actions tend to undermine each other's (as well as America's). For example, the American and European efforts to change Russian behaviour regarding Ukraine and Europe generally by imposing economic sanctions have been undermined by the willingness of Israel and certain Gulf Arab states to expand their economic ties to Russia. Similarly, Gulf Arab and Israeli efforts to isolate Iran have been undermined by European and Asian willingness to do business with Tehran.<sup>26</sup> Virtually everyone's – including America's – willingness to (and indeed dependence on) trade with China undermines efforts to contain the security threat Beijing poses in its immediate neighbourhood. Some believe that America's desire to continue cooperating with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan has led Washington to ignore how much support for Sunni jihadists originates in these two countries in particular.<sup>27</sup> The international community has imposed sanctions on North Korea in response to its nuclear weapons programme, but these have been undermined both by insufficiently strenuous application and by collaboration with corrupt networks in China and elsewhere that help North Korea evade them.<sup>28</sup>

The differing prioritization of adversaries by America's many allies affects how America itself can prioritize and respond to them. But so too does the prioritization of adversaries by the adversaries themselves.

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25 Scott A. Snyder et al., "The Korean Pivot: Seoul's Strategic Choices and Rising Rivalries in Northeast Asia". Council on Foreign Relations, February 2017, [https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2017/01/Discussion\\_Paper\\_Snyder\\_Draudt\\_Park\\_Korean\\_Pivot\\_OR.pdf](https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2017/01/Discussion_Paper_Snyder_Draudt_Park_Korean_Pivot_OR.pdf), last accessed 5 May 2017.

26 "Iran's Foreign Trade Booming". *Financial Tribune*, 4 May 2017, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/63277/iran-s-foreign-trade-booming>, last accessed 5 May 2017. "Trade with China Up 70% under Rouhani Administration". *Financial Tribune*, 4 May 2017, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/63661/trade-with-china-up-70-under-rouhani-administration>, last accessed 5 May 2017.

27 Clint Watts, "America's Counterterrorism Allies: What Are They Good For?". *Lawfare*, 30 October 2016, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/americas-counterterrorism-allies-what-are-they-good>, last accessed 5 May 2017.

28 Elina Sinkkonen, "Waiting Is Not an Option: The North Korean Threat Increases as the Country Advances its Nuclear and Missile Programmes". FIIA Comment, April 2017, [http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/676/waiting\\_is\\_not\\_an\\_option/](http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/676/waiting_is_not_an_option/), last accessed 5 May 2017.

## THE ADVERSARIES' ADVERSARIES

### America and its allies

It goes without saying that each of America's adversaries likewise considers America to be its adversary. There are, however, three main ways in which they consider the US to pose a threat. First, of course, is the fact that America's powerful military serves to constrain the military options of each of the adversaries. As Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea do not actually want to fight a war with the US, the US military serves as a deterrent to actions on their part that might lead to one. Nonetheless, several of these adversaries have not been averse to undertaking military action either where they are sure that the US will not respond militarily, or perhaps to test whether it will. Examples of this include Russian military action against neighbouring states (Georgia and Ukraine) that the US and its allies have not committed themselves to defend; Chinese efforts to secure control over contested waters in the South China Sea; and Iranian support for Iraqi Shi'a militias that have fought against US forces.<sup>29</sup> While the US military has not deterred hostile action on the part of various Sunni jihadist groups, the direct American use of force and support for its allies has imposed heavy costs on them which have limited their ability, if not their willingness, to expand their reach or to sustain it where it has expanded. On the other hand, as powerful as US military forces are, they and their allies have clearly not succeeded in defeating the Sunni jihadists.<sup>30</sup>

Second, America and some (albeit not all) of its allies pose a threat to its adversaries to the extent that the populations the latter control (or hope to control) see them as providing more attractive political and economic models that they would like to emulate. In other words, America's soft power is a threat to America's adversaries. This "threat", however, emanates not just from the "push" of US government democratization efforts (which are not always successful, as the attempts by the George W. Bush and the Obama administrations to promote democratization in the Middle East demonstrated), but from the "pull" of people dissatisfied with life under the rule of authoritarian governments, or movements coveting the lifestyle exemplified by America and many of its allies. Fearing this "pull" factor, America's adversaries often prefer to maintain hostile, or at least distant, relations with the US for fear that good relations would allow for more interaction between their societies and those in America and other democracies that could strengthen their own internal democratic opponents. The leaders of some of America's adversaries appear convinced that any democratic opposition activity inside their own borders is somehow organized and orchestrated by the US, such as when Putin famously blamed the large-scale demonstrations against him in Russia in 2011–12

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29 On Russian, Chinese, and Iranian probing activity, see Jakub J. Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerable Allies, and the Crisis of American Power*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2016.

30 Erik W. Goepner, "Measuring the Effectiveness of America's War on Terror". *Parameters*, vol. 46, no. 1, Spring 2016, [https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/issues/Spring\\_2016/13\\_Goepner.pdf](https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/issues/Spring_2016/13_Goepner.pdf), last accessed 5 May 2017.



as having resulted from a “signal” given by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.<sup>31</sup> This factor in particular limits the willingness of America’s adversaries to engage in rapprochements with the US.

Third, what often aggravates America’s adversaries is not so much America itself as the fact that America is allied with nations that they have much more hostile relations with – and which America’s adversaries would have far greater leverage over if America were not allied to them. Iran, for example, has highly adversarial relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia, as does China with Japan and India, Russia with Ukraine and Georgia, and North Korea with South Korea. In other words, in the eyes of America’s adversaries, some of America’s allies may be considered just as, if not more, adversarial than the US itself.

On occasion, some American adversaries have actually held out the prospect of improved ties with the US if Washington were to distance itself from certain of its allies. Moscow, for example, seems to nurture the hope that the US and Russia can make an agreement between themselves about demarcating spheres of influence in Europe in particular.<sup>32</sup> What North Korea really seems to want from the US is an American withdrawal from South Korea – and hence it praised Trump when he called for this during the 2016 presidential campaign.<sup>33</sup> China would see America in a much more positive light if Washington were to end its security commitments to Taiwan.<sup>34</sup> America’s allies understandably worry that Washington might be tempted by such offers. Of greater concern to America’s allies, however, is when Washington itself undertakes efforts to improve relations with common adversaries. During the Obama years, a tacit alliance emerged between Israel and some of the Arab Gulf states jointly concerned that Obama’s outreach to Iran would lead to diminished American commitment to them.<sup>35</sup> Similarly,

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31 David M. Herszenhorn and Ellen Barry, “Putin Contends Clinton Incited Unrest over Vote”. *The New York Times*, 8 December 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/09/world/europe/putin-accuses-clinton-of-instigating-russian-protests.html>, last accessed 5 May 2017.

32 Fiona Hill, “This Is What Putin Really Wants”. *The National Interest*, 24 February 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-putin-really-wants-12311>, last accessed 5 May 2015.

33 “North Korea Praises Trump and Urges US Voters to Reject ‘Dull Hillary’”. *The Guardian*, 1 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/31/north-korea-praises-trump-and-urges-us-voters-to-reject-dull-hillary>, last accessed 5 May 2017.

34 On Chinese efforts to persuade other countries, especially America, to accommodate its demands on Taiwan and other issues, see Kai He, “China’s Bargaining Strategies for a Peaceful Accommodation after the Cold War”, in T.V. Paul ed., *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 200–220.

35 Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky, “Israel’s Relations with the Gulf States: Toward the Emergence of a Tacit Security Regime?”. *Contemporary Security Policy*, published online 20 February 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2017.1292375>, last accessed 7 May 2017.

after Trump was elected, some European allies were concerned that the new president might be willing to make a deal with Putin detrimental to their interests.<sup>36</sup>

## Internal opponents

America's adversaries also face a variety of internal opponents. Some of these, as noted earlier, are democrats who are pro-Western, but these are not necessarily their only internal opponents. Some espouse authoritarian nationalist and/or religious ideologies that seek to replace an existing authoritarian regime with one of a different sort. Whether democratic or non-democratic, secessionist nationalist movements are also active within several of America's adversaries. Beijing seems especially sensitive to the question of Taiwan formally declaring itself independent from China for fear that this will have a demonstration effect in other parts of China, such as Tibet and Xinjiang. Beijing fears that American support for Taiwan would make what China regards as a catastrophic scenario more likely.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Tehran fears secessionist nationalism among several groups along its frontiers, such as the Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and Baluchis. American support for the Kurds in both Iraq and Syria heightens this concern.<sup>38</sup> Post-Soviet Russia has already fought off two armed independence struggles in Chechnya, and secessionist sentiment continues there as well as elsewhere in the predominantly Muslim regions of Russia. Putin, of course, is certain that America is encouraging this, and seems unaware that his own support for secession from Georgia and Ukraine might encourage those seeking it from Russia as well.<sup>39</sup> The Sunni jihadists have been plagued by national and sub-national rivalries within their ranks, which the Islamist ideology was intended to help overcome through fostering a common identity, but at which it has often failed at.<sup>40</sup>

## One another

Last but not least, America's adversaries can also be one another's adversaries. Russia, Iran, and China all fear Sunni jihadist activity directed against them. Each faces an

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36 Natalie Nougayrède, "With Trump and Putin, Europe is Now between a Rock and a Hard Place". *The Guardian*, 7 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/07/trump-putin-europe-rock-hard-place-exploit-eu-cracks-solidarity>, last accessed 7 May 2017.

37 Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, "How China Sees America: The Sum of Beijing's Fears". *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 5, September–October 2012, pp. 32–47.

38 Alex Vatanka, "Why Iran Fears an Independent Kurdistan". *The National Interest*, 25 July 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-iran-fears-independent-kurdistan-10950>, last accessed 8 May 2017.

39 Paul Goble, "How Putin Unwittingly Revived Secessionist Talk across Russia". *Window on Eurasia – New Series*, 5 March 2017, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.fi/2017/03/how-putin-unwittingly-revived.html>, last accessed 8 May 2017.

40 Anne Stenersen, "Arab and Non-Arab Jihadis", in Assaf Moghaddam and Brian Fishman, *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al-Qa'ida and its Periphery*, Harmony Project/Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 16 December 2010, pp. 132–154.

internal threat from such forces (disaffected Muslims in Russia, Sunnis in Iran, and Uighurs and other groups in China), as well as their linkages to external jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State. Many Russians are concerned about the growing economic and military power of China as well as Russia's growing dependence on it because of Moscow's deteriorating relationship with America and the West.<sup>41</sup> Iran has had security concerns about Russia in the past, and the two countries have sometimes worked at cross-purposes despite their common support for the Assad regime, as well as antipathy towards America.<sup>42</sup> An open debate in the Chinese press is ongoing over whether North Korea is an ally or a liability for China.<sup>43</sup>

Yet while America's adversaries sometimes exhibit serious differences among themselves, there have nonetheless been instances of cooperation between them. As noted above, Russia and Iran cooperate closely in Syria despite their past and present disagreements. Russia and China also cooperate closely despite their differences. While Russia and Iran both claim to be fighting against Sunni jihadist forces that also threaten America and its allies, both of them reportedly cooperate with the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> Just as America's allies often make clearer priorities among their adversaries than America does, so do America's adversaries. Moreover, to the extent that America's adversaries likewise regard one another as adversaries, their prioritization appears to be America first and one another second.

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41 David Tweed, "Why Putin Fears China". Bloomberg, 16 February 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-15/putin-fearing-russian-subservience-to-china-casts-wider-asia-net>, last accessed 8 May 2017.

42 Mahan Abedin, "Tensions in Russia-Iran Ties". *Middle East Monitor*, 3 April 2017, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170403-tensions-in-russia-iran-ties/>, last accessed 8 May 2017.

43 Chris Buckley, "Criticism of Beijing's North Korea Policy Comes from Unlikely Place: China". *The New York Times*, 18 April 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/world/asia/china-north-korea-war.html>, last accessed 8 May 2017.

44 Ahmad Majidiyar, "Iran and Russia Team Up with Taliban to Undermine U.S.-led Mission in Afghanistan." Middle East Institute, 24 March 2017, <http://www.mei.edu/content/io/iran-and-russia-team-taliban-undermine-us-led-mission-afghanistan>, last accessed 8 May 2017.

## DEALING WITH THE DILEMMA

How can the US deal with these five separate adversaries simultaneously? What follows are not specific policy prescriptions, but guidelines to be kept in mind in formulating policy.

Whereas many of America's allies focus primarily on one or two adversaries of special concern to each of them, while either disregarding the others or even regarding them as partners, the US must be alert to all of its adversaries simultaneously. But as the experience of each post-Cold War administration has shown, this is no mean feat as there is an inherent (and highly understandable) tendency to focus on the one that appears to be the most threatening at any given time. America focusing on just one (or even none) of its adversaries, however, provides opportunities for the others to benefit from Washington's distraction elsewhere.

When one adversary appears especially threatening, the US understandably seeks to prevent it from becoming stronger and to weaken it. But while pursuing this goal, the US must be alert to how weakening one adversary may strengthen another, and how defeating or eliminating any one adversary may do this even more dramatically. The American overthrow of Saddam Hussein, for example, unintentionally led to increased Iranian influence in Iraq. American efforts to defeat ISIS in Syria are highly laudable, but the elimination of ISIS in Syria may well result in strengthening Russian and Iranian influence there, unless the US can take steps to prevent this.

Sometimes one or more of America's adversaries also develop hostile relations with each other. When this occurs, the US needs to be alert to opportunities for taking advantage of differences between its adversaries. The US cannot manufacture such differences (as the Trump administration seemed to think it could between Russia and Iran), however; they have to develop on their own. On the other hand, the US needs to be ready to take advantage of such differences if and when they arise. Blind adherence to a "worst case" analysis mindset, which insists that America's adversaries are always closely allied to each other and that disputes between them are somehow contrived in order to "lull us into complacency", risks backfiring through influencing adversaries to become or remain allied with each other due to their being more afraid of the common "American threat" than of one another.

Some US administrations have undertaken humanitarian or peacekeeping interventions, such as the first Bush and Clinton administrations in Somalia, the Clinton administration in Haiti and the former Yugoslavia, and the Obama administration in Libya. US administrations which have done this have seen (or were responding to American public opinion seeing) them as idealistic efforts outside the arena of great-power rivalry, or even as opportunities for the US to improve relations with one or more adversaries through the pursuit of what is believed by America and at least some of its allies to be the common good. America's adversaries, however, do not see US-led humanitarian interventions in such terms, but rather as cynical moves by the US to justify its own great-power ambitions through falsely claiming to undertake them for humanitarian reasons. Whatever the advisability of America undertaking humanitarian interventions, the US government needs to understand that when its adversaries see them as part of their ongoing rivalry with the US, they will seek to undermine them. Further, to the extent that America's adversaries do not distinguish between American interventions

undertaken for humanitarian purposes and those undertaken to advance its national security aims, US administrations need to be alert to how successful and (more usually) unsuccessful humanitarian interventions impact adversary perceptions about US willingness to undertake interventions to advance its national security aims.

One way that several US administrations have sought to reduce the number of America's adversaries is through engaging in rapprochements with them. Past cases in which the US has done this include the Nixon administration with Moscow and Beijing; the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations with Cairo; the Reagan and first Bush administrations with Moscow; the Clinton administration with Hanoi; the second Bush administration with Libya's Gaddafi; and (at least to some extent) the Obama administration with Tehran and Havana. Rapprochements, however, cannot be brought about by the US unilaterally; the adversary also has to have a strong motivation to seek rapprochement with the US. Having a common adversary (such as the USSR was for America and China in the early 1970s, or China has been for America and Vietnam more recently) can serve as a strong basis for rapprochement, as can a new leadership's increased focus on economic development combined with an understanding that this is best achieved through cooperation with the West (as was the case with both Gorbachev and Yeltsin at the end of the Cold War, and Raul Castro more recently). Nevertheless, it must be recognized that rapprochements do not always last, and can come to an end if the initial joint motivation is no longer present (in that the common threat is no longer common or no longer a threat), or through changing leadership priorities (such as the way in which Putin's priorities diverged from those of his two predecessors vis-à-vis the West).

Further, the US must be sensitive to its allies' reactions to American rapprochement efforts with adversaries. At the very least, it must not be assumed that they will see such rapprochements as being as beneficial as Washington does. By not "bringing the allies on board", Washington risks some of them acting to undermine the rapprochement effort, or possibly even moving away from the US and towards one of its adversaries.

Understanding that there are often differing threat perceptions between the US and some of its allies, as well as between allies, does not just relate to the question of rapprochement efforts, but also to how to respond to America's and its allies' adversaries in general. The first thing that needs to be recognized is that there are always likely to be differences, not just in how to prioritize these adversaries but even in identifying them. Not all of America's allies see all of America's adversaries as their adversaries. Similarly, not all of the allies' adversaries are America's – and Washington should resist uncritically accepting certain of its allies' insistence that they are – especially in those cases where US allies see each other as adversaries.

Beyond this, there are two other ways in which America can work with different allies against different adversaries. One is to coordinate responses against each adversary with those allies that also have such a priority: mainly European states vis-à-vis Russia, mainly Middle Eastern states vis-à-vis Iran, mainly Asian states vis-à-vis China, and governments in several regions vis-à-vis Sunni jihadists. The US, of course, has already been doing this. Regarding NATO in particular, however, Washington needs to recognize that while many of its members prioritize Russia as an adversary, there are some that do not. The US, then, needs to work closely with those NATO members (as well as non-NATO ones such as Finland and Sweden) that do prioritize Russia, while not expecting those NATO members that do not (such as Italy and Greece) to contribute to this effort.

On the other hand, America can work with Italy and Greece (as well as many other NATO members) on countering the Sunni jihadist threat, which they do prioritize.

But in addition to cooperating with those allies that likewise prioritize a particular adversary, the US also needs to coordinate efforts among allies with different priorities, so that policies undercutting one another are minimized, if not eliminated. This might best be done via informal consultation between the US, on the one hand, and allies prioritizing different adversaries whose policies have the greatest potential impact on one another. In addition to the US, these consultations should include allies that prioritize each of America's five main adversaries, if only to ensure that each is sensitized to the concerns of the others.

Yet while a forum discussing all five adversaries would be useful for discussing how various allies might best avoid undercutting each other's actions, it might be too unwieldy to come up with common policies that would be effective vis-à-vis all five main adversaries. More fruitful in this regard might be meetings between two sets of allies, such as those most concerned about Russia and those most concerned about Iran. The obvious sort of agreement that could be pursued is one in which America's allies most concerned with Russia and those most concerned with Iran either collaborate in working together against both, or at least minimize the extent to which they are working at cross purposes with each other. Those most concerned about Sunni jihadists might work with others to minimize the extent to which actions undertaken to weaken the former do not end up strengthening others (such as Russia or Iran).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The working assumption throughout this paper has been that, irrespective of the difficulties in dealing with multiple adversaries simultaneously, as well as managing relations with multiple allies that often have differing interests, the US will continue to act as the leader in this endeavour, just as it has since World War II. But when Trump's behaviour at the May 2017 NATO and G-7 summits intensified rather than allayed the growing doubts about his commitment to working with America's allies, German Chancellor Angela Merkel subsequently stated, "The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over. I've experienced that in the last few days. We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands".<sup>45</sup> Her statement not only has possible implications for the future of European-American relations, but also for the entire American project of managing multiple adversaries simultaneously in cooperation with its multiple allies. For if the sentiments expressed by Merkel about being unable to "completely depend on others" (i.e., the US) become widespread among America's allies around the world or, worse, become intensified as a result of further statements by Trump causing them to doubt America's commitment to them, this could have grave consequences.

To the extent that they see America's alliances as fraying, America's various adversaries might seize upon this as an opportunity to behave even more aggressively than they are currently doing. At a time when they are harbouring doubts about America's commitment to them, many of its allies could find dealing with these adversaries quite challenging. Some of the allies, however, may be able to rise to the challenge. After Merkel's statement, American scholar Stephen M. Walt not only noted that "it would be highly desirable if Europe did take more responsibility for its own security," but further observed that "NATO's European members spend more than four times more than Russia does on defense every year, and Russia's long-term prospects are gloomy as its population shrinks and ages and as oil and gas become less and less important in the global economy".<sup>46</sup>

Not all of America's allies may be as capable of dealing with their various adversaries as Walt sees Europe being with regard to Russia. But even if they are, they will face two problems in doing so without America's leadership. First, since nations are not equal in power and resources, regional powers may have to take on more of the role that America has played in leading the response to regional challenges. However, it is unclear whether the states in some regions would be as willing to accept leadership from their most powerful state (Germany in Europe, Japan in Asia) in the same way that they have accepted leadership from America up to now. Moreover, in other regions (most notably the Middle East), there may be no state powerful enough to play this role.

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45 John Henley, "Angela Merkel: EU Cannot Completely Rely on US and Britain Any More". *The Guardian*, 28 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/28/merkel-says-eu-cannot-completely-rely-on-us-and-britain-any-more-g7-talks>, last accessed 31 May 2017.

46 Stephen M. Walt, "In Praise of a Transatlantic Divorce". *Foreign Policy*, 30 May 2017, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/30/in-praise-of-a-transatlantic-divorce-trump-merkel-europe-nato/?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm\\_term=Flashpoints](https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/30/in-praise-of-a-transatlantic-divorce-trump-merkel-europe-nato/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=Flashpoints), last accessed 1 June 2017.

Second, even if the problem of regional leadership can be resolved (and even more so if it cannot), the absence of America as a global alliance leader will exacerbate the tendency for groups of allied states in various regions to focus on the threats of most concern to them, and not those of most concern in other regions. Additionally, to the extent that America's allies in various regions are so concerned about the most immediate threat they face that they reach out for assistance from the adversary of most concern in others (such as, for example, the Gulf Arabs concerned about Iran reaching out to Russia for help), significant friction among states that are now America's allies could be created.

This only underscores the fact that the most important ingredient for responding to an international environment where there are multiple threats is that the alliance relationships America has built up in various parts of the world be continued and even strengthened. This is something that will not just happen automatically, but will only come about through concerted efforts on the part of policymakers who understand the importance of this task (especially in countries where there are some that do not) for both America and for its many allies.