

**House Foreign Affairs Committee | Europe Subcommittee**  
**Hearing on “Hybrid Warfare in Europe Against US Interests:**  
**Moscow and Beijing’s Playbook”**

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**Introduction**

Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on a threat landscape that strikes at the foundations of US national security and undermines American strategic influence: Russia’s broad-spectrum warfare across Europe, and China’s pivotal enabling role in sustaining and amplifying these efforts.

It is an honor to address you, and I should note that the views expressed in this testimony do not reflect those of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) or its staff and fellows.

Today, I will focus on several critical points that relate to the ways Russia’s multidimensional form of warfare—reinforced by China’s economic, technological, informational, and diplomatic support—is designed to constrain America’s ability to lead, deter, and compete globally.

This is not an abstract challenge. It is a systemic assault on free societies that is being waged by ambitious dictatorships which themselves deny their own people basic freedoms. The principles by which the authoritarians operate should be understood as stemming from an ideological posture that “privileges state power over individual liberty and is fundamentally hostile to free expression, open debate, and independent thought.” This posture is at direct odds with the values and interests of the United States and other free societies.

For its part, domestically the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses extensive state power to suppress dissent. Abroad, where the possibility for such direct coercion is more limited, Beijing relies on educational, cultural, media, and other overseas platforms to extend its influence within open societies. Such initiatives are not benign. Instead, more often than not they are “accompanied by an authoritarian determination to monopolize ideas, suppress alternative narratives, and exploit partner institutions”. This is an exertion of sharp power that frequently involves inducements to censorship and manipulation to degrade the integrity of independent institutions.<sup>1</sup> China and Russia together represent among the world’s most repressive censorship regimes; they seek by their nature to eliminate free speech domestically and export the tools to do so abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> “Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence,” National Endowment for Democracy, December 5, 2017, <https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report/>. See also, “China seeks a world order that defers to states and their rulers,” The Economist, October 10, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2022/10/10/china-seeks-a-world-order-that-defers-to-states-and-their-rulers?>

Today's leading authoritarian powers are internationalists. The authorities in Russia and China—increasingly working in concert with a networked grouping of like-minded autocratic regimes—have strong ideas about the way the world should be organized, and they are operationalizing their ambitions with purpose. We should not underestimate the velocity of change or the depth of purpose with which these authoritarian powers are proceeding. A report CEPA released in November 2025 titled “War Without End: Russia’s Shadow Warfare” puts the threat into context and dissects the logic that underpins Moscow’s progressively brazen approach.

“War Without End” observes that “the Kremlin’s overriding concern is not Russian national security, but the survival and continuation of the current regime—or, rather, the Kremlin’s worldview is incapable of distinguishing between the two”. It adds that “Russia’s shadow warfare is not simply a covert strategy, developed to take advantage of Western soft spots or fecklessness. Rather, it is the reflection of a deeper ideological and institutional logic, a neo-Stalinist threat framework that sees warfare as continuous and ubiquitous, that fuses domestic and foreign threats, and that understands everything and everyone as a potential target”.

Critically, the report argues that Russia’s leadership already believes that it is at war with the West, even if many western democracies still do not see it this way. The Kremlin, moreover, does not compartmentalize the various wars it is prosecuting; it views its full-scale war on Ukraine and its shadow warfare in Europe as two, linked fronts in the same, wider conflict against the West.<sup>2</sup>

Another CEPA report, released this month—“The Hybrid Threat Imperative: Deterring Russia Before it is Too Late”—observes that “the turning point in global awareness of Russia’s hybrid strategy came with its 2014 annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine”.<sup>3</sup> This point is an important reminder that Moscow has been waging a far longer-term effort to subvert the western alliance that is best understood as one of imperial ambition. As with the leadership in Beijing, top decision makers in Moscow see no clear line between war and peace. Under Vladimir Putin, Moscow’s wide-ranging sub-threshold aggression across Europe is bound to continue, even if a cessation to hostilities may be achieved in Ukraine.

For the purposes of this testimony, I will focus in the first instance on Russia’s shadow warfare, a crucial dimension of Moscow’s playbook that represents a concerted campaign of kinetic attacks designed to degrade an adversary without provoking a military reprisal. Then, I will turn to China’s role as muscular enabler and crucial champion of Russia’s activities. Finally, I will touch on the larger implications of what might be understood as a deepening “shared consciousness” between the leaderships in Moscow and Beijing.

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<sup>2</sup> Sam Greene, Andrei Soldatov, and Irina Borogan, *War Without End: Russia’s Shadow Warfare*, Comprehensive Report, Center for European Policy Analysis, November 19, 2025. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/war-without-end-russias-shadow-warfare/>

<sup>3</sup> Eityvydas Bajarūnas, *The Hybrid Threat Imperative: Deterring Russia Before It Is Too Late*, Comprehensive Report, Center for European Policy Analysis, December 2, 2025. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/the-hybrid-threat-imperative-deterring-russia-before-it-is-too-late/>

## Russia's Shadow Warfare

Russia's shadow warfare aims to weaken US power and has the effect of undermining US military preparedness. Russia's leadership understands that, at least for the time being, it cannot fight Europe directly, so it pursues shadow war, which tests "the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, to destabilize societies and governments" and provokes reactions designed to undermine national, European, and transatlantic unity and institutions.<sup>4</sup>

Our research makes clear that Russia does not view conflict through a binary war–peace lens. Instead, Moscow operates in a constant state of confrontation, using shadow warfare to manipulate, coerce, and destabilize targeted states without triggering a conventional military response. Moscow's covert, deniable, and often difficult to attribute operations are executed by Russian intelligence services, proxies, criminal networks, and state-controlled enterprises to shape strategic outcomes while obscuring direct state involvement.

Russia's shadow warfare campaign in Europe has intensified in recent weeks. In November, Polish authorities described an explosion on the Warsaw–Lublin rail corridor—a vital artery for transporting military aid to Ukraine—as a deliberate act of suspected Russian sabotage.<sup>5</sup> Days later, a Russian drone penetrated Romanian airspace during a large-scale Russian strike on western Ukraine, triggering a scramble of German and Romanian fighter jets.<sup>6</sup> Belgium has also faced a surge of drone incursions in recent weeks, including three UAVs detected over a nuclear power plant near the Port of Antwerp<sup>7</sup> and separate sightings that forced the temporary closure of Brussels and Liège airports.<sup>8</sup> Just days after the railway explosion in Poland, a Russian intelligence vessel reappeared off the U.K. coast for the second time this year, directing lasers at RAF pilots monitoring its movement.<sup>9</sup> And earlier this month, a group of military-style drones breached Ireland's no-fly zone, flying toward the flight path of President Zelenskyy's aircraft as it approached Dublin International Airport.<sup>10</sup> Russia uses its toolkit to achieve four core objectives, which have the effect of undermining US interests.

First, Undermining NATO Cohesion Through Covert and Deniable Operations. CEPA's assessments show that Russia employs shadow tactics specifically to target cohesion—the essential ingredient of NATO deterrence. These tactics include:

- Sabotage operations against ammunition depots, energy pipelines, rail nodes, and ports—often timed to appear as accidents.
- Clandestine reconnaissance by GRU units posing as tourists, students, or businesspeople in frontline states.

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<sup>4</sup> Marija Golubeva, "Awake But Groggy: Europe's Shadow Warfare Guardians," *CEPA*, November 19, 2025. <https://cepa.org/article/awake-but-groggy-europes-shadow-warfare-guardians/>

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, "Polish Railway Track Blast an 'Unprecedented Act of Sabotage,' PM Says," Reuters, November 17, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/explosion-polish-railway-track-was-caused-by-sabotage-pm-says-2025-11-17>

<sup>6</sup> Ellie Cook and Shane Croucher, "NATO Fighter Jets Scrambled After Russian Drone Breaches Airspace," *Newsweek*, November 19, 2025. <https://www.newsweek.com/nato-fighter-jets-russia-drone-strikes-izmail-ukraine-romania-air-force-2093473>

<sup>7</sup> Robin Emmott, "Drones Spotted Near Belgium Nuclear Plant in Latest Airspace Incursions," *Politico Europe*, November 4, 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/drones-spotted-belgium-nuclear-plant-does-airspace-incursions/>

<sup>8</sup> Reuters, "Brussels, Liège Airports Closed for Hours Due to Drone Sightings," *Reuters*, November 5, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/brussels-airport-closed-after-reported-sighting-drone-2025-11-04/>

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, "U.K. Says Military Options Ready After Russian Ship Uses Lasers Against RAF Pilots," *Reuters*, November 19, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk-says-military-options-ready-russian-ship-uses-lasers-against-raf-pilots-2025-11-19/>

<sup>10</sup> Reuters, "Drones Were Spotted Near Zelenskyy Flight Path to Dublin, Irish Media Report," *Reuters*, December 4, 2025.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/drones-were-spotted-near-zelenskyy-flight-path-dublin-irish-media-report-2025-12-04/>

- Intimidation of bilateral partners through mysterious fires, infrastructure disruptions, and unexplained explosions.
- Use of deniable proxies—such as Wagner remnants, criminal networks, or extremist groups—to conduct operations Moscow wishes to keep at arm’s length.

These activities weaken public trust, sow doubt about NATO’s ability to defend frontline states, and create the perception that escalation risks are too high for allies to maintain unity. It is worth noting that despite these persistent efforts to undermine NATO, 68% of Americans hold a favorable view of NATO, according to recent surveys.<sup>11</sup>

For the United States, erosion of allied confidence represents a dangerous threat. NATO’s effectiveness—and US credibility—rests on the belief that the alliance can act collectively. Shadow warfare is designed to corrode that belief from within. On this count, the 2025 US National Security Strategy rightly observes that the US “will need a strong Europe to help [the US] successfully compete, and to work in concert with [the US] to prevent any adversary from dominating Europe.

Second, Targeting Critical Infrastructure Vital to US Force Projection. CEPA’s work highlights how Russia increasingly uses shadow tactics to probe, target, and degrade European infrastructure essential to US military operations, including:

- Rail and port facilities that support US troop deployments.
- Energy systems powering bases.
- Dual-use shipping hubs.
- Undersea data cables linking the US and Europe.
- Logistical networks needed for reinforcement in crisis.

These activities are conducted covertly—often via Russian intelligence cutouts or actors operating from third countries. The strategic effect is clear: make Europe brittle enough that US reinforcements cannot move quickly or reliably in a crisis. This is one of the most direct ways Russian shadow warfare undermines US national security.

Third, Weakening Democratic Governance Through Influence Networks. Russia’s sub-threshold campaigns target democratic institutions openly, but its shadow networks aim at deeper, longer-term penetration. Our research describes a multilayered ecosystem that includes:

- Covert financing of political parties and cultural organizations.
- Long-term cultivation of strategic relationships with political, business, and academic elites.
- Infiltration of diaspora organizations and criminal enterprises used to mask intelligence operations.

These networks distort policy debates and make democratic systems more vulnerable to both Russian and Chinese influence. The US relies on a Europe made up of capable, trustworthy

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<sup>11</sup> Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute, *2025 Reagan National Defense Survey*, Ronald Reagan Institute, accessed December 11, 2025. <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan-institute/centers/peace-through-strength/survey/2025-reagan-national-defense-survey>

democracies. Russian shadow operations—especially those involving covert finance and influence—erode that reliability.

Fourth, Creating Sustained Instability in Europe. CEPA has warned that Russia’s objective is to create a perpetual low-grade crisis environment that forces the United States to devote disproportionate time, resources, and political energy to Europe. Every cyber intrusion, sabotage incident, or disinformation surge forces the US into reactive posture. At the same time, “Europe still faces significant material, logistical, and readiness challenges that could impede its ability to independently deter or defend against a fully mobilized Russian threat without substantial and sustained US support”.<sup>12</sup>

This is not coincidence. It is a strategy. And this is where China’s role becomes especially important.

### **China as a Champion of Russia and Pivotal Enabler of its Ambitions**

At a global level, China is using a web of relationships with other autocratic regimes in order to achieve multiplier effects and more fundamentally to shift the political center of gravity globally in a direction that is more friendly to CCP interests. China functions as a crucial strategic enabler of Russia and Moscow’s shadow warfare. CEPA’S analysis emphasizes that China and Russia increasingly operate in a form of authoritarian alignment.<sup>13</sup>

They do not necessarily share identical worldviews, although their top leadership appears to have shrunk much daylight between them. But they share a common interest: weakening US leadership, fracturing Western unity, and creating strategic paralysis across the democratic world.

On these counts, China strengthens Russia’s shadow warfare in several critical ways. First, through amplifying Russian narratives through a global authoritarian information ecosystem. China frequently mirrors, amplifies, and normalizes Russian propaganda and strategic narratives.

- Chinese state media repeats Russian strategic narratives, helping them reverberate among wider audiences.
- Chinese diplomats circulate Kremlin talking points in Europe and the Global South.<sup>14</sup>
- Overarching messaging portrays US leadership as reckless or destabilizing.

It is worth noting that this engagement in the informational domain plays out in different ways in different settings. In Latin America, for example, collaboration between the Russian and Chinese governments and their regional authoritarian counterparts, such as those in Venezuela and Cuba, enables a multiplier effect on narratives that, among other things,

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<sup>12</sup> Alina Polyakova, Testimony to the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Hearing on “NATO Summit 2025: An Assessment of Transatlantic Security Cooperation,” June 18, 2025.

[https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/cf9a3398-b27d-c49c-5783-20e212fbbc0e/061825\\_Polyakova\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/cf9a3398-b27d-c49c-5783-20e212fbbc0e/061825_Polyakova_Testimony.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> András Rác and Alina Hrytsenko, *Partnership Short of Alliance: Military Cooperation Between Russia and China*, Comprehensive Report, Center for European Policy Analysis, June 16, 2025. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/partnership-short-of-alliance-military-cooperation-between-russia-and-china/>

<sup>14</sup> Tamás Matura, *Sino-Russian Convergence in Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference: A Global Threat to the US and Its Allies*, Comprehensive Report, Center for European Policy Analysis, June 30, 2025. <https://www.cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/sino-russian-convergence-in-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference/>

systematically assail the US, while asserting the ostensible benefits of one-party rule and focusing on the US as being decadent and unreliable.<sup>15</sup>

Russian and Chinese channels cross-promote disinformation about sanctions, NATO, and Western support for Ukraine. This alignment strengthens Russia's capacity to manipulate public opinion and exploit democratic vulnerabilities.

China has invested tens of billions of dollars to influence global public opinion, using tools such as large-scale people-to-people exchanges, extensive cultural programs, and worldwide media operations. Some estimates place its international media spending alone at about \$10 billion. Chinese companies are also working with state institutions on new technologies like generative AI and virtual reality, which could make these influence efforts even more powerful both by bringing them to scale and enabling more targeted and convincing ways to shape how people understand events.<sup>16</sup> Russia is estimated to spend more than \$300 million each year on RT alone, with its total international information efforts reaching about \$1.5 billion.<sup>17</sup>

The cooperation in the information sphere is illustrative of a larger point. As with Russia, China functions as a "keystone" for a grouping of repressive powers that makes the authoritarian whole stronger than any one of its parts. This development represents a top order threat to the United States and other free systems. As Beijing strengthens "its strategic cooperation with countries such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea across the military, technological, and political spheres, the global operating environment is bound to become even less hospitable to US interests".<sup>18</sup>

Beijing also provides technology and components used in Russian shadow operations. Russia's sabotage, cyber activity, and intelligence operations rely heavily on electronics and dual-use tools - many of which now come from China. These include:

- Microchips for weapons and surveillance systems.
- Drones used in reconnaissance and covert action.
- Encrypted communications tools used by Russia's intelligence services.
- Telecommunications infrastructure that creates new espionage vectors.

China's technological support increases Russia's capacity to operate in the shadows—and reduces the effectiveness of Western export controls.

These various forms of support for Russia's operations makes it harder for the US and its allies to impose meaningful costs. Beijing also affords diplomatic cover that shields Russian

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<sup>15</sup> "Deepening the Response to Authoritarian Information Operations in Latin America," National Endowment for Democracy, November 28, 2023. <https://www.ned.org/deepening-the-response-to-authoritarian-information-operations-in-latin-america/>.

<sup>16</sup> Daria Impiombato et al., "Persuasive Technologies in China: Implications for the Future of National Security," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, November 2024. <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/persuasive-technologies-china-implications-future-national-security>.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Walker, "Discourse Power: The CCP's Strategy to Shape the Global Information Space," testimony before the Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, November 30, 2023. <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Discourse-Power-CCP-Strategy-to-Shape-the-Global-Information-Space-Christopher-Walker-testimony-November-2023.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Walker, "*China as the Keystone of a Global Network of Autocracies*," testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission at the hearing "An Axis of Autocracy? China's Relations with Russia, Iran, and North Korea," February 20, 2025. [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2025-02/Christopher\\_Walker\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2025-02/Christopher_Walker_Testimony.pdf)

activity. Among other efforts, Beijing uses its political and diplomatic leverage to blunt Western efforts to expose or punish Russian shadow operations. This includes:

- Weakening UN resolutions condemning Russian activity.
- Pressuring smaller states to avoid siding with the West.
- Reframing US and NATO defensive measures as escalatory.
- Providing Russia with narrative cover for deniable activities.

The result is that Russia gains political space to conduct its activities with fewer risks and fewer consequences.

Russian shadow warfare operations are not isolated incidents. They represent a persistent ecosystem of covert coercion—now strengthened by China’s dedicated and diverse forms of support. Russia and China are reinforcing each other’s efforts. The combined effect of now more mature cooperation between Beijing and Moscow presents daunting challenges for an ever more vulnerable Free World, including weakened Allied cohesion; compromised European stability; an environment in which US force projection becomes harder and riskier, and democratic partners grow more vulnerable to manipulation. This is the strategic environment Russia and China seek to shape. It is one where American options are narrower, and the cost of leadership is higher. Given the stakes, the growing authoritarian coordination requires unity among the democracies.

### **Policy Recommendations**

In line with CEPA’s focus on resilience, allied unity, and confronting authoritarian coercion, I offer the following recommendations.

#### **Strengthen Transatlantic Resilience Against Shadow Warfare**

- Improve joint surveillance and attribution of sabotage incidents, including a pre-authorized joint operational assets pool and improved burden-sharing mechanisms for air defense costs.
- Harden ports, rail lines, energy grids, and undersea cables.
- Establish a dedicated mechanism for the US–EU to craft responses on shadow operations, including the creation of a joint EU-NATO hybrid escalation ladder that links specific Russian aggression to predefined, proportional responses.
- Establish integrated EU-NATO roles where the EU leads on financial pressure, border controls, and law enforcement while NATO leads on detection, defense, and military responses.

#### **Impose Costs on Chinese Entities Supporting Russia’s Hybrid and Covert Capabilities**

- Expand sanctions against Chinese firms supplying dual-use technologies.
- Coordinate with Europe to restrict access to microelectronics and UAV components.
- Track and disrupt third-country evasion routes.
- Invest in stronger interstate coordination and enforcement capabilities.

#### **Counter Covert Influence and Malign Finance in Democratic Systems**

- Require greater transparency in cross-border political funding.
- Strengthen defenses against covert media ownership and false-front NGOs.

- Expand support for investigative journalism and civil society in frontline states.

#### Reduce Economic Vulnerabilities Exploited by Russia and China

- Support Europe's energy diversification and infrastructure protection.
- Establish joint investment screening mechanisms.
- Secure strategic supply chains across the Atlantic.

#### Reinforce NATO Cohesion and Deterrence

- Strengthen forward defense and mobility in frontline regions.
- Invest in interstate and public-private intelligence sharing on shadow operations.
- Integrate Indo-Pacific allies into discussions on Chinese support for Russian aggression.

### **The “Shared Consciousness” Between Moscow and Beijing**

Russia and China are revisionist powers that are working hard to reshape the international landscape in ways that suit their values and interests. When Xi Jinping became China's top leader in 2012 many observers viewed China mainly as an opportunity rather than a threat. Since then, much more has been revealed and is now understood about the regime's predatory character. For more than a dozen years, the personal relationship forged by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin has led to a shared consciousness between them that has set their respective systems on a course with more purpose.<sup>19</sup>

A year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in March 2023, Xi told Putin that “right now there are changes—the likes of which we haven't seen for 100 years—and we are the ones driving these changes together”. Putin agreed. The leaders of these two authoritarian behemoths did not make clear the exact meaning of this ominous prediction. It means no doubt that the United States and other free societies have far less margin for error in the fiercer global competition that has emerged.

Russia's shadow warfare, which is bolstered and amplified by China, constitutes a long-term challenge to American power. It weakens US alliances, disrupts democratic institutions, and degrades the infrastructure and political cohesion on which US strategy depends. Moscow and Beijing, for their part, offer no constructive vision for the future. Instead, they use a variety of aggressive tactics to discredit the values and political systems of the United States and its allies. Their goal is to weaken global confidence in democracy, while growing the ranks of unfree countries. In the end, they aim to fracture and isolate democratic societies so thoroughly that an authoritarian model encounters no unified opposition.

Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>19</sup> Austin Ramzy (and *The Wall Street Journal*), “China's Xi Jinping Seeks to Shake Trans-Atlantic Solidarity With Flurry of Diplomacy,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/world/chinas-xi-jinping-seeks-to-shake-trans-atlantic-solidarity-with-flurry-of-diplomacy-b671c6af>