



Who made China and Russia the enemy, and why?

By Elisa Barwick

In recent years China and Russia have been increasingly demonised by the Anglo-American political establishment to prevent the world looking to an alternative economic and strategic approach. A backdrop of key developments on both sides, highlighting a shift in 2016-17, is provided here.

Following the 2007-08 global financial crisis, China made a decisive intervention, demonstrating a pathway for reform of the financial and economic architecture. While the USA, UK and EU led the world into a rapid expansion of speculation fuelled by quantitative easing and driven to rescue banks by stealing private investments, put into motion at the 2009 London G20 summit, Chinese economic officials observed that a major contributor to the crisis was the decoupling of the financial sector from the productive economy. China therefore launched a dramatic infrastructure investment campaign and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to upgrade and expand global trade infrastructure, along with financial reforms to discourage financial speculation.

British and American politicians and think-tanks responded with a campaign to marginalise China and suppress its leadership in this field; they also targeted Russia, the other major power deemed a threat to Anglo-American geopolitical dominance.

In early 2016, US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter and Director of National Intelligence Gen. James Clapper both named Russia and China as greater threats to America than the ISIS terrorist network. This was a truly shocking and insulting inference at the time. In January, Clapper told WTOP radio in Washington, DC, that among the greatest threats to the United States were Russian aggression and Chinese espionage. Addressing the Economic Club of Washington in February, Carter declared that Russia and China posed the two top challenges for American defence planners, followed by North Korea, Iran, and then Islamic State (ISIS).

In February 2016, the Australian government released its 2016 Defence White Paper, which explicitly subordinated Australia's defence policy to that of the United States, pledged open-ended and unconditional support to the US "strategic rebalance" (pivot) to Asia, and portrayed China as the single greatest threat (with Russia a close second) to the "rules-based global order".

The Belt and Road

A 31 July 2016 article for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, by economics editor Ross Gittins, is a reminder that most Australians at this time hadn't even heard of the Belt and Road project. He asked, "have you heard of One Belt, One Road? No, I thought not." That gradually changed, but the true motives were never conveyed by the mainstream press. The line peddled was that put out by geopolitical strategists—that the BRI was a Trojan horse for China to expand influence and control.

The USA, which had refused to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) initiated by China in 2014 to increase development funding, made clear it would not be participating in the BRI. As geostrategic analyst from the Malaysia University of Technology, Mathew Maavak, told *Sputnik* in August 2016, "Playing second fiddle to Eurasia is not an option for Washington."

Significantly, China and Russia were boosting



Economist covers featuring Xi and Putin. The British magazine is considered to speak for the City of London imperial financial centre. Photos: Economist

cooperation in this period, both bilaterally and through the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) bloc, and regional Eurasian forums including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and Eastern Economic Forum (EEF). A *New York Times* editorial of 21 July 2019 warned that "Western interests" would be threatened if America's two major "adversaries"—Russia and China—were to unite.

In September 2016, China hosted the G20 Leaders' Summit at Hangzhou. Amid warnings of a new global financial crisis, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for international coordination to "build a strong bulwark against crises", and called for "a new path of economic development" by moving away from purely fiscal and monetary mechanisms. At the B20 forum for business leaders, Xi described the initiatives China had taken to lift over 700 million people out of poverty, saying "this is the course ... the world should take. For this purpose, we have introduced large-scale investment overseas." The BRI, he said, "is not China creating a sphere of influence, but rather a means of supporting the development of all countries".

From that time, AAS reported a sharp increase in anti-China rhetoric—which included lies about China being the biggest foreign investor in Australia and China hacking the online census (later disproven)—clearly intended to stymie increased economic cooperation with China. When Members and Senators elected in July 2016 arrived in Canberra at the end of August for their first parliamentary sitting, they were presented with the new issue of the Parliamentary Library's Briefing Book, which cast the BRI as a "profound challenge to the current global political and economic status quo". Written by ANU academic Dr Geoff Wade, a career anti-China propagandist who writes for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's *The Strategist*, it warned MPs to "maintain a close watch" on the project and remain cautious about involvement. Nevertheless, the BRI was well received at the state level, especially in Victoria, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Tasmania. Most states backed off significantly, however, in the face of the increasing China hysteria, with the exception of Victoria which with federal government approval signed an MOU to participate in BRI projects.

Enter Trump

Upon the November 2016 election of Donald Trump, there was immediate panic in the corridors of Whitehall in the UK

over his intention to improve relations with Russia, do deals with China and end regime-change wars. Rupert Murdoch's 13 November *Sunday Times* in "Britain's plan to tame Trump" reported on the effort to shift Trump with "outside influence", i.e., from the UK. This was later described by British Ambassador to the United States [Sir Kim Darroch](#) as "Trump whispering", with efforts to "flood the zone" surrounding Trump with advisors who would redirect his policy. This followed the failure of plans to sink Trump's presidential ambitions ahead of November 2016 and to destroy his presidency with the "Russiagate" scandal.

One of Trump's early moves was to quit the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement that conspicuously excluded China, and functioned as an economic adjunct to his predecessor Barack Obama's Pivot to Asia. In an infamous 2 May 2016 *Washington Post* column promoting the TPP, Obama asserted that "America should write the rules", not China.

Although he has not lived up to most of his promises, such decisions and Trump's "wild card" nature shook the very foundations of the Anglo-American "special relationship"—the essence of which has always been Britain preserving its imperial power via influence over a militarily powerful USA, or "British brains-American brawn". In December 2018, a House of Lords report, "UK Foreign Policy in a Shifting World Order", warned that the Trump Administration had taken "a number of high-profile unilateral foreign policy decisions that are contrary to the interests of the United Kingdom", and that, "Should President Trump win a second term ... the damage to UK/US relations will be longer lasting." Notably, former Foreign Secretary William Hague is cited in the same report referring to Xi's October 2017 speech to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as "entirely different" from any by a Chinese leader in modern times and a declaration that China was determined to "take centre-stage in world affairs".

In May 2017 the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing polarised governments for and against the BRI, but attracted support from business and industry worldwide. China had rapidly expanded collaboration with Europe, Eastern Europe and Africa. Alongside increased slanders of the BRI, thoughtful articles began to appear about reviving the American System economic approach, starring similar national credit and industry policies as China was utilising. (This has culminated recently with the new [American Compass](#) project and explosion of support for a National Infrastructure Bank—p. 13.)

Foreshadowing a significant shift in the mass media portrayal of President Xi, the Australian Parliamentary Library issued another paper, ahead of the 2017 National Congress of the Communist Party, warning of Xi's "concentration of power" and "growing cult of personality". While in reality Xi must still be re-elected by the party and the changes at the congress amounted to the removal of term limits, the paper warned that the failure to promote a successor to Xi at the conference could indicate he was on the way to becoming dictator.

Defence and Security

By year end the earlier ruminations of Clapper and Carter had been formalised, with the release of the December 2017 [US National Security Strategy](#) and the January 2018 [National Defence Strategy](#). At the conclusion of the Cold War, "America emerged as the lone superpower", said the new security strategy, but over time it let that advantage slide. The USA would need to expand its influence in order to maintain its "unmatched political, economic, military, and technological advantages".

China and Russia were listed alongside jihadist terrorists and transnational criminal organisations as challenges to "American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity". Engagement with such "revisionist powers" was no longer considered a viable strategy, the paper stated.

Two weeks earlier, State Department front group the National Endowment for Democracy (p. 9) had outlined the new conflict in a report titled "From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power': Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World". It suggested that Russia and China were working together to exert their authoritarian influence through "'sharp power' that pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries". Initiatives that "may appear to advance admirable goals" are merely a ruse to gain control.

The new defence strategy announced that "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security". It declared China and Russia "the principal priorities for the [Defence] Department ... because of the magnitude of the threats they pose to US security and prosperity".

The strategy asserted that "China and Russia are now undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously undercutting its principles and 'rules of the road'." It called for building "a more lethal" defence force and was backed up by Nuclear Posture and Ballistic Missile Defence Reviews which mandated the [integration of nuclear weapons](#) into conventional weapons systems at the combat command level.

A 25 January 2018 "[expert opinion](#)" from British imperial bastion the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), warned that the USA must manage the threat posed by the Kremlin without "striking a 'grand bargain'—which would implicitly accept that the current world order is no longer functional". The article gloated that Trump was isolated, as his "personal deference to Vladimir Putin" does not reflect the position of the "political and military establishment in Washington" which views Russia as a threat.

The UK Strategic Security Capability Review, released in March 2018, revealed the UK and US establishments were in lockstep, unveiling a new era of modern, "soft" warfare against challengers to Anglo-American power. This included the UK's new "Fusion doctrine" comprising greater orchestration of existing national security capabilities and integration with private and third sectors. This has been mimicked by the other Five Eyes intelligence alliance members, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The UK review placed "the resurgence of state-based threats" alongside terrorism as the UK's greatest security concern. The [Global Britain](#) campaign, a strategy to rebuild British trade and military domination using the Commonwealth and other "Anglosphere" networks, is listed as a key factor in "using our soft power to project our values and advance UK interests". The report stressed the battle for supremacy in the cyber realm, necessary due to the "democratisation of information" through social media.

China's July 2019 defence white paper, on the other hand, stated that its defence strategy is "never seeking hegemony, expansion or spheres of influence". It said the "pursuit of peace, stability and development has become a universal aspiration of the international community with forces for peace predominating over elements of war", but with revisions of the US national security and defence strategies, this ambition is "undermined by growing hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism and constant regional conflicts and wars".