

China and Russia unveil plan for new world order

by [Joel Gehrke](#), Foreign Affairs Reporter |  | February 05, 2022 05:45 AM

China and [Russia](#) have outlined a vision of international relations [anchored](#) in their [potential](#) to [reinforce](#) each other in disputes with the United States and its allies while cooperating on an array of economic and diplomatic fronts.

Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping and Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) issued a joint statement that forecast the “transformation of the global governance architecture and world order.” And that transformation would be marked by the progress of concepts and initiatives that Moscow and Beijing conceived separately, often in opposition to the U.S. and its Western allies, and now could develop into an integrated challenge to American power.

“What they propose or rather suggest is a new world order, isn’t it? They have not left out a single policy issue,” Stefanie Babst, former NATO chief strategic policy analyst, explained to the *Washington Examiner*. “The prime addressee sits in the White House, with the main message being, ‘F*** you. We are the future, and you are the past.’”

[PUTIN AND XI DECLARE CHINA-RUSSIA TIES 'SUPERIOR' TO NATO](#)

George H.W. Bush popularized the term “new world order” in a Sept. 11, 1990, appearance before a joint session of Congress, in the midst of the first Gulf War. Bush touted fading Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev’s denunciation of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, a point of unity between Washington and Moscow that Bush thought heralded a new moment in international affairs.

“Clearly, no longer can a dictator count on East-West confrontation to stymie concerted United Nations action against aggression,” he said. “A new world order can emerge. ... A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.”

Putin and Xi made an effort to occupy the rhetorical position held by Western leaders who have touted the value of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and other multilateral institutions collectively described as “the post-war world order.” But they pledged allegiance to that order in terms that called attention to their acrimonious relations with their respective neighbors.

“The sides intend to strongly uphold the outcomes of the Second World War and the existing post-war world order, defend the authority of the United Nations and justice in international relations, resist attempts to deny, distort, and falsify the history of the Second World War,” the China-Russia joint statement says.

“In order to prevent the recurrence of the tragedy of the world war, the sides will strongly condemn actions aimed at denying the responsibility for atrocities of Nazi aggressors, militarist invaders, and their accomplices, besmirch and tarnish the honor of the victorious countries,” they continued.

That paragraph is filled with pointed statements. Russian officials refer to that cataclysmic conflict as a triumph that rescued Eastern Europe from Nazi German rule — “a noble and great mission of liberation,” as Putin put it last year — while contemporary Central and Eastern European critics of Soviet rule are portrayed as “[fascists](#).” Chinese diplomats routinely [recall](#) that the Chinese people “defeated the Japanese militarist aggressors and fascism” and [accuse](#) Tokyo of trying “to revive the specter of militarism” in the context of contemporary disputes.

The linking of such disputes with their mutual affirmation of “the outcomes of the Second World War” might signal their joint determination to recover the clout in their own regions that they enjoyed after the defeat of the Axis powers.

“The outcome of World War II, depending on how you read it, was reasserting Soviet-Russian hegemony over their sphere of influence in Eastern Europe [Also], think about the Chinese victories over Japan in East Asia,” U.S. Army War College research professor Evan Ellis, a former member of the State Department’s policy planning staff, told the *Washington Examiner*. “You could read it [to mean that] reaffirming the outcome of World War II is implicitly rolling back the ‘new world order’” that Bush described in 1990.

The statement included alignment on two simmering hot spots. Russian forces annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and destabilized the Donbas region. That conflict has festered for years, with Putin recently mobilizing Russian forces around Ukrainian borders while demanding that NATO ban Ukraine and Georgia from joining and cut U.S. and Western European military ties to Eastern European allies. Xi endorsed Putin’s push for “binding security guarantees in Europe,” while Putin endorsed China’s claim to sovereignty over Taiwan, a strategically significant island democracy that the Chinese Communist Party has never ruled.

“Russia and [China](#) stand against attempts by external forces to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions, intend to counter interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, oppose color revolutions, and will increase cooperation in the aforementioned areas,” they said in the China-Russia statement.

Those areas include a linking of the Xi’s vaunted Belt and Road Initiative, an overseas infrastructure investment program that Western officials deride as predatory lending, with the Eurasian Economic Union that Moscow hopes will lead to the economic integration of states that gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

“The sides reaffirm their focus on building the Greater Eurasian Partnership in parallel and in coordination with the Belt and Road construction to foster the development of regional associations as well as bilateral and multilateral integration processes for the benefit of the peoples on the Eurasian continent,” Xi and Putin said.

The statement suggests that Putin is more willing to align with Xi than Western analysts generally have thought, although he may remain uncomfortable with the imbalance of power between Moscow and Beijing.

“They traded quite a number of issues, which are important for either Russia or China, carefully crafted. But we expected all this, didn’t we? What they cannot camouflage is they remain an uneven couple,” said Babst, the former NATO strategist. “But in contrast to China, Putin has put himself ... in a corner. Both cannot force other countries to ‘love and follow’ them, neither with money nor guns. But neither Putin nor Xi understand the concept of soft power and persuasion.”