ChatGPT

Strategic White Paper: The “Anaconda Strategy” of Constricting China, Russia, and Iran

Introduction: A New Era of Strategic Competition

The United States and its allies have entered a new era of great-power competition, one often framed in policy documents as a struggle between open, democratic systems and authoritarian challengers. In this context, American strategy has increasingly coalesced around a concept akin to an “anaconda strategy” – a long-term, multidimensional constriction of key adversarial states. This strategy envisions the United States, together with its extensive network of allies, slowly tightening a **comprehensive encirclement** around the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as the primary strategic competitor, while simultaneously constraining the destabilizing behaviors of secondary threats like Russia and Iran. The approach is patient and multi-faceted: it seeks to apply consistent pressure in all domains – military, economic, technological, and ideological – to **limit these adversaries’ strategic reach and influence** over time.

This white paper provides a rigorous analysis of the anaconda strategy for a policy, academic, and strategic-planning audience. It begins by outlining the **official policy positioning** that underpins this approach, as articulated in recent Pentagon and national security strategy documents. It then details each facet of the constriction strategy: from the geographic encirclement achieved via basing and alliances, to economic and financial containment measures, supply chain realignments, technological chokepoints, demographic and internal pressure points, alliance network expansions, control of global chokepoints in energy and trade, dominance of key network-effect standards, and the narrative “battle of ideas” being waged on the world stage. In doing so, the paper draws explicit parallels to the **Cold War containment** policy and highlights how this modern variant – a dialectical encirclement leveraging the inherent strengths of open systems – both resembles and diverges from the past.

Finally, the report projects plausible **scenarios through 2050** that range from low-disruption continuity to high-disruption crises, including potential flashpoints such as a conflict over Taiwan, sudden leadership vacuums in Beijing or Moscow, a collapse of the Iranian regime, or an accelerated Western technological boom (for example, via AI) that dramatically shifts the balance. Each scenario illuminates how the anaconda strategy might unfold or be stress-tested under different conditions. Throughout, the analysis underscores the principle of **strategic patience and compounding advantages**: by leveraging their open-system strengths and staying united, the United States and its allies aim to gradually sap the leverage of their rivals – tightening the coils, as it were, until the strategic choices available to China, Russia, and Iran narrow irreversibly.

(Note: All sections of this document are supported with academic-level citations, and visual aids (maps, diagrams, timelines) are provided to illustrate key concepts. Images are embedded where appropriate to aid comprehension, and appendices include supplementary data on demographic and economic trends.)

I. Policy Posture: Identifying the Primary Competitor and Persistent Threats

United States strategy today explicitly names China, Russia, and Iran as central challenges to the international order, albeit in different tiers of priority. In the Pentagon's official lexicon, China is deemed the "pacing challenge" – the foremost long-term strategic competitor – whereas Russia is characterized as an "acute threat," and Iran (along with North Korea and non-state terrorist actors) is treated as a persistent regional menace [1] [2]. This prioritization reflects a bipartisan consensus that has solidified in U.S. national security strategy over the past several years. The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), for example, states unambiguously that "the People's Republic of China (PRC) [is] the Department's pacing challenge," even as the Department also **accounts for Russia's acute threat and remains vigilant against other persistent threats like Iran** [1] [3]. In similar terms, the 2018 NDS had already shifted the U.S. defense focus from counterterrorism to "inter-state strategic competition," declaring that China and Russia were **revisionist powers** intent on challenging American interests, while Iran and North Korea were "rogue regimes" destabilizing their regions [4] [5].

At the highest level, the United States explicitly positions China as the **primary strategic competitor** for the coming decades. China is described as the only power with both the intent and the growing capabilities to fundamentally reshape the international order in ways that undermine U.S. values and interests [4] [5]. Beijing's militarization of the South China Sea, "predatory" economic practices, rapid military modernization, and coercive diplomacy are cited as evidence that China seeks regional (and eventually global) hegemony at the expense of the free and open system the U.S. and its allies uphold [4] [6]. Russia, by contrast, is seen as a revanchist but less systemically powerful actor – dangerous due to its nuclear arsenal and willingness to use force (as starkly demonstrated in Ukraine), yet ultimately unable to compete with the full spectrum of U.S. and allied strengths in the long run [1] [2]. U.S. officials frequently note that **Moscow can wreak acute havoc (as in its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine), but it cannot match the collective economic and technological weight of the NATO alliance** [7] [1]. Iran is identified as a persistent threat largely at the regional level – the *"most significant challenge to Middle East stability,"* in the words of the 2018 NDS [5]. Tehran's support for terrorism, pursuit of nuclear capabilities, and use of proxy militias are enduring security problems, though Iran lacks the global reach of China or Russia.

This explicit policy framing sets the stage for the anaconda-like encirclement strategy. By **naming these adversaries in official strategy**, Washington is effectively declaring its intent to mobilize resources and alliances to constrain them. Indeed, the 2022 NDS emphasizes that mutually-beneficial alliances are the United States' "greatest global strategic advantage" and a **"center of gravity"** for prevailing in this complex competition [8] [9]. U.S. leaders openly speak of a global contest of systems – **"democracy versus autocracy"** – and have oriented defense, economic, and diplomatic initiatives accordingly. President Biden's 2022 National Security Strategy, for instance, refers to this era as a contest to *"win the 21st century"* against authoritarian rivals, prioritizing investment in U.S. strength and like-minded coalitions. The anaconda metaphor, though not used officially, aptly captures the collective effect of the policies now in motion: **a coordinated, tightening pressure campaign** on multiple fronts to check the ambitions of China, contain and weaken Russia, and isolate Iran.

In summary, current U.S. policy provides a clear mandate for a constriction strategy. China is recognized as the **central challenge** – a near-peer competitor to be outmaneuvered and contained over decades [1]. Russia and Iran are to be countered and blunted as ongoing threats to regional stability and the

international norms of peace. This hierarchy of adversaries informs how the United States allocates its strategic focus across the facets of the anaconda strategy described in the following section. It is with this policy posture in mind that we examine each dimension of the long-term encirclement and pressure campaign.

II. Facets of the Multidimensional Constriction Strategy

The "anaconda strategy" is not a single policy or tactic, but rather a **synergy of efforts across geographic, economic, technological, military, and informational domains**. Each facet reinforces the others, with the ultimate goal of constricting the strategic operating space of China, Russia, and Iran – **squeezing their influence, access, and options** over time without immediate direct conflict. Below, we detail the major components of this strategy.

1. Geographic Encirclement and Basing Structure

One of the most visible manifestations of the constriction strategy is the **geographical positioning of U.S. and allied military power** around the key adversaries. Just as an anaconda coils around its prey, the United States has been **fortifying a ring of alliances, forward bases, and military partnerships encircling China, Russia, and Iran**. This encirclement is not absolute – nor is it acknowledged as "encirclement" by U.S. officials, who emphasize defensive intentions – but from the perspective of Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran, the pattern is unmistakable. Strategic chokepoints, border regions, and potential flashpoints around these countries are increasingly ringed by U.S. or allied presence, creating a sense of military pressure on multiple fronts.

Encircling China (Indo-Pacific Maritime Ring): In the Indo-Pacific, American strategy has long centered on the *"island chain"* concept originally conceived by U.S. strategists in the early Cold War. Today, this has translated into a de facto encirclement of China's maritime periphery by U.S. bases and allied territories. The First Island Chain – stretching from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines down to Borneo – and the Second Island Chain farther out – encompassing Guam and other Pacific islands – form concentric barriers to Chinese naval and air expansion [10] [11]. The U.S. forward-deploys significant forces in Japan (including Okinawa) and South Korea, maintains rotational force access to strategic locations in the Philippines, Singapore, and increasingly Vietnam and other partners, and possesses major bases at Guam and in Hawaii that underpin its Pacific projection capabilities. **For Beijing, this network amounts to a perimeter of U.S.-linked strongpoints hemming in China's freedom of maneuver in the Western Pacific**. Chinese analysts frequently voice concerns of a U.S. "strategic encirclement" aimed at cutting off China's access to the open ocean and straits [11] [12]. The island chains, anchored by treaty allies (Japan, South Korea, Australia) and bolstered by newer partnerships (India via the Quad, and Pacific island states), serve as the skeletal structure of this maritime constriction ring.

Figure 1: U.S. and Allied Basing in the Indo-Pacific – The First and Second Island Chains. This map illustrates the First Island Chain (inner curve, in pink) running from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines, and the Second Island Chain (outer curve) extending further east. These island chains correspond to the geographic linchpins of the U.S. Indo-Pacific alliance structure, effectively encircling China's maritime approaches [10] [11]. Key U.S. bases and security partners along these chains (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Guam, etc.) create a forward-deployed presence that can monitor and potentially choke off Chinese naval movement through critical sea lanes in a conflict scenario.

In recent years, **the United States has intensified this encirclement of China through enhanced basing agreements and new force deployments in the region**. Notably, in 2023 Washington secured expanded access to military sites in the Philippines under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), adding four new locations to bring the total U.S.-accessible bases there to nine [13] [14]. Some of these Philippine sites (in Cagayan and Isabela provinces) directly face north toward Taiwan, positioning U.S. forces closer to a potential flashpoint, while another site on Palawan faces the South China Sea where China has built militarized artificial islands [14] [15]. Likewise, the U.S. Marine Corps has begun rotating units through Darwin, Australia, and is investing in infrastructure in Micronesia and Polynesia under new agreements (for instance, the Compact states and a defense cooperation agreement with Papua New Guinea) to ensure strategic coverage of the southwest Pacific. The **military footprint of the U.S. and its allies now virtually surrounds China's eastern and southern flanks**, from the Bering Sea (via the U.S. Aleutian presence and growing NATO interest in the North Pacific) to the Indian Ocean (through U.S.-India naval cooperation and Diego Garcia in the British Indian Ocean Territory).

It is important to note that U.S. officials describe these moves not as an aggressive encirclement, but as prudent steps to **deter Chinese coercion and preserve a "free and open Indo-Pacific."** The island chain strategy, for instance, is framed by the United States as a means of **force projection and sea lane security**, integral to reassuring allies [10] [11]. Nonetheless, Chinese leadership perceives the steady build-up of U.S. alliances and bases along its maritime periphery as a tightening noose. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly criticized U.S.-led "containment, encirclement, and suppression" of China in speeches, reflecting Beijing's anxiety about the *deployed* geography of U.S. power around it [16] [17]. Indeed, Chinese strategists have

invoked an “Anaconda Ring” metaphor themselves in referring to what they see as the West’s orchestration of conflicts around China’s border – from the Korean Peninsula to the Indian border – as a grand conspiracy to strangle China’s rise [18] [19]. While such claims veer into propaganda, they underscore how **the pattern of U.S. basing and alliance commitments appears to China as a grand encirclement effort**.

Encircling Russia (NATO’s Expanding Frontier and the Arctic): A similar, though not identical, encirclement process is evident in Europe and Eurasia vis-à-vis Russia. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has enlarged eastward in waves, transforming the strategic map around the Russian Federation. What began as a Western European defensive alliance of 12 countries in 1949 has grown to **32 members as of 2024**, including almost the entire swath of Eastern Europe that was once Moscow’s sphere [20] [21]. Most dramatically, the Kremlin’s own aggressions in Ukraine (2014 and 2022) have backfired by prompting historically non-aligned states to seek NATO protection: Finland joined NATO in April 2023, **doubling the length of NATO’s direct land border with Russia overnight**, and Sweden’s accession is underway in 2024 [20] [21]. With the Nordic enlargement, NATO now literally surrounds Russia in the Arctic and Baltic regions – *“making all Arctic countries except Russia part of the alliance,”* as one analysis notes [20]. To Russia’s west and south, NATO allies and partners form an almost contiguous belt from the Barents Sea down through Eastern Europe and around the Black Sea (via Turkey). To Russia’s east, U.S. treaty ally Japan (and security partner South Korea) stand guard in Northeast Asia, while across the North Pacific, the United States and Canada (NATO’s North American anchors) face Russia’s Far East. In effect, Russia is **strategically encircled by a ring of U.S.-aligned states or forces from every compass point except the strictly southern belt of Central Asia**. Even there, Russia’s influence is contested by an increasing Chinese economic presence and U.S. security partnerships with nations like Kazakhstan (albeit more limited than NATO ties).

From Moscow’s vantage, NATO’s post-Cold War expansion has been the principal evidence of a Western “encirclement” strategy. President Vladimir Putin and his officials have long accused NATO of breaking promises and moving ever closer to Russia’s borders with hostile intent [22] [23]. While NATO insists it is a defensive alliance that expanded by the voluntary accession of sovereign countries seeking security [22] [24], the practical result is that **Russian territory is now nearly surrounded by NATO or U.S. military presence along a vast perimeter**. For instance, Russia’s exclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea is entirely encircled by NATO members (Poland and Lithuania). The Baltic Fleet’s access to the Atlantic can be easily bottled up by NATO control of the Danish Straits. In the Black Sea, NATO members Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria, plus close partners like Ukraine (if it succeeds in resisting Russia) and Georgia (aspiring member), severely limit Russia’s freedom. In the Arctic, with Finland and Norway in NATO, Russia’s strategic Kola Peninsula (home to its Northern Fleet) is under new pressure; all other Arctic littoral states (Canada, Denmark via Greenland, Norway, U.S.) are allied, complicating Russia’s plans for the Northern Sea Route and resource extraction. Even in the Far East, Russia faces U.S. military power projecting from Alaska (across the narrow Bering Strait) and from Japan.

To be sure, the NATO alliance does not physically surround all Russian frontiers – Russia’s sprawling land border includes non-NATO states like Belarus (a client ally of Moscow), Mongolia, China, and North Korea. But the **encroachment of NATO infrastructure eastward** has reached points closer to Russia’s core territory than ever before. U.S.-led multinational battlegroups are now stationed on a persistent rotational basis in Poland and the Baltic states, only a few hundred kilometers from St. Petersburg [22] [25]. In Poland, the United States established an enhanced military presence including an armored brigade and an Aegis Ashore missile defense site. Romania too hosts U.S. missile defenses and troops. The forward deployment of NATO forces in Eastern Europe since 2014 (and significantly reinforced since 2022) means that **Russia now faces a nearly continuous line of NATO military power from the Arctic Circle to the Black Sea** [22]

[25]. Russian strategists speak of an "Anaconda Loop" imposed by NATO in Europe, akin to the U.S. Civil War strategy of blockading the Confederacy; pro-Kremlin outlets even labeled NATO's multi-front pressure in 2022 (the Baltics, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Asia-Pacific with Japan) as an *"Anaconda ring"* intended to strangle Russia [23] [26]. Although Western analysts rightly note this is a distorted narrative – NATO's enlargement was not an offensive plot but a series of sovereign choices [22] – the net effect in capability terms is that Russia's geopolitical reach is constrained by an opposing ring on its periphery.

Encircling Iran (Middle Eastern Base Network): In the Middle East, the United States and its regional partners have similarly boxed in the Islamic Republic of Iran through a robust U.S. military footprint to Iran's west, south, and east. Ever since the 1980s, a key U.S. objective has been to **maintain a "strategic envelope" of bases and alliances around Iran** to contain its influence and respond to contingencies. Today, Iran finds itself surrounded by U.S. or allied military presence on nearly every side. To Iran's west, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf host a heavy concentration of American bases and forces: Qatar (Al Udeid Air Base) and Bahrain (home port of the U.S. Fifth Fleet) are major hubs, along with sizable U.S. installations in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia, while hosting fewer U.S. troops than in the past, is tightly aligned with U.S. security policy and hosts training missions and pre-positioned equipment. To Iran's northwest, Turkey is a NATO ally hosting Incirlik Air Base. South of Iran, the U.S. Navy patrols the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman, operating from bases in Oman and the British-owned Diego Garcia island in the Indian Ocean [27] [28]. To Iran's east, until 2021 the U.S. had bases in Afghanistan; after withdrawal, the U.S. has sought counterterrorism basing in Central Asia (though with limited success) and maintains strong defense relations with Pakistan's military (Pakistan borders Iran to the southeast). Across the Arabian Sea, the U.S. has a cooperative security relationship with India (whose navy monitors the sea lanes from the Persian Gulf). And to Iran's north, while the Caspian Sea is relatively insulated, the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia generally prefer balancing Iran with relationships with Turkey, Russia, or China, leaving Tehran with few reliable allies on its borders.

In effect, **dozens of U.S. and allied military installations dot the region around Iran, forming a ring that keeps Iran under constant observation and, if necessary, able to be struck from multiple directions**. Even after the U.S. drew down troops in Iraq (which lies directly on Iran's western border) in 2021, it has maintained a residual training presence there and in Syria, and more importantly, it can project power into Iraq/Syria from nearby bases in the Gulf and Jordan. Iran is keenly aware of this encirclement. Iranian military planners often voice concern that the U.S. can launch airstrikes from the south (carrier groups in the Persian Gulf or bases in Gulf states), from the west (Iraq or Jordan), or even from the southeast (if using facilities in Pakistan or with India's tacit cooperation). During periods of high tension, such as after Iran's nuclear facilities were sabotaged or its proxies attacked U.S. forces, the Revolutionary Guard has staged exercises targeting notional U.S. carrier strike groups in the Gulf and plotting missile strikes on U.S. bases in Qatar, Bahrain, and UAE – a sign of how **Iran perceives itself as militarily encircled by American firepower**.

Indeed, analysts have described the U.S. basing posture as a **"strategic envelope around Iran"**, noting that American forces have been in place to Iran's west (in the Levant and Gulf) and to its east/south (Afghanistan, Indian Ocean) for decades [29] [30]. A 2020 ABC News analysis concluded that *"Iran is encircled by numerous American military facilities"* across the Middle East, with approximately 60,000 U.S. troops stationed around the region as of that time [31] [32]. Even accounting for adjustments after Afghan withdrawal, that number remains substantial today. **Iran's leadership, much like Russia's and China's, views the United States as systematically deploying its military might to surround and contain their nation**. This perception has fueled Iran's asymmetrical responses – from building up a network of proxy

militias in neighboring countries to developing long-range missiles capable of striking U.S. bases. Tehran's goal is to break out of the encirclement by raising the costs for U.S. forces and threatening U.S. partners' stability from within (e.g. the Houthis in Yemen threatening Bab-el-Mandeb, or militias in Iraq pressuring the U.S. presence). However, the core geography of U.S. power in the region remains decidedly unfriendly to Iran's expansion. In a striking illustration of Iran's predicament, an Al Jazeera infographic from 2012 (when U.S. forces were still in Iraq and Afghanistan in large numbers) showed Iran virtually *surrounded* by U.S. bases – from Incirlik in Turkey to bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman, and Afghanistan – hence the phrase in that report that **U.S. bases "continue to form a strategic envelope around Iran" despite some drawdowns** [29] [30] **.**

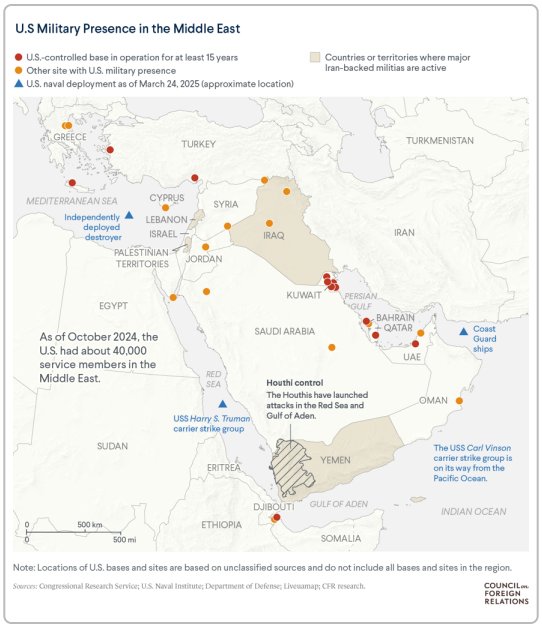

Figure 2: U.S. Military Presence Surrounding Iran (2025). This map (from the Council on Foreign Relations, updated March 2025) highlights U.S. military bases and naval deployments in the Middle East, as well as areas where Iranian-backed militias are active. Red dots indicate long-standing U.S.-controlled bases, orange dots show other sites with U.S. military presence, and the shaded areas (e.g., in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon) show regions where Iran's proxy forces operate [33] [34] *. The map illustrates how U.S. and allied military positions encircle Iran on multiple fronts – in the Persian Gulf to the south, across Iraq/Syria/Jordan to the west, and in nearby maritime domains (Red Sea, Arabian Sea) – effectively constraining Iran's ability to project power beyond its borders.*

In all three cases – China, Russia, and Iran – the geographic aspect of the anaconda strategy is about **positioning forces and alliances in a way that adversaries are never secure on their periphery**. This does not mean imminent war or blockades in peacetime, but it creates a constant military overhang. The adversary must divert resources to home defense on multiple fronts, feel uncertain about its lines of communication in a crisis, and be deterred from expansionist moves by the credible presence of allied forces around it. Geographic encirclement also facilitates other facets of constriction: for instance, forward bases enable quick implementation of **naval blockades or no-fly zones** (choking off trade) if conflict erupts, and they reassure allies to hold the line economically against the adversary. In sum, the U.S. and allied basing structure around these rivals represents the physical contour of containment – **the literal ring of steel that embodies strategic resolve to restrict China, Russia, and Iran's military freedom**.

2. Economic Decoupling and Financial Architecture Control

A second coil of the anaconda strategy is economic and financial pressure – essentially, **constricting the lifeblood of adversary states by leveraging dominance over the global financial system and critical economic networks**. The United States and its allies collectively command an overwhelming share of world financial architecture: they issue the major reserve currencies, host the largest financial centers, and set the rules for international banking, insurance, and trade settlement. Over the past decade, Washington has increasingly weaponized these advantages to **"de-platform" rivals from the global economy when necessary**, through sanctions, export controls, and efforts to reduce dependency on adversarial supply chains. The strategic aim is two-fold: to *decouple* the Western economies from undue reliance on China or Russia (so as to reduce vulnerability and leverage), and conversely to *deny* those adversaries access to Western capital, technology, and markets in ways that weaken their long-term capabilities.

One primary tool has been the expansive use of **financial sanctions and the control of international payment networks**. The United States' stewardship of the dollar-centric global financial system gives it formidable chokepoint power. For example, access to the Brussels-based SWIFT messaging system – essential for international bank transactions – can be limited under Western sanctions, effectively cutting a country off from the global banking sphere. Iran experienced this in 2012 and again in 2018, when it was *disconnected from SWIFT* as part of U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear program [35]. The impact on Iran's economy was severe, contributing to a currency collapse and deep recession. Russia likewise faced partial ostracization: following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. and EU moved to **block key Russian banks from SWIFT** and freeze the Russian Central Bank's foreign reserves (seizing access to around $300 billion in assets) [36] [37]. These unprecedented measures immediately isolated Russia's financial sector – the ruble's value plummeted and cross-border transactions became arduous. Western governments also **banned or restricted transactions with major Russian state-owned enterprises and oligarchs**, compounding the squeeze. By 2023, Russia had been forced to lean on its own fledgling financial messaging system and alternative arrangements with China to keep trade flows alive [38] [39], but those stopgaps remain far less efficient than the Western-dominated system.

Controlling financial plumbing extends to **payment networks and capital markets** as well. In the wake of sanctions, private companies like Visa and Mastercard suspended operations in Russia – meaning Russian banks could no longer use these networks for international or even domestic transactions in many cases [40] [41]. Russian-issued Visa/Mastercards stopped working outside Russia, and foreign-issued cards were no longer accepted inside Russia [40] [41]. This effectively siloed the Russian payments ecosystem, forcing it to rely on the lesser-used Mir card system and Chinese UnionPay, which have nowhere near the global acceptance of Western payment networks. Similarly, **Western capital markets have been largely closed off to sanctioned actors**: major Russian corporations and banks were delisted from European and U.S. stock exchanges; Russian sovereign debt was downgraded to junk and made off-limits to many institutional investors. Iran, of course, has been barred from Western capital markets for decades. China so far has avoided blanket financial sanctions – reflecting its larger role in the world economy – but even Beijing faces selective financial pressure (such as U.S. bans on investing in Chinese companies linked to the military or surveillance industry, and the looming threat that a conflict over Taiwan could trigger far more drastic financial retaliation against China).

Another dimension of economic constriction is **strategic decoupling and supply chain realignment**. The United States and allies are actively reducing their dependence on adversaries for critical materials and products, thereby both insulating their own economies and depriving those rivals of leverage. This is most

evident in the U.S.-China context: after decades of deep integration, a partial economic disentanglement is underway in sectors deemed vital to national security. For instance, the U.S. has imposed stringent export controls on advanced semiconductors and semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China (see Section 4 on tech chokepoints), and conversely is seeking to **on-shore or "friend-shore" supply chains** for crucial goods like rare earth minerals, batteries, and pharmaceuticals that had been overly reliant on China. By cutting down Chinese inputs in high-tech industries and reducing Chinese companies' access to Western markets (through measures like telecom equipment bans on Huawei or removal of Chinese firms from U.S. stock indexes), Washington aims to *limit China's economic growth in strategic sectors* and curb the resources it can devote to military modernization [42] [43] .

Economic decoupling is also pursued with Russia and Iran, albeit differently given their export profiles. In response to Russia's aggression, Western nations undertook a massive effort to **wean Europe off Russian energy exports** – a previously critical point of leverage for Moscow. Within months of the Ukraine invasion, Europe slashed its imports of Russian natural gas (through diversification and consumption cuts) and agreed to phase out seaborne Russian oil imports. The G7-led *price cap* on Russian oil, implemented in late 2022, further aims to squeeze Moscow's revenue by leveraging Western dominance in maritime insurance and shipping financing: any Russian oil sold above the price cap ($60/barrel for crude) cannot be insured or transported by Western firms [44] [45] . This policy literally uses the **network effect of Western insurance and shipping – which cover the bulk of global tanker capacity – to enforce a ceiling on Russia's oil income**. Thus far, while Russia has found ways to sell oil at discounts via a "dark fleet," the price cap and European embargo have forced Moscow to accept significantly lower profits and to rely on costlier, opaque logistics for its exports [46] [47] . Iran, for its part, has been under energy sanctions for years; its oil exports plummeted from ~2.5 million barrels/day in 2017 to well under 1 million at times after U.S. sanctions snapped back in 2018, depriving Tehran of tens of billions in revenue annually.

Underpinning these economic measures is the idea of controlling the **financial and trading architecture** that adversaries depend on. The U.S. and allies effectively **occupy the "high ground" of the international economic system** – they set standards and norms through institutions like the SWIFT consortium, IMF/World Bank, global commercial banks, big insurance syndicates (Lloyd's of London and the like), and industry cartels in key commodities. By **leveraging these network advantages**, they can isolate a target state in ways that were not possible in earlier eras of great-power rivalry. During the Cold War, for instance, the Soviet bloc was economically separate but also somewhat self-sufficient; today's adversaries (especially China) are deeply enmeshed in global trade and finance, which makes them more vulnerable if those links are severed. Chinese strategists often speak of the *"Malacca dilemma"* in reference to their energy imports (discussed later), but there is also a *"dollar dilemma"* – the reality that the global economy runs through Western-led circuits. In 2022, the U.S. demonstrated that by freezing Russia's central bank assets and ejecting banks from SWIFT, it could induce a financial crisis in a G20 economy virtually overnight [36] [37] . This sent a powerful message to Beijing as well: any Chinese move that incurs severe Western sanctions (such as an invasion of Taiwan) could threaten China's access to the dollar system and global payments, potentially crippling its trade and investment flows.

In response, the adversary states have begun creating workarounds – **alternative financial infrastructures** – but these remain relatively rudimentary. Russia and Iran, for example, linked their domestic banking message systems in 2023 to try to facilitate bilateral trade outside SWIFT [48] [49] . Approximately 700 Russian and 100 foreign banks (from 13 countries) were connected to this system, according to Iranian officials [39] . China has its own Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) for yuan transactions and has promoted usage of its UnionPay cards and digital yuan. However, none of these has

the reach or trust of the established Western networks. Even Chinese banks, when faced with the risk of secondary U.S. sanctions, have largely complied with sanctions regimes rather than bet their survival on a non-dollar alternative [50] [51]. The dominance of the U.S. dollar (which comprises roughly 60% of global foreign exchange reserves and is used in the majority of trade invoicing) remains a pillar of U.S. constrictive power. As of 2025, **the architecture of global finance is still tilted heavily in favor of the U.S.-led order**, enabling measures that strangle opponents' economic arteries without requiring kinetic force.

Another aspect of economic constriction is **controlling high-ground financial norms** like anti-money laundering enforcement and corruption crackdowns, which can selectively pressure adversary elites. The U.S. Treasury and Justice Departments have aggressively pursued oligarchs' illicit wealth (freezing yachts, seizing luxury properties linked to sanctioned individuals), thereby tightening the vise on regime supporters. These efforts not only punish bad actors but also serve to *demonstrate the reach of Western law enforcement into the safe havens of the global financial system*. In essence, the message is: *if you are on the wrong side of this contest, your assets worldwide are not safe.* This has led many wealthy Russians and Chinese to hedge by moving assets (or themselves) into more neutral jurisdictions or under greater secrecy – yet even so, the networks of Western-aligned jurisdictions (from Switzerland to Singapore, now cooperating on sanctions) make true safe havens scarce for targeted entities.

In summary, economic decoupling and financial architecture control function as a slow suffocation mechanism within the anaconda strategy. **By selectively cutting off adversaries from capital, technology, and markets, the U.S. and allies aim to diminish these rivals' economic vitality and war-making potential over time**. It's a form of economic siege laid in peacetime. The effect on Russia has been dramatic: despite short-term resilience in 2022, Russia faces a future of technological stagnation, budget deficits, and a status as a commodity dependency toward China due to Western sanctions. Iran's economy has similarly been kept in survival mode, never able to translate its human and resource potential into broad development while sanctions persist (inflation over 50%, high unemployment, brain drain) [52] [53]. China's economy, much larger and more integrated globally, would be a far harder target – but the groundwork is being laid through partial decoupling and the implicit threat that egregious behavior (like an invasion of Taiwan) would trigger an unprecedented financial backlash. Thus, the economic and financial constriction is both ongoing (in the cases of Russia and Iran) and preparatory/deterrent (in the case of China). By **controlling the "wallet" of the international system, the U.S.-led coalition tightens the noose on adversaries' strategic ambitions**, ensuring that even if those states seek to project military power, they do so on a resource base and industrial foundation that Western policies have deliberately enfeebled.

3. Supply Chain Realignment and Critical Resource Control

Closely related to economic decoupling is the specific effort to **realign global supply chains and secure critical resources** so that adversarial powers cannot exploit dependencies or chokepoints to their advantage. In essence, this facet of the strategy is about **reshaping the flows of vital materials and technologies** – such as rare earth elements, semiconductors, and energy supplies – to favor the U.S. and allied nations while denying the would-be rivals the ability to coerce or dominate through these channels. It is a form of preemptive constriction: identifying where China, Russia, or Iran might hold a stranglehold (or aspire to one) and then systematically diversifying or undermining that leverage.

A prime example is the global supply of **rare earth elements (REEs)** and other critical minerals. Rare earths (like neodymium, dysprosium, etc.) are essential inputs for high-tech manufacturing – from electric vehicle

motors and wind turbines to precision-guided munitions and fighter jet components. For years, China has dominated this sector, being responsible for not only the majority of rare earth mining, but more critically about **85–90% of the processing capacity** that turns rare earth ore into usable oxides and alloys [54] [55]. This near-monopoly became apparent in 2010 when China unofficially embargoed rare earth exports to Japan during a diplomatic spat, sending shockwaves through industrial planners worldwide. Since then, the U.S., Japan, and other allies have launched multiple initiatives to break China's chokehold. The anaconda strategy has seized upon REEs as a vulnerability to fix: **Western countries are investing heavily in alternative rare earth mines and processing facilities** – from Australia to Canada to the United States itself – and forging partnerships to create a resilient supply chain that circumvents China [56] [54]. For instance, the Mountain Pass mine in California (the only U.S. rare earth mine) was restarted and its processing capability is being scaled up with government support, so that ore need not be sent to China for refining [56]. Likewise, Australia's Lynas Corporation, one of the few non-Chinese processors, received financing from the U.S. and Japan to expand facilities in Malaysia and Australia. By 2025, these efforts have begun to chip away at China's share of global REE processing (which, while still dominant, has fallen slightly as new plants come online) [57] [54]. The Western allies are essentially **decoupling from China's rare earth supply before China can ever use it as a strategic weapon**, thereby neutering one potential leverage point. In fact, China's dominance has already been reduced from producing ~95% of world rare earths in 2010 to about 70% of global output in 2023 [54] [58], and further declines are expected as new non-Chinese projects ramp up. The same logic is being applied to other critical materials: lithium for batteries (with new mining in Australia, Chile, and recycling in North America), cobalt and nickel (investments in Africa and Indonesia by non-Chinese entities), and medical supply precursors (encouraging production outside China after the pandemic exposed vulnerabilities).

On the flip side, where adversaries are dependent on the West or its partners for crucial inputs, the strategy is to maintain or **increase that dependency**, creating a potential vise. A key area here is **semiconductors** (which overlaps with technological chokepoints in the next section). China imports well over $300 billion worth of semiconductors annually – its single largest import category – because it cannot domestically produce the most advanced chips at scale. The U.S. and allies control the high end of this market (through companies like TSMC in Taiwan, Samsung in Korea, and equipment-makers ASML in the Netherlands, Applied Materials in the U.S., etc.). By tightening export controls on these cutting-edge chips and tools, the U.S.-led bloc can *constrain China's technological progress* (more in Section 4). The supply chain angle is that **the West is re-routing the semiconductor supply chain to be less centered on East Asia (Taiwan/South Korea) and more distributed among allied nations, including new fabs in the U.S., Japan, and Europe**. The CHIPS Act in the U.S. ($52 billion subsidy program) and similar initiatives in Japan and EU are luring advanced chip manufacturing onshore or to friendly shores, with companies like TSMC building fabs in Arizona and Intel in Ohio. This not only reduces the risk of Chinese coercion or an invasion of Taiwan threatening the world's chip supply, but it also gradually reduces China's access to the most advanced manufacturing know-how. **In short, the democracies are securing the supply chains of the future – semiconductors, batteries, AI-critical hardware – among themselves, deliberately excluding adversarial powers from those networks**.

Meanwhile, in sectors where adversaries have historically held sway, the strategy is to diminish their market power. Russia's role as a major energy exporter to Europe was one such leverage point that is now largely broken: as noted earlier, Europe has nearly eliminated Russian natural gas imports (once ~40% of EU gas) by switching to LNG from allies and boosting renewables. Russia's oil is under sanctions and price caps, forcing Moscow to sell mostly to China and India at discounted rates. Over time, this will reduce investment in Russia's oil fields and could lead to a decline in output. OPEC nations aligned with the U.S. (like Saudi Arabia)

have also worked to stabilize oil markets in line with U.S. pressure to prevent Russia from benefitting excessively from price spikes. Similarly, Iran's influence in OPEC is marginal due to sanctions on its exports; it cannot use oil as a strategic weapon when its own exports are constrained.

Another example is the effort to secure **5G telecommunications infrastructure** among allies without Chinese equipment, thus cutting off a potential supply chain through which China's Huawei could dominate or spy on global networks. In recent years, many NATO and EU countries (as well as partners like Japan, Australia, India) have banned or severely restricted Huawei and ZTE from their 5G rollouts, often under U.S. urging. Instead, they are turning to Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung, and emerging Open RAN technologies championed by democracies. This supply chain shift ensures that in the future, China will *not* have leverage via control of telecommunications in allied nations, and it protects the integrity of allied communications from Chinese state interference.

Under the anaconda strategy, even **food supply chains and infrastructure** are part of the calculus. For instance, Ukraine (a partner nation) is a huge grain exporter; when Russia's war threatened its ability to export via the Black Sea, the West set up alternative land routes and pressured Russia via Turkey to allow some shipments, mitigating the risk of global food crises that could have given Moscow undue influence. Meanwhile, Russia's own dependence on imported agricultural technology (seeds, equipment) from the West is a vulnerability; sanctions on those can degrade Russian agricultural yields over time, further weakening an economic sector.

For Iran, supply chain control largely means enforcing arms embargoes and restricting its access to advanced industrial equipment. International sanctions have prevented Iran from easily importing modern airplanes, for example, crippling its civilian aviation and making even procurement of spare parts a struggle. Likewise, Iran's military industries suffer from lack of access to Western machine tools and software. When Iran has tried to circumvent by working with countries like China or North Korea for certain needs, Western intelligence and interdiction efforts (like seizing parts shipments) often come into play.

In conclusion, supply chain realignment is the proactive facet of economic constriction: **it's about re-engineering who depends on whom, so that the U.S. and allies hold the critical cards**. By ensuring that democracies control or at least have reliable access to the key inputs of modern power (from microchips to minerals to energy), and that autocratic rivals are denied monopolistic or asymmetric positions in those domains, the anaconda strategy tightens its economic coil. This also feeds into the broader narrative of an open-system advantage – democracies coordinating to keep global commons and supply routes accessible, while authoritarians who try to weaponize interdependence find themselves isolated. Already we see the impact: China's attempt to curtail rare earth exports in 2010 spurred diversification that weakened China's later attempt (in 2023, Beijing imposed export controls on two obscure chipmaking minerals, gallium and germanium, in retaliation for U.S. tech sanctions [59]. The West had stockpiles and alternate sources ready, blunting the effect). As this process continues, by 2050 the vision is that **no adversary will have a stranglehold on any supply critical to the functioning of the U.S. and allied economies or militaries**, whereas those adversaries will remain entangled in a web of dependencies on the allied network for advanced goods and finance. In that scenario, the ability of China, Russia, or Iran to exert coercive leverage through economic means will have been effectively suffocated.

4. Technological Chokepoints and Export Controls

Perhaps the most strategically potent constriction in the modern era comes from **technological chokepoints** – the monopolization or control of critical technologies without which a rival's progress grinds to a halt. The United States and its advanced industrial allies still enjoy a lead (and often near-total dominance) in many foundational high-tech areas. By **denying adversaries access to these technologies**, the anaconda strategy aims to stunt their military modernization and economic competitiveness, locking them a generation or two behind the cutting edge. This is a form of *technology containment* reminiscent of Cold War export controls (like CoCom), but now far more targeted and sophisticated, given the complexity of globalized tech supply chains.

A flagship example is the **semiconductor sector**, which truly sits at the heart of the 21st-century economy and military power. Cutting-edge computer chips – especially logic chips for AI and advanced computing, and specialized chips for military systems – are produced by only a handful of firms in a few countries, all U.S.-aligned (Taiwan's TSMC, South Korea's Samsung, and the U.S. and Japan for design and equipment). The machines required to make these chips, such as extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography systems, are monopolized by one Western company (ASML of the Netherlands). A single ASML EUV machine, costing over $150 million, is critical to printing the tiny transistors on 5nm and 3nm node chips – and **China has zero capability to produce a comparable tool domestically**. Recognizing this chokepoint, the United States orchestrated a sweeping set of export controls in October 2022 that banned the sale to China of advanced semiconductors and the equipment/software to fabricate them [42] [43]. This move, coordinated in 2023 with the Netherlands and Japan (which produce complementary lithography and inspection tools), slammed the brakes on China's semiconductor ambitions [60] [61]. Chinese chipmakers like SMIC can no longer acquire the latest tools to continue shrinking chip sizes, effectively freezing them at technology levels far behind the state-of-the-art. Even Chinese firms' access to slightly older deep ultraviolet (DUV) lithography machines has been curtailed by Dutch and Japanese export licensing since mid-2023 [62] [60]. The **intent is clear**: as a senior U.S. official put it, the goal is to "limit or delay [China's] ability to produce advanced semiconductor technologies" and thus *"restrain Chinese military modernization efforts"* [42] [43]. In practical terms, this means China's AI researchers and military designers might have to rely on 2nd-tier hardware, unable to manufacture or import the top-tier AI accelerators that give the U.S. and its allies an edge in everything from intelligence analysis to autonomous weapons.

Beyond manufacturing equipment, the U.S. controls even the **chip intellectual property** domain: companies like Cadence and Synopsys dominate electronic design automation (EDA) software, without which designing modern chips is nearly impossible. These tools are also now off-limits to Chinese entities working on advanced nodes. The allied coalition has thus erected a **"silicon barrier"** around China. Similar tech chokepoints are being applied to Russia and Iran, though those countries have far less indigenous high-tech capacity to begin with. For instance, Russia's access to dual-use electronics has been drastically reduced by export controls; its defense industry is forced to cannibalize chips from home appliances for use in weapons due to lack of supply (open-source reports have found Western commercial chips inside downed Russian missiles and drones, showing how dependent Moscow was on imports). Western governments are tightening enforcement to prevent even this kind of leakage.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is another domain of intense chokepoint strategy. Advanced AI systems require two things: top-tier hardware (GPUs or AI chips) and massive datasets/software talent. The hardware is being handled via the semiconductor controls (e.g., Nvidia was barred from selling its cutting-edge A100 and H100 AI chips to China; Nvidia attempted to offer a neutered version A800 to comply with U.S. rules,

but in 2023 the U.S. tightened definitions to close that loophole [63] [64]). On the software side, while algorithms are hard to control, the U.S. is leveraging its dominance in *cloud computing services* (AWS, Azure, Google Cloud) – which Chinese AI researchers often used for heavy training tasks – by having those companies suspend cloud services in China/Russia for sensitive work [65] [66]. For example, Microsoft announced in 2024 it would fully suspend Azure cloud services in Russia to comply with sanctions [65], and earlier all major U.S. cloud providers stopped allowing new cloud sign-ups from Russia and limited services in China [66] [67]. This makes it harder for adversary companies or military programs to access scalable computing unless they build it all in-house (which again comes back to chips). **By controlling upstream chokepoints (like chip IP, manufacturing tools, and cloud infrastructure), the U.S.-led bloc can effectively throttle the AI development of rivals** or at least ensure it proceeds on a less advanced trajectory.

Another realm is **quantum computing and cryptography**. Export controls now restrict quantum-related technologies to China and Russia, and there are NATO cooperative projects to stay ahead in quantum-resistant encryption – aiming to prevent a scenario where, say, China achieves a quantum breakthrough that could undermine Western cybersecurity. Similar logic applies to **biotechnology**: the COVID-19 pandemic showed the West's biotech prowess (with mRNA vaccines) outpaced China/Russia, and efforts are underway to guard biotech IP and talent. The U.S. has also placed Chinese biotechnology companies on export blacklists if they are linked to surveillance or human rights abuses (like DNA sequencing firms tied to Xinjiang abuses).

The strategy also considers **space and aerospace technologies**. The U.S. has denied China participation in the International Space Station and restricts exports of satellite components and sensors. Many commercial satellites use American-made parts, giving leverage to enforce export rules. Additionally, technologies like high-end turbine engines (for advanced fighter jets) remain out of China's reach – for example, China's airliner program still relies on Western engines and it has struggled to develop reliable domestic jet engines for fighters. By continuing to ban exports of such engines or related know-how, the West preserves a qualitative edge.

Crucially, the U.S. has worked to **enlist allies in a tech containment coalition**. In early 2023, after intensive diplomacy, the Netherlands and Japan (both key players in semiconductor equipment) agreed to align with U.S. export restrictions on China [68] [69]. This unity closed what would have been fatal gaps in the controls – since if the U.S. barred its own firms but others sold tools freely, China could still advance. The fact that even a country like the Netherlands, facing Chinese pressure, agreed to expand export controls on lithography equipment in 2023 and again in 2025 [69] [70] shows the strength of the allied resolve to **hold these chokepoints**. Similarly, South Korea and Taiwan, while wary of provoking Beijing, have quietly complied with U.S. curbs given their reliance on U.S. technology and markets. Thus, an international tech alliance – sometimes dubbed the "Chip 4" (US, Japan, Netherlands, Taiwan/S.Korea) – has formed a high-tech cartel that *the adversaries are excluded from*.

For Russia and Iran, the tech denial has an immediate military effect: both have found it challenging to produce precision weaponry in large quantities under sanction, because they cannot easily import microelectronics or specialized machine tools. Iran's drones, for instance, often contain Western off-the-shelf components; as those are cut off, Iran must find illicit channels or accept lesser performance. In Russia's case, export controls instituted in 2022 cover everything from lasers to bearings to quantum sensors – anything that could aid its weapons programs. Over time, this will degrade Russian R&D and

production, effectively **putting a ceiling on Russia's military technological advancement** while NATO continues to innovate.

It is worth noting that the adversaries are attempting various counters to tech chokepoints: China has a massive campaign to achieve "self-reliance" in semiconductors and AI, including heavy state investment and talent recruitment. It is also reportedly stockpiling critical chips in the short term to ride out the sanctions [63] [64]. Russia and Iran try to set up illicit procurement networks or collaborate with each other and with countries like North Korea to get components. But the longer the squeeze continues, the further behind these nations fall. Technology is a domain of exponential returns (the more advanced your tech, the faster you can develop the next generation). By **denying the latest tools to its rivals, the U.S.-led coalition ensures that it maintains – and likely widens – the innovation gap**. This translates into everything from more sophisticated military systems to higher productivity economies, which in turn feed back into military spending.

In sum, by exploiting technological chokepoints, the anaconda strategy strikes at the **future potential** of adversaries, not just their present capabilities. It attempts to consign them to *permanent second-tier status* in critical technologies. Just as cutting off oxygen will eventually still a prey's resistance, cutting off access to cutting-edge tech will over time erode a state's comprehensive national power. The U.S. approach of "small yard, high fence" export controls – tightly focusing on the most crucial tech areas – is intended to maximize impact on rivals while minimizing collateral harm to civilian trade [71] [72]. The strategy seems to be working: Beijing has vociferously protested these measures, calling them **"technological containment"** and warning that they will not stop China's rise – a sign that the Chinese leadership keenly feels this pressure on its Achilles' heel (semiconductors and high-tech inputs) [59] [60]. The U.S., however, remains firm that **cutting off China's access to the means of AI and advanced computing is necessary to "dissuade the PRC from considering aggression as a viable means"** of achieving its goals [73]. Through such chokepoints, the anaconda's squeeze on the technological front is arguably the one that could most decisively determine the long-term outcome of the great-power competition.

5. Demographic Pressure and Internal Legitimacy Decay

A less overt but no less important facet of the constriction strategy involves leveraging **internal weaknesses of the rival states** – in particular, adverse demographic trends and crises of domestic legitimacy. The United States and its allies recognize that China, Russia, and Iran each face significant internal challenges, from rapidly aging populations to restive publics fed up with authoritarian rule. The anaconda strategy seeks to **amplify these internal pressures (indirectly and patiently) such that over time the adversary regimes weaken from within**, constraining their ability to project power externally. In essence, it is a bet on the inherent fragility of closed, repressive systems when subjected to long-term stresses – a bet that time and internal contradictions are on the side of the open-world coalition.

Demographic decline is a striking challenge for both China and Russia (and to a lesser extent Iran), one that U.S. strategists quietly note will work in the West's favor. China's population, for centuries the world's largest, has now begun an historic contraction. After peaking at around 1.41 billion in 2021, China's population **tipped into decline in 2022** – a momentous turning point [74]. Due to decades of the one-child policy and rising living costs, China's fertility rate has plummeted to well below replacement (around 1.2–1.3), and the society is aging at one of the fastest rates in history. By 2049 (the PRC's centennial), China will likely have *hundreds of millions fewer people* than it does today. Projections suggest a drop of up to 200 million people by mid-century [74] [75], with the median age soaring from 38 now to around 50 years old [76]

[77]. This means China will have a smaller workforce, a heavier burden of elderly dependents, and likely lower dynamic growth. The anaconda strategy effectively plans around this "China fade" – in other words, **if the U.S. and allies can maintain pressure and avoid catastrophic war for the next two to three decades, they expect to face a China that is demographically past its peak and potentially economically stagnating**. An aging, shrinking China could struggle to sustain the high defense spending and innovative vigor needed to challenge a younger, growing coalition of democracies (the U.S. population is still growing slowly and will be far younger on average than China's in 2050, buoyed by immigration).

Russia's demographics are arguably even more dire. The Russian population has been in decline (excluding immigration) since the 1990s, due to low birth rates and poor health. At the same time, the Ukraine war has triggered a new exodus: hundreds of thousands of mostly young, educated Russians have fled abroad to avoid mobilization or political repression [78] [79]. In late 2022 alone, as many as **700,000 Russians left the country** during the partial mobilization announcement [80] [79], according to some reports – a staggering brain drain. Moreover, war casualties have been extremely high; Western intelligence estimates by 2023 put Russian killed and wounded in Ukraine at well over 200,000. Many of these are men in their 20s and 30s – the very cohort that would father the next generation and drive the economy [81] [82]. The result is that Russia faces a looming demographic collapse, with projections that its population (around 145 million pre-war) could fall below 130 million in the next 20-30 years, even as its median age rises into the 50s. From a constriction standpoint, **Russia's human capital is being steadily sapped**, diminishing its long-term economic and military potential. U.S. strategy encourages this trend indirectly: by supporting Ukraine and prolonging Putin's costly war, and by maintaining sanctions that incentivize young professionals to seek futures elsewhere, the West is effectively exacerbating Russia's demographic and talent bleed. Every technologist or entrepreneur who leaves Moscow for exile in the West is a gain for the democracies and a loss for Russia. As President Biden quipped in 2022, referring to brain drain, "Putin has managed to **'de-Nazify'** Russia by driving out some of its best and brightest."

Iran is somewhat different demographically – its population is still growing, but much slower than before. Iran had a famous fertility crash from the 1980s to 2000s, going from ~6 children per woman to about 2, one of the fastest declines ever. Now its fertility is around or below replacement, meaning Iran too will age (though its median age is still just over 30, younger than China's 38 or Russia's 40+). By 2050, Iran's population may plateau and begin aging significantly. More salient for Iran is that **its population is highly urbanized, educated, and increasingly discontent with clerical rule**. This represents a **legitimacy crisis** that the constriction strategy seeks to quietly encourage. The massive nationwide protests that erupted in Iran in late 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini in morality police custody showed the depth of popular anger – especially among young Iranian women and ethnic minorities – at the authoritarian restrictions of the regime. These protests, which carried on for months, had no illusion of immediate success under brutal repression, but they delivered a powerful message: the Iranian regime is *"struggling for legitimacy"* in the eyes of its own people [83] [84]. Voter turnout in Iran's tightly-managed elections has plunged to record lows (around 40% in the 2020 parliamentary and 2021 presidential elections, the lowest since 1979) [83], indicating widespread public cynicism. *In other words, the Islamic Republic's social contract is fraying.* Western policy has been to amplify Tehran's isolation and the attractiveness of an alternative future: by supporting Iranian civil society (through sanctions relief tools like offering internet services during blackouts, broadcasting truthful narratives via VOA and BBC Persian, etc.), the U.S. and allies signal solidarity with the Iranian people over the regime. The goal is not regime change per se (officially), but **the natural decay of an unpopular regime under the weight of its own repression and failure** is seen as likely, and Western actions like maintaining sanctions (despite nuclear deal talks faltering) are partly aimed at denying the regime resources to rebuild legitimacy [85] [86]. Indeed, as one UK parliamentary analysis put it in 2023, the

combination of protest and low election turnout "suggests the Iranian regime is struggling for legitimacy" [83], which is exactly the kind of internal weakening the anaconda strategy can exploit.

The approach to **internal pressures** in China and Russia is more subtle, given their stronger security apparatuses. But even these giants have cracks. In China, **economic slowing and public frustration** pose latent threats to CCP legitimacy. Decades of rapid growth formed a key pillar of CCP rule (the implicit bargain of prosperity for acquiescence). Now growth is slowing markedly (the real estate crisis, high youth unemployment of over 20%, and the end of the demographic dividend are serious headwinds). The zero-COVID policy protests in late 2022 revealed that even in China's tightly controlled society, discontent can erupt unexpectedly. U.S. strategy doesn't overtly seek to spark unrest in China, but it does aim to *channel* discontent by emphasizing the contrast in governance models. American officials frequently speak about corruption in authoritarian systems, lack of freedoms, and how that leads to worse outcomes (such as China's initial COVID cover-up). The narrative battle (see Section 9) ties in closely – if Chinese citizens come to believe that the CCP is mismanaging the economy or isolating China internationally to their detriment, public confidence could erode. **Time is a factor:** as China ages and if its economy plateaus at a middle-income level, the CCP's promise of national rejuvenation might ring hollow to younger generations burdened with caring for the elderly and facing job scarcity. In fact, President Xi's tightening authoritarianism – while aimed at shoring up control – may be ill-suited to address these complex social challenges [87] [88]. Some analysts argue that an increasingly autocratic system under Xi is *less adaptable* to solving problems like pension reform or encouraging higher birth rates [87] [88]. The U.S. and allies quietly welcome this rigidity, believing that **an inflexible, internally paranoid CCP will struggle to maintain its legitimacy amid societal stresses**, especially when contrasted with the relative vibrancy and resilience of democratic societies.

In Russia, Putin's regime initially built legitimacy on stability and modest prosperity (in the 2000s) and later on nationalist pride and a narrative of Russia's return to great power status. The disastrous Ukraine war undercuts both – thousands of Russian families have lost sons to a war many did not understand or support, and sanctions are chipping away at long-term prosperity. While overt dissent is crushed (independent media shuttered, protestors jailed or exiled), there have been signs of elite fissures (e.g., the Wagner mercenary mutiny in June 2023 briefly challenged Putin's authority, revealing cracks in the façade of unity). U.S. and allied policy on Russia is explicitly aimed at making the war as *unattractive and costly* as possible to Putin's regime – both to deter further aggression and in hopes that internal opposition might eventually rise. If the war is seen as a failure, Putin's personal invincibility myth is punctured. The West has also taken the moral high ground, painting Putin as a corrupt dictator sending Russians to die for his ego, hoping this will sow doubt among Russians (though propaganda in Russia is strong, the message still seeps through via social media and conversations with friends abroad). In a high-disruption scenario, one could imagine Putin's removal from power – whether by palace coup or health (he is in his 70s) – and the regime struggling to maintain control amid nationalist hawks on one side and anti-war segments on the other. The constriction strategy doesn't necessarily *force* that outcome, but by maintaining external pressure (sanctions, military setbacks), it **raises the probability that Russia's internal contradictions sharpen**.

In summary, the anaconda strategy exploits the reality that these rival powers are *not monolithic juggernauts*, but states with significant **structural weaknesses**. By **"waiting them out"** and applying consistent external pressure, the U.S. and allies anticipate that China's economic and demographic momentum will slow and its model may lose appeal (even Xi has warned of the "middle income trap" and the party's diminishing revolutionary zeal), that Russia's Putinist system will corrode from a combination of defeat and demographic decline, and that Iran's theocracy will eventually face either collapse or forced

transformation under the weight of a young, connected populace that does not share its ideology. The emphasis on **strategic patience** in U.S. strategy reflects this thinking – that time is on the side of the open societies, so long as they can prevent the autocracies from achieving quick, decisive gains in the near term.

In practical terms, this facet means the U.S. and allies will *sustain sanctions and diplomatic ostracism* (keeping regimes isolated denies them foreign successes that could bolster legitimacy), *speak out on human rights* (to encourage dissidents and remind populations that the world hears their grievances), and quietly support civil society (through information campaigns or circumvention tools to access the uncensored internet, etc.). Over decades, such efforts aim to **loosen the grip of the autocrats internally, like an anaconda inducing exhaustion in its prey**. There is a historical parallel in the late Cold War: Western broadcasts and the allure of prosperity eroded Soviet citizens' faith in their system, contributing to the USSR's collapse. Similarly, if a young Chinese worker or Iranian student increasingly doubts their government's path and yearns for the freedoms and opportunities seen in democratic countries, that is a victory, however subtle, for the constriction strategy. It turns the adversary's own people (or demographics) into an agent of constraint upon the regime's external ambitions. A state busy firefighting internal dissent or coping with an aging, shrinking tax base is less able to fund adventurism or challenge the global order. In the end, **the tightest coil around these regimes may be the one they unwittingly impose on themselves** through misrule and demographic destiny – the anaconda strategy simply ensures they cannot escape the consequences.

6. Alliance Network Building: NATO Expansion, Indo-Pacific Coalitions, and Global Partnerships

At the core of the anaconda strategy is the strength of the **United States' alliance and partner network**, which far exceeds anything China, Russia, or Iran can marshal. The deliberate expansion and deepening of this U.S.-led alliance network – both in Europe (NATO and beyond) and the Indo-Pacific (the "Atlantic-Pacific" partnership system) – serves to **multiply the constrictive pressure** on adversaries. By **enlisting many nations into a cohesive alignment**, the U.S. creates an effect of encirclement not just in a geographic sense (as discussed in Section 1), but also diplomatically and militarily: the adversaries face a broad coalition rather than isolated confrontation with the U.S. alone. This section examines how NATO's enlargement and reinvigoration, along with new coalitions like the Quad and AUKUS and closer alignment of regional groupings (e.g., ASEAN, EU) with U.S. strategy, contribute to the comprehensive squeezing of China, Russia, and Iran.

NATO Expansion and Revitalization (Encircling Russia and Beyond): NATO – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – remains the world's most powerful military alliance and a linchpin of U.S. strategy. In recent years, far from fading, NATO has expanded and taken on new purpose in directly countering Russian aggression. The addition of new members up to Russia's doorstep has not only **geographically hemmed in Russia** as described, but also vastly increased the alliance's collective capabilities and reach. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has conducted ten rounds of enlargement, growing from 16 members in 1990 to 32 members by 2024 [89] [90]. Importantly, many of these new members (Poland, the Baltic states, Romania, etc.) are countries that Russia once considered part of its security buffer – their accession to NATO represents a major strategic setback for Moscow's influence. NATO's Article 5 guarantee now protects nations all along Russia's western flank. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine – intended in part to halt NATO's creep – instead galvanized NATO to further enlarge: Finland and Sweden's decisions to join mark a strategic earthquake. With Finland in, NATO's border with Russia doubled in length (another ~1,300 km of direct contact) [20]. With Sweden joining (as anticipated in 2024), the entire Baltic Sea becomes essentially a NATO lake, further trapping Russia's navy. NATO has also enhanced partnerships with non-member

neighbors: for example, it has deepened cooperation with Ukraine (declaring at the 2023 summit that Ukraine will eventually become a member in the future) and with Georgia, Bosnia, and others aspiring to join [90].

From the perspective of constraining Russia, NATO's evolution has been extremely effective. Militarily, the alliance now surrounds Kaliningrad (with Poland and Lithuania both NATO members) and can fortify the Suwałki Gap (the narrow land corridor between Kaliningrad and Belarus) to prevent any Russian breakout there. In the Arctic, all Arctic Council nations except Russia are NATO members or close allies, meaning **Russia cannot isolate the High North or Northern Sea Route from allied presence**. Diplomatically, the unity shown in response to Russia's war – NATO countries coordinating thousands of sanctions, expelling Russian intelligence officers en masse, and moving in lockstep to supply Ukraine – underscores that **Russia is effectively facing not one country but a 50-nation coalition** (counting NATO and key Pacific partners like Japan, Korea, Australia who aligned with NATO's sanctions). This multilateral encirclement dilutes any asymmetric response Russia might attempt. For example, Russia tried to cut off gas to Europe in 2022 to break Europe's will, but NATO/EU solidarity (backed by U.S. LNG exports) prevented any one country from breaking ranks – a collective resilience that blunted Russia's leverage. NATO has also been adapting its strategic concept to explicitly name Russia as the primary threat and China as a "systemic challenge," indicating a broadened scope [91] [92]. In effect, NATO is no longer a purely Euro-Atlantic defensive pact but is tilting toward a global role in upholding the rules-based order. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said that "what happens in the Indo-Pacific matters to NATO," reflecting concerns about China's rise. This has led to greater cooperation between NATO and Indo-Pacific partners (like inviting Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea to NATO summits as observers, and establishing liaison missions). The result is an **emerging interlinkage between the Atlantic and Pacific alliance structures** – something that significantly worries Beijing and Moscow, who would prefer to deal with each region separately.

The Quad, AUKUS, and Indo-Pacific Alignments (Encircling China): In the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. has moved to knit together a web of alliances analogous to NATO, though more issue-specific and less formal. The "Quad" – comprising the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia – has re-emerged as a central coalition to promote a *"free and open Indo-Pacific,"* implicitly aimed at counterbalancing China [93] [94]. While not a military alliance with mutual defense pacts, the Quad has been **upgrading strategic coordination among the four pivotal democracies of the region**. They conduct joint naval exercises (the Malabar exercise, which in 2020 included all four navies for the first time in over a decade [95] [96]), coordinate policies on infrastructure financing to offer alternatives to China's Belt and Road, and share intelligence on issues like Chinese maritime activities. The value of the Quad is that it aligns India – a historically non-aligned giant – more closely with the U.S. camp, thus **plugging a critical gap in the encirclement of China**. India provides the "western" anchor in the Indo-Pacific strategy, from the Indian Ocean up to the Himalayas where it directly borders China. Indeed, China's aggressive moves on India's border in 2020 (the deadly Galwan Valley clash) were a catalyst that drove India closer into the Quad's embrace [97] [98]. As one Asia Society piece noted, Beijing is alarmed by the Quad's agenda to *"advance a free and open Indo-Pacific"* which it perceives as code for containing China [97] [98]. The more institutionalized and operational the Quad becomes, the tighter the effective strategic noose around China – because it means U.S. treaty allies (Japan, Australia) and the huge swing state (India) are acting in unison.

In parallel, the AUKUS pact (Australia-UK-U.S.) announced in 2021 represents a major step to **militarily constrain China's future capabilities**. Under AUKUS, the U.S. and UK will assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines – dramatically extending the range and stealth of Australia's navy to patrol the South China Sea and beyond [99] [100]. China reacted angrily, calling it a "Cold War mentality" [101], precisely

because AUKUS will, over time, yield a network of interoperable advanced forces (including not just subs but also cooperation on AI, quantum, and hypersonic missiles) clearly aimed at countering Chinese military expansion. Australia, a middle power, is thus being armed with top-tier tech to become a frontline constrictor in the Pacific. The UK, though not a Pacific nation, is demonstrating commitment by planning to rotate naval assets to the region and cooperating under AUKUS – effectively **globalizing the alliance against China**. Taken together, the Quad and AUKUS, plus existing bilateral alliances (U.S.-Japan, U.S.-ROK, U.S.-Australia, U.S.-Philippines, U.S.-Thailand) and partnerships (with Singapore, Vietnam, etc.), form a lattice of security relationships encircling China in the maritime domain. Former Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, an architect of the Quad concept, explicitly saw it as **a coalition to ensure no single power (read: China) can dominate the Indo-Pacific and to preserve openness** [93] [94]. In Abe's words, the Quad could be a way to socialize China into responsible behavior, but if not, to constrain it with collective strength [102] [103].

Aligning ASEAN and Other Regional Groupings: An important element of constriction is making sure that neutral or non-aligned blocs tilt toward the U.S. position. In Southeast Asia, for instance, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) historically tried to balance the U.S. and China. Recently, however, ASEAN states have grown warier of China's assertiveness (e.g. militarization of the South China Sea). The U.S. has leveraged this by increasing diplomatic engagement with ASEAN as a whole – elevating the U.S.-ASEAN Summit to a yearly event, launching initiatives on infrastructure and digital standards, and explicitly supporting ASEAN's centrality in regional norms. This has encouraged even smaller states to speak up against China's overreach. For example, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia have all strengthened security ties with the U.S. and partners (the Philippines, after a period of ambivalence under Duterte, fully "returned" to the U.S. fold under President Marcos Jr., granting new base access; Vietnam regularly consults with the Quad powers on South China Sea issues). While ASEAN will not become an anti-China alliance, the convergence of its members' interests with the U.S. on key issues (freedom of navigation, opposition to unilateral coercion) effectively **bolsters the encirclement**. It means China cannot count on dividing the region to isolate the U.S.; instead, China sees even its immediate neighbors increasingly cooperating with the U.S. network.

In the Middle East, the U.S. has also fostered quasi-alliances to encircle Iran. The **Abraham Accords** of 2020–2021, which normalized relations between Israel and several Arab states (UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan), have quietly yielded a budding security cooperation aimed at Iran. Israel, the Gulf states, and the U.S. Central Command now share early warning data on Iranian missile and drone threats, and there's talk of integrated air defenses. This effectively lines up Israel and key Sunni Arab states in a loose anti-Iran coalition, something Iran finds threatening as it reduces the divide-and-conquer options it used to exploit in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, NATO's deepening partnerships with countries like Jordan and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states tie those regions closer to the Western security framework, thereby **further isolating Iran**. Even India, though historically friendly with Iran, has tilted away as it strengthens U.S. ties (India cut its substantial oil imports from Iran to zero after U.S. sanctions snapped back in 2018, aligning with the U.S. sanctions regime on Iran). Thus, Iran too faces not just the U.S. and Israel, but a broader alignment of its Sunni Arab neighbors in opposition, coordinated by U.S. diplomacy.

Global Coalition vs. Autocratic Bloc: It is worth noting that while the U.S. builds alliances, China and Russia have tried to form their own partnerships – but these are far less cohesive. There is no "Eastern NATO." Russia has the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) with a few ex-Soviet states, but its credibility was damaged when CSTO allies like Kazakhstan refused to send troops to Ukraine and even maintained neutral or pro-Ukraine stances. China touts partnerships via BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), but these groupings are not mutual defense pacts and include countries with divergent

interests (India is in both BRICS and SCO yet is very much against China's hegemonic aims). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) created economic ties, but also blowback over debt traps, leading many countries in Asia/Africa to become more cautious about China. Meanwhile, **the U.S. alliance network is formalized, battle-tested (in Afghanistan, in anti-ISIS, and now supporting Ukraine), and linked by shared democratic values to a significant degree**. This asymmetry of alliances is a decisive advantage: collectively, NATO + Indo-Pacific allies account for well over half of global GDP and military spending, whereas China's closest military ally is North Korea – a stark contrast.

By continually **broadening and strengthening this alliance network**, the U.S. essentially magnifies the encirclement pressure. NATO expanding in Europe, and frameworks like Quad/AUKUS expanding in Asia, send the message that **the circle of countries aligned against authoritarian aggression is growing**. This has psychological and deterrent effects: adversary leaders feel more isolated and confronted by an overwhelming coalition. For instance, after the Ukraine war began, even traditionally neutral states like Switzerland and Sweden broke centuries of neutrality to side with the Western position (Switzerland joined EU sanctions; Sweden sought NATO membership). Finland's president dryly noted, "you [Putin] caused this – look in the mirror." From the strategic viewpoint, **every new ally or partner added to the U.S. column is another coil in the anaconda**. It forces adversaries to stretch resources across more fronts and discourages them from risky action by raising the certainty of collective response.

In conclusion, **alliance building is the force multiplier of the anaconda strategy**. It converts what could be unilateral U.S. containment into a *network effect* of containment. A network of 30-40-50 countries acting in coordinated fashion can impose far greater costs than the sum of individual efforts. It also lends moral and legal legitimacy – a key difference from the adversaries, which often act alone or with one or two pariah partners (e.g., Russia with Belarus in the Ukraine war). The anaconda strategy relies on this unity to be credible. So far, the results are evident: NATO is more unified post-2022 than it has been in decades, and Indo-Pacific nations are increasingly aligning on China policy (even India is now quietly participating in U.S.-led technology initiatives that exclude China, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework). If this trend continues, by 2050 the international landscape may well resemble **a tight coalition of democracies and like-minded states encompassing the majority of global power, with a shrinking, isolated bloc of autocracies confined on the other side**. That is effectively a strategic stranglehold, achieved not through conquest but through coalition – the anaconda not acting alone but as a constricting **network**.

7. Energy and Maritime Chokepoints: Controlling the Arteries of Global Trade

A classic component of containment strategy is the control of strategic **chokepoints** – narrow pathways on the globe through which a disproportionate share of critical commerce flows. By positioning forces to potentially cut off these arteries, the U.S. and allies hold a powerful deterrent and coercive tool: the ability to literally **strangle an adversary's access to resources and markets** in a crisis. The anaconda metaphor is directly applicable here, conjuring the image of squeezing the supply lines. Key chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, the Bab-el-Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz, and even the emerging Arctic passages are all under careful observation (and in many cases, de facto control) by the U.S.-aligned powers. This section analyzes how dominance over energy and shipping chokepoints serves the constriction strategy against China, Russia, and Iran.

The Strait of Malacca – China's Maritime Lifeline: Perhaps no chokepoint is more discussed in China's strategic circles than Malacca, the narrow strait between Malaysia and Indonesia that connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea. This is the route through which the majority of China's vital imports

(especially oil from the Middle East and Africa, as well as liquefied natural gas and many raw materials) flow. In fact, roughly **80% of China's imported crude oil passes through the Strait of Malacca** [104] [12] – making it a glaring vulnerability often termed China's *"Malacca Dilemma."* Chinese President Hu Jintao popularized this term in 2003, expressing concern that a hostile power (implying the U.S.) could cut off this maritime artery in times of conflict [12] [105]. The United States and its allies have indeed quietly built capabilities to dominate Malacca if needed. Singapore, a close U.S. security partner at the strait's eastern mouth, hosts a major logistics command for the U.S. Navy and has deep interoperability with Western navies. To the west, India's Andaman and Nicobar Command sits by the strait's entrance in the Bay of Bengal – India has been expanding its naval and air facilities there specifically to monitor Chinese naval movements and potentially interdict shipping [106] [107]. The U.S. Navy's persistent presence in the Indian Ocean, often together with Indian and Australian vessels (e.g., during Malabar exercises), means that *in a war scenario, the Western coalition could effectively blockade Malacca and choke China's seaborne trade.* As one analysis notes, the U.S. maintains a "strong naval presence and developed strategies to potentially restrict China's access to key shipping lanes" and Chinese assessments explicitly view the U.S. as the major threat to its energy sea lines [108] [107]. The knowledge of this vulnerability already constrains China's behavior – it has driven China to invest in alternative routes (like pipelines through Pakistan and Myanmar) and a larger naval presence, but those mitigations are limited. In peacetime, the U.S. doesn't need to act, but the latent power to sever Malacca-bound flows is a potent constrictive coil, deterring China from rash moves that would invite a naval blockade. It is essentially a modern-day equivalent of the Union's blockade of Confederate ports – except that China is far more dependent on external trade than the Confederacy was. A successful Malacca cut-off would be economically devastating for China within months, if not weeks, given its reliance on continuous energy imports (China keeps only modest strategic petroleum reserves).

Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb – Hemming in Iran (and Influencing China): The Strait of Hormuz, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, is the world's most critical oil chokepoint (around 17–18 million barrels per day of oil flow through it, about a third of global seaborne oil trade). Iran lies on one side of Hormuz and has often threatened to block it in retaliation for Western pressure. However, the U.S. and its Gulf allies have overwhelming naval power in the region to keep Hormuz open. From a constriction perspective, control of Hormuz serves two purposes: it neutralizes Iran's leverage over global oil (deterring Tehran from attempts to hold the world hostage by mining or blocking the strait), and it means the West can itself shut Hormuz if needed to squeeze Iran (though this would hurt allies too, so it's more a deterrent). Indeed, U.S. and allied naval forces (like the Combined Maritime Forces fleet based in Bahrain) have regularly escorted shipping and practiced responses to Iranian swarm boat attacks, etc., to ensure Hormuz cannot be closed by Iran for long. This diminishes Iran's threatening power and thus **cages Iran within its coastline**.

Meanwhile, the Bab-el-Mandeb, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden (and thus to the Indian Ocean), is another vital choke point – especially for European-Asian trade which then transits the Suez Canal. Around 6 to 9 million barrels of oil and petroleum products pass through Bab-el-Mandeb daily toward Europe or Asia [109] [110], as well as huge volumes of container traffic (any ship going from Europe to Asia via Suez must go through Bab-el-Mandeb). The U.S. and its partners (like France and Japan, which have bases in Djibouti at the Bab-el-Mandeb) are actively guarding this strait, particularly due to threats from Yemen's Houthi rebels (Iran-backed) who have attacked ships. By deploying naval assets (as CFR noted, U.S. and coalition ships have been protecting merchant shipping in the Red Sea from Houthi attacks [111] [112]), the West ensures this artery remains open for its use. But conversely, were an adversary war to escalate, allied control of Bab-el-Mandeb (in conjunction with Suez, controlled by pro-U.S. Egypt) could **bottle up an adversary like China's naval deployments** (preventing Chinese ships from easily moving between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean) and also cut off trade routes. For example, a significant portion of

Chinese and Russian exports to Europe go via Suez – controlling Bab-el-Mandeb and Suez would force those to detour around Africa at great cost, if not outright stop. In a conflict scenario, one could envision NATO navies closing the Mediterranean to Russian or Chinese vessels entirely, given choke point dominance.

It's instructive that Chinese strategists have tried to mitigate this by investing in ports around the Indian Ocean ("String of Pearls"), including Gwadar in Pakistan and a base in Djibouti. Those are attempts to have alternative access points, but in a full confrontation, those could be isolated or neutralized by superior Western naval-air power. In fact, China's base in Djibouti sits near multiple Western bases, meaning it's effectively under the eye of the U.S./France/Japan. So while China is present at Bab-el-Mandeb, it's outmatched locally.

The Suez Canal: Suez is another Western-leveraged chokepoint. Egypt, which controls Suez, is a close security partner of the U.S. and receives substantial U.S. military aid. In any East-West confrontation, it is likely Egypt would align at least tacitly with the West, ensuring Suez is denied to adversaries if needed. The sheer volume of commerce (some 12% of global trade, including energy, passes through Suez annually) means that controlling Suez is a massive strategic advantage – one that the U.S. and NATO indirectly wield through influence in Egypt and an ability to operate in the Eastern Med. When a single ship (Ever Given) accidentally blocked Suez in 2021 for a week, it caused global shipping chaos; imagine that scale of disruption deliberately imposed on China or Russia while Western countries route goods via alternate paths or use stockpiles. This prospect is part of the silent coercive power the West holds.

The Turkish Straits (Bosphorus & Dardanelles): Another choke area relevant to Russia is the entry to the Black Sea through Turkey. Under the Montreux Convention, Turkey can close the straits to military vessels of belligerents in wartime. Turkey is a NATO member, and though it has its own approach, in the event of a broad NATO-Russia conflict, Turkey could shut the Bosphorus to Russian warships. In fact, during the 2022 Ukraine conflict, Turkey closed the straits to *all* warships to prevent escalation, which mainly locked some Russian naval vessels out. This kind of action shows how **Russia's naval mobility is at the mercy of a NATO country's decision at a choke point**.

The Arctic (Northern Sea Route): With climate change opening the Arctic routes, there's a potential new chokepoint dimension. Russia's Northern Sea Route (NSR) along Siberia could shorten transit to Asia. However, with NATO expansion to Finland and Sweden, and strong U.S./Canadian presence in the Arctic, the Western bloc is positioning to ensure the Arctic doesn't become a free highway for Russia or China. NATO states now ring the Arctic circle (as noted, all Arctic littoral states except Russia are NATO), so any shipping through the Arctic can be monitored or challenged. It's conceivable that by 2030s, NATO or a coalition might even enforce certain controls on Arctic navigation under environmental or legal pretenses that de facto constrain Russian use of the NSR for strategic gain. For China, which calls itself a "near-Arctic state," Western control in the Arctic means China's hoped-for alternative route to avoid Malacca (via Arctic to Europe) will still be under the thumb of NATO navies and coast guards.

In peacetime, control of chokepoints also gives diplomatic leverage. For instance, the US Navy's dominance of the Indian Ocean and approaches to Hormuz has enabled rapid punishment of any Iranian harassing of ships (like convoy operations in the 1980s tanker war). It also allowed the U.S. to enforce oil sanctions by tracking tankers and pressuring insurers as mentioned in Section 2.

Furthermore, by **conducting regular Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs)** through contested chokepoints like in the South China Sea (through the Straits of Malacca and through international waters

near Chinese-claimed features), the U.S. signals it won't let China turn those into a Chinese lake. If China cannot even control the waters near its coast (due to U.S. naval presence), it surely cannot control distant straits like Malacca or Bab-el-Mandeb.

In summary, control of energy and shipping chokepoints is a classic squeeze mechanism in the anaconda strategy. **It is the maritime equivalent of cutting off circulation**. The mere knowledge by adversaries that the U.S. alliance can, if provoked, sever their economic lifelines – whether it's China's oil, Russia's export routes, or Iran's ability to send anything out – serves as a powerful deterrent. If deterrence fails, then in conflict it becomes an execution of strangulation. In either case, it significantly **limits the strategic freedom of those adversaries**, forcing them to devote resources to securing alternative routes (which are often longer and costlier) and to naval buildup (which in turn triggers counter-buildup by the U.S. alliance). It is notable that despite massive investment, China still cannot meaningfully project naval power into the Indian Ocean or beyond – any attempt runs into the ring of U.S.-partner naval presence at chokepoints. That is constriction at a grand scale: the adversary can roam within its cage (e.g., Chinese Navy within the First Island Chain), but venture beyond and the choke points await. The anaconda, as it were, has coiled itself around the world's great maritime highways, ensuring the prey stays confined.

8. Network-Effect Standards: Payments, Protocols, Cloud, and Insurance Dominance

In the modern globalized world, **standards and platforms** themselves can become instruments of power. The anaconda strategy extends into the digital and institutional realm by aiming to **maintain Western dominance over critical networks and standards** – from financial payment systems and internet protocols to cloud computing infrastructure, semiconductor standards, and even insurance and legal norms. Because many of these systems have strong *network effects* (the more users adopt a standard or platform, the more indispensable it becomes), controlling them gives the U.S. and allies tremendous leverage. Adversaries find themselves either having to play by rules set by the West or being excluded at great cost. In effect, the "operating system" of the global economy and technology stack is largely Western-designed; the anaconda strategy is to keep it that way and use that fact to constrict authoritarian adversaries' freedom of maneuver.

Global Payments and Currency Networks: As touched on earlier, the West's hold on global payments (SWIFT, Visa/Mastercard, etc.) is a prime example. Visa and Mastercard together facilitate the vast majority of card transactions worldwide – when they **suspended services in Russia**, millions of Russians suddenly found their cards non-functional abroad and foreign cards not working in Russia [40] [41]. Russia had to rapidly shift transactions onto its Mir card network domestically and rely on China's UnionPay for limited international acceptance. But UnionPay is not globally ubiquitous, and Mir is recognized almost nowhere outside a few sympathetic countries. Thus, being cut off from the Western card networks isolated Russia's consumers and businesses from the global economy to a significant degree. This demonstrates a broader truth: **the Western financial network is sticky and self-reinforcing**. People and businesses use it because everyone else does; alternatives struggle to gain traction beyond niche. The U.S. ensures that its adversaries remain dependent or at least disadvantaged in this realm. China has tried to internationalize its renminbi (RMB) and establish the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) as a SWIFT alternative for RMB transactions, but as of 2025 the dollar still accounts for ~88% of all FX trades (as one side of the transaction) and ~60% of reserve assets – meaning global trust is overwhelmingly in Western currency and oversight [36] [37]. Even countries that chafe at U.S. power often still turn to dollars in a crisis (witness how Russians themselves fled to holding dollars or euros when the ruble crashed). The network effect of the dollar-based system is so strong that China and Russia trading with each other often still price deals in

dollars! The anaconda strategy is simply to preserve this status quo and exploit it: by **requiring transactions to clear through Western banks or be insured by Western firms**, the U.S. can force adversaries into compliance (or punish them by exclusion).

Technical Protocols and Internet Governance: Many core internet and telecom protocols were developed in the West – from TCP/IP to 5G standards (3GPP) historically. The U.S. and allies benefit from this because their companies hold key patents and because the architecture often reflects openness and transparency values, which align with Western political values. China and Russia have pushed alternatives (e.g., Chinese proposals for a more state-controlled internet architecture dubbed "New IP") but have met resistance in global standard-setting bodies like the ITU, largely due to Western and allied opposition. Ensuring that **international technical standards continue to be set by consortia of mostly democratic nations or at least in fora where the West has influence** is a part of the strategy. It prevents authoritarian regimes from rewriting the rules in their favor. For instance, U.S. diplomacy worked to convince many countries to reject Huawei's 5G and instead adopt Western-aligned standards (Open RAN etc.), citing security. If, say, 5G networks globally were dominated by Chinese tech and protocols, China could gain both espionage opportunities and an ability to exclude Western tech. Preventing that outcome was crucial – and largely successful: a majority of NATO/EU/OECD countries plus partners like India and Australia have limited or banned Huawei. **So the network effect remains with Western-aligned vendors and security standards.**

Another area is domain governance: the organization that oversees domain names, ICANN, is based in the U.S. and adheres to a multi-stakeholder open model. Russia and China periodically advocate moving internet governance to a more state-controlled UN framework (where they'd have more sway), but Western countries and NGOs have successfully fended that off, preserving an open internet backbone. This matters because it stops authoritarian regimes from potentially carving up or controlling the root of the internet (which could allow censorship or surveillance built into the architecture). In short, **keeping the fundamental digital protocols aligned with open, Western-led norms ensures adversaries cannot bend the network to their will** – rather, if they want to use the global internet and telecom networks, they have to accept the prevailing standards.

Cloud Computing and Tech Platforms: The early dominance of U.S. firms in cloud computing (Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud) and social media/platform ecosystems gives the West another soft chokehold. For instance, Russian businesses were heavily using Microsoft and Amazon cloud services – when sanctions came, those companies halted support and sales to Russia [66] [67], disrupting Russian IT operations. The fact that key software like Windows, Office, Adobe products, etc., are mostly American (with no comparable Russian or even Chinese substitutes widely used globally) means Russia and others are stuck with either pirated copies or inferior alternatives. That has long-term consequences for productivity and technological edge. The U.S. also has legal/regulatory levers on these companies (such as export control enforcement) to ensure adversaries don't quietly keep access. For cloud, as noted, by March 2024 Microsoft and Amazon **completely cut off Russian enterprises from their cloud services** [65] [113], citing compliance with sanctions. This pushed Russian companies onto smaller domestic clouds that lack equivalent scalability or onto Chinese providers like Alibaba Cloud, which come with dependency on China. Neither is an attractive option compared to the world-class capabilities the Western clouds offer. So, **the West's network effect in the tech realm forces adversaries into second-best solutions**, hindering their competitiveness.

Global Insurance and Maritime Trade Services: One of the less glamorous but extremely important networks is the maritime insurance and reinsurance industry. Historically centered in London (Lloyd's) and

Europe (like Norway for marine insurance, etc.), these insurers cover the vast majority of ships carrying goods. The G7's price cap on Russian oil was enforced largely by leveraging these insurers: Western insurers were prohibited from covering shipments of Russian oil sold above $60 [114] [44]. Since roughly 90–95% of the world's tanker insurance and P&I (Protection & Indemnity) insurance is handled by European/U.S. firms, **this policy had teeth** – many shippers couldn't operate without coverage, effectively compelling compliance with the cap or forcing Russia to resort to a risky "dark fleet" of uninsured or self-insured tankers. Likewise, the global shipping industry uses predominantly Western-controlled classification societies, port entry systems, and the U.S.-created GPS for navigation (Russia and China have alternatives like GLONASS and BeiDou, but many ships still rely on GPS). Collectively, these "under-the-hood" services create a Western-aligned fabric that global trade runs on. So if needed, the West can **pull those plugs**: for example, it can blacklist ships (via OFAC sanctions) from ports, exclude them from insurance, and effectively ban them from major trade lanes. That has been done to Iranian and North Korean shipping to great effect.

Even in emerging domains like **finance clearing and SWIFT**, the West still leads, as covered. It's instructive that when Russia was cut from SWIFT, it tried to use its own system SPFS; however, SPFS has at most a few dozen foreign banks connected (mostly small banks in former Soviet states), compared to SWIFT's 11,000+ member institutions worldwide. Similarly, China's CIPS handled only a small fraction of transactions compared to SWIFT (something like processing 15,000 transactions per day vs. SWIFT's 42 million messages per day). These stats reveal the chasm – the Western networks are entrenched and huge, giving enormous economies of scale and trust network that newcomers lack.

Standard-Setting Consortia and Regulatory Influence: Another facet is how Western nations set rules in international bodies ranging from aviation (ICAO) to shipping (IMO) to financial regulation (Basel, FATF). Having rules aligned to Western norms forces adversaries to either play along or be seen as rogue. For instance, after 9/11 the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) set anti-money-laundering/counter-terror finance standards. Iran and North Korea are blacklisted; Russia was suspended from FATF in 2023 after Ukraine invasion. Being out of these standards makes doing business with those countries heavily restricted since compliant banks avoid them. China is part of FATF (didn't want to be blacklisted), so it adheres to many Western-set finance rules, which ironically hamper its ability to help sanctioned friends without risking its own banks' secondary sanctions. So Western dominance in regulatory standards (whether through numbers or influence or threat of exclusion) again **ropes adversaries into at least partially following Western rules** or paying a high cost.

In chip manufacturing standards too, U.S.-led bodies like SEMI and JEDEC set norms; Chinese companies participate but U.S. export controls override any influence they might gain, since the actual tech suppliers abide by U.S. rules. The West has also pushed "trusted network" initiatives (like the Clean Network program for telecom) that rally countries to exclude untrusted (read: Chinese) vendors. Getting dozens of countries to sign onto common frameworks (e.g., EU's toolbox for 5G cybersecurity) creates a de facto standard that isolates China's tech.

Trust Asymmetry as an Asset: The user prompt mentions "trust asymmetries." This likely refers to how the open democratic systems are generally more trusted by other nations and global markets than authoritarian ones. For example, foreign investors have far more trust in the U.S. or UK legal system to protect property than in China's – hence the dollar and pound enjoy reserve status whereas the RMB is distrusted (capital controls, opaque governance). Insurance from a UK firm is considered reliable due to rule of law, whereas if Russia or China tried to set up an alternate insurer, counterparties might question if it pays out claims fairly. Thus **the Western network has a built-in trust premium**. It compounds the

network effect: once you're the trusted standard, you attract more users, which in turn reinforces your central role. This is something adversaries struggle to replicate. They often resort to state-directed strategies to create parallel systems (like China paying countries to adopt BeiDou navigation or use RMB in some deals), but without voluntary trust and adoption, these remain limited.

The anaconda strategy appreciates that *reputation and credibility* are strategic assets. As long as democracies maintain relatively strong rule-of-law and transparency, they will be preferred hubs for global networks – be it finance, data, research collaboration, etc. The adversaries, by contrast, sabotage their own attractiveness by censorship, arbitrary legal practices, or aggression (Russia's war made it a pariah market; China's heavy-handed tech crackdown and surveillance scare away some foreign innovators). So the West's superior position in global networks tends to be self-perpetuating, and Western policy can encourage that by upholding high standards of governance and interoperability. In doing so, **the adversaries remain "takers" of standards they didn't set** or struggle on the margins with inferior homegrown versions.

In summary, **controlling the global networks and standards is like having invisible coils around the adversaries**: they might not feel them day-to-day, but whenever they try to move outside a certain space, they encounter constraints. Want to do international banking? That goes through SWIFT and dollar clearing – cooperate or be cut off. Want to build cutting-edge chips? Comply with Wassenaar military-tech controls or face denial of equipment. Want your ships to trade? Follow IMO rules and carry Western insurance or else be denied entry at ports. These frameworks create an environment where **China, Russia, and Iran are effectively boxed in by the need to conform to global systems that are still largely Western-governed**. They chafe at this (hence talk of dedollarization, "internet sovereignty", etc.), but breaking free involves exorbitant costs and collective action dilemmas (many partner countries won't join them in ditching Western systems because they benefit from them). Thus, the network-effect standards act as a long-term noose – not tightened to suffocate immediately, but always there to limit the adversaries' range of action and to be tightened if they egregiously defy the order (as seen with sanctions enforcement). This subtle but far-reaching dominance is a cornerstone of the anaconda approach in the 21st century, complementing the more traditional military and economic facets.

9. Narrative and Soft-Power Warfare: Ideology, Information, and "Trust" as Weapons

In the struggle between open societies and authoritarian regimes, **the battle of narratives and soft power** is a critical front. The anaconda strategy recognizes that constriction is not just physical or economic but also psychological and moral. By shaping the global narrative – promoting the values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law while exposing the failings and malign behavior of the adversaries – the United States and its allies aim to **erode the legitimacy and appeal of rival systems** and strengthen the coalition of nations willing to contain them. This involves information campaigns, public diplomacy, support for independent media, and leveraging the inherent "trust asymmetry" that tends to favor open societies over closed ones in the eyes of international audiences. In essence, **soft power and credibility are used as a tightening coil**: making the world skeptical of, and resistant to, the narratives put forth by Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran, thereby limiting those regimes' influence and freedom to justify expansionist actions.

Democracies vs. Autocracies – A Framing Narrative: The U.S. has explicitly framed the current era as an ideological competition – President Biden often speaks of a contest between democracy and autocracy shaping the 21st century. This framing rallies democratic nations together (bridging disparate regions under a common banner) and puts China/Russia on the defensive, as they must answer why they suppress freedoms. Through forums like the Summit for Democracy and statements at the G7, the U.S. emphasizes

"the values at the heart of the American way of life" as strengths [8] [115] that competitors cannot match. The goal is to highlight the **"open-system superiority"** – the idea that democracies are more innovative, more prosperous, and ultimately more secure because of their openness, whereas authoritarian models breed corruption, stagnation, and instability. By pushing this narrative, Washington seeks to dissuade other countries from viewing the Chinese or Russian systems as attractive alternatives. For instance, the Belt and Road Initiative is countered not just with infrastructure offers from the West, but with a narrative about "debt traps" and lack of transparency in Chinese projects – a story that has resonated in some BRI recipient countries, leading them to recalibrate or cancel Chinese deals. Similarly, U.S. officials openly talk about Kremlin corruption and how Putin's oligarchy robs the Russian people, undermining any mystique around Putinism.

Exposure of Authoritarian Narratives: A key component of narrative warfare is **exposing and debunking the propaganda of adversaries**. Western governments and NGOs actively counter disinformation emanating from Moscow and Beijing. For example, the EU's East StratCom Task Force runs "EUvsDisinfo" which catalogs and refutes Russian disinformation campaigns (like the false claims about NATO "encircling" Russia discussed earlier) [116] [22]. The idea is to **deny the adversary control of the information space**. In recent years, social media companies (mostly U.S.-based) have taken actions to remove or label state-sponsored propaganda (e.g., Twitter and Facebook labeling Chinese and Russian state media accounts as such, or banning Russian state outlets after the Ukraine invasion in Europe). This limits those regimes' ability to shape narratives freely. Moreover, Western media provides a platform for dissident voices: Russian opposition figures and Chinese human rights activists get coverage on the BBC, CNN, etc., projecting an alternative narrative to the official ones of those regimes. The effect, though hard to quantify, is a **steady undercurrent that questions the legitimacy** of the autocrats and reminds global audiences of their abuses. As the National Endowment for Democracy put it in a 2024 report, "autocracies…disseminate authoritarian narratives globally, seeking to normalize authoritarianism… How can democracies respond by asserting a more positive vision?" [117] [118]. The response includes highlighting democracy's moral and developmental advantages – e.g., pointing out how democracies don't fight wars of aggression (contrasting NATO's defensive posture with Russia's invasion) and how democracies foster innovation (contrasting mRNA vaccine success vs. Chinese and Russian vaccine issues).

Soft Power and Cultural Influence: Soft power – the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies – is another domain where democracies enjoy an edge. American and Western culture (films, universities, brands) have global appeal, including within adversary nations' populations. Millions of Chinese students study in the West (or aspire to), exposing them to democratic societies. The U.S. exploits this by maintaining open channels for people-to-people exchange where possible and by ensuring its narrative of opportunity remains alive. Meanwhile, China's and Russia's soft power efforts (Confucius Institutes, RT/Sputnik media, etc.) have had limited success and often backlash when seen as propaganda. Trust asymmetry plays in here: global surveys (like Pew polls) often show **higher global trust in U.S. leadership than in Chinese or Russian leadership**, especially after events like the Ukraine war [119] [120]. Even in regions wary of U.S. influence (say, parts of Africa or Latin America), the general population often still prefers Western education, Western pop culture, etc., to Chinese or Russian counterparts. The anaconda strategy leverages this by being patient – over time, if people in developing nations see that Western systems produce better outcomes (or at least that Chinese/Russian promises come with strings and pitfalls), they gravitate toward the West. A practical example: during Covid, Chinese "vaccine diplomacy" tried to win hearts by distributing vaccines, but Western mRNA vaccines proved more effective, and Western support through COVAX eventually surpassed China's. This created a narrative of Western reliability vs Chinese opportunism.

Undermining Adversary Legitimacy: For the adversary regimes themselves, the narrative front is partly about encouraging their internal dissent as noted earlier (through broadcasting human rights messages, information about regime corruption, etc.). Western outlets like Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), BBC World Service, VOA, Deutsche Welle, etc., broadcast in local languages to provide uncensored news. This can be quite impactful: during the 2022 Iranian protests, Persian-language broadcasts and social media from outside Iran kept information flowing despite regime internet shutdowns, helping sustain the movement. Similarly, RFE/RL's Russian service and newer outlets like Current Time TV provide Russians an alternative to Kremlin propaganda (with millions accessing via VPNs). Over decades, such truthful media can chip away at the credibility of state-controlled media. The **trust asymmetry** is evident even inside autocracies: many Chinese privately trust Western sources or products more than their own government's, despite the nationalist narrative. E.g., wealthy Chinese prefer Western courts for contract disputes, and Chinese parents often prefer foreign vaccines or baby formula after domestic scandals. These micro-level trust gaps hint at larger legitimacy issues which Western soft-power exploits simply by being the contrast.

Allied vs. Adversary Narratives on International Stage: On the global stage, the West also pushes a narrative of rule-of-law vs might-makes-right. For instance, NATO and EU articulate that Ukraine is a sovereign nation whose borders must be respected, whereas Russia's narrative of "historic claims" is cast as dangerous revanchism. Most countries (even if they haven't sanctioned Russia) at least rhetorically side with territorial integrity principle at the UN. Similarly on China, the U.S. frames things like the South China Sea dispute as upholding international law (UNCLOS ruling) against China's excessive claims. By positioning its actions as upholding a rules-based order, the West garners broader support or at least acquiescence. China and Russia's more transactional or coercive diplomacy often alienates neutral countries over time (e.g., China's wolf-warrior diplomacy generated pushback in Europe, India, SE Asia, aiding the U.S. narrative that China is a bully).

The concept of "trust asymmetry" may also refer to **alliances vs. coerced partnerships**: allies genuinely trust the U.S. (to an extent – there's always debates, but no one fears U.S. invasion), whereas Russia's neighbors and China's neighbors largely do not trust them due to history of coercion. This means U.S. can build real alliances (NATO, etc.), while China and Russia mostly get at best tactical partnerships (China-Russia entente is "driven by need, not trust" as some analysts say). The anaconda strategy benefits from this asymmetry because **the coalition of democracies is held together not just by interest but by some level of mutual trust and values, making it resilient**, whereas any opposing coalition (like say Russia-China-Iran) lacks deep trust and is more brittle. For example, Russia might not fully trust China (Siberia resource issues, etc.) and China certainly doesn't trust an unpredictable partner like North Korea – these cracks limit how effectively they can coordinate compared to NATO.

Finally, it's crucial that the democracies maintain their soft power by living up to their values. The anaconda strategy implicitly includes *self-reform*: acknowledging mistakes (like reckoning with past support for dictators, or instances of domestic injustice) and thus improving credibility when calling out others. If democracies address their weaknesses, it undercuts adversaries' favorite propaganda lines (e.g., Chinese talking point: "America has racism and gun violence, so it has no right to lecture us" – which loses potency if the U.S. shows progress on those fronts).

In conclusion, **narrative and soft power warfare weaves the moral and informational constraints that complement the physical ones**. It rallies a global audience (both governments and peoples) to view the authoritarian challengers with suspicion and to prefer the status quo order championed by the U.S. This not

only isolates the adversaries – limiting their ability to form broad coalitions or woo swing states – but also pressures them internally as their own citizens see alternative narratives of truth and freedom. As a result, China, Russia, and Iran find their **"information space" constricted**: they struggle to sell their worldview convincingly beyond their borders, and even within, they must expend ever more effort on censorship and repression of truth. Much like an anaconda's coils induce exhaustion and panic, the steady drumbeat of democratic messaging and the aspirational pull of freedom aim to wear down the confidence of these regimes over time. And as trust in them erodes domestically and internationally, their strategic position grows weaker, ideally leading them to moderate behavior or face eventual implosion from within. This intangible yet potent dimension of the strategy reinforces all the others – after all, alliances hold together through shared narrative, economic sanctions stick through shared moral purpose, and even soldiers fight harder when they trust in the cause. In the end, **the side that wins the narrative war may well decide the strategic war** – and the democracies are betting that their story, grounded in liberty and human dignity, will ultimately prove far more compelling than the hollow justifications of autocracy [117] [118].

<hr>

Having surveyed the multifaceted components of the anaconda strategy, we now turn to a historical perspective to understand its lineage and novelty, before forecasting how it might play out through 2050 under various scenarios.

III. Historical Parallels and Evolution: From Cold War Containment to Open-System Encirclement

The concept of encircling and containing rival powers is not new – it harks back most famously to George F. Kennan's **Cold War containment** doctrine against the Soviet Union. However, the modern "anaconda strategy" against China, Russia, and Iran both builds on that historical precedent and diverges in important ways. This section provides background on how earlier containment strategies evolved, draws parallels with today's approach, and highlights why the *current variant – a dialectical encirclement leveraging the strengths of an open, interconnected system – differs from the Cold War model*. By examining past successes and failures, we can better grasp the logic of today's strategic design and its innovative features.

Containment in the Cold War: After World War II, faced with Soviet expansionism, the United States adopted "containment" as its guiding strategy, first articulated by Kennan in his 1946 "Long Telegram" and 1947 *Foreign Affairs* article (under pseudonym "X"). Kennan advised that **the U.S. must undertake "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies"** [121]. This meant not directly invading the USSR or rolling it back by force, but rather preventing its communist influence from spreading further until, over time, internal weaknesses would cause the Soviet system to mellow or collapse. The strategy had many dimensions familiar to us today: building alliances (NATO in 1949, SEATO in Asia 1954, etc.) to encircle the USSR and its allies; economic measures (the Marshall Plan to strengthen Western Europe, export controls via CoCom to deny advanced technology to the Soviets); military deterrence (forward-deployed U.S. troops in Europe, a ring of bases from Turkey around to Japan encircling the communist bloc); and ideological competition (the U.S. touted freedom and prosperity vs. Soviet repression). The Cold War "Anaconda" – though they didn't use that term – was symbolized by initiatives like the Truman Doctrine and NSC-68 that framed the struggle as between the free world and an enslaved world, committing U.S. resources to oppose communism globally [6] [122].

We can see direct parallels: then it was communism; now it's authoritarian state-capitalism or kleptocracy. Then as now, the U.S. sought to **surround the adversary with a network of allies, contain its influence within fixed limits, and wait/pressure for its eventual weakening**. Indeed, NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe in the 1990s–2000s can be seen as a continuation of containment, moving the line of "containment" right up to post-Soviet Russia's borders.

However, the *differences* are noteworthy. The Cold War containment was heavily military and ideological in a bipolar context. The U.S. and USSR had almost no economic ties or interdependence to speak of, and each led a fairly closed bloc. That made containment in some ways simpler (clear blocs, few complex supply chains crossing lines) but also riskier (any contact was seen through a military lens, raising nuclear stakes). The modern variant operates in a **much more interconnected world** – especially regarding China, which until recently was deeply integrated in global trade and tech flows. Thus, containment today involves managing economic decoupling without collapsing the global economy. It's more selective, targeting only strategic sectors (e.g., chip tech) rather than a full trade embargo like existed between the West and Soviet bloc. This is why we speak of *"open-system superiority"*: the U.S. strategy tries to use the fact that its adversaries rose by plugging into an open global system, and now deny them the fruits of that system if they turn aggressive. It's a dialectical twist – using globalization (once touted by China/Russia as chance to gain wealth) as a weapon for encirclement by controlling the key nodes.

Another difference is that **the roles of soft power and internal contradictions are even more highlighted now**. Kennan's containment indeed banked on Soviet internal flaws causing mellowing (he predicted either the regime would adjust or collapse). He was right – the Soviet economic stagnation and popular disillusionment in the 1980s led to its collapse without a hot war. Similarly, today's strategy explicitly counts on internal pressures (aging, discontent) in China/Russia/Iran to do much of the work of containment from within, as we discussed. But a key evolution is that the U.S. is now actively engaging in information warfare in ways that are more agile (through social media, broadcast in native languages, etc.) compared to Cold War era when information flow was slower (shortwave radio, leaflets). Also, during Cold War, the ideological contest was communism vs. capitalism as systems. Now it's framed more as democracy vs. autocracy – arguably a clearer moral narrative since communism had some idealistic appeal in the mid-20th century whereas few openly laud "autocracy." This difference means the U.S. today often has broader support in calling out human rights (even other autocracies might quietly agree on norms against, say, territorial aggression, because they too rely on stable global order).

There's also a **multipolar nuance** now. In Cold War, essentially two superpower blocs. Today, the U.S. and allies (which include most advanced economies) vs a loose alignment of China-Russia-Iran, but many other countries are non-aligned or hedging (India, much of Global South). So the strategy must be more nuanced to win over these middle players rather than assume a strict bipolar split. This is why the narrative and standard-setting aspects are crucial – to ensure countries like Indonesia, South Africa, Brazil lean towards the open camp or at least don't actively side with China/Russia. Containment now is about creating a *critical mass* of global coalition that isolates the adversaries, rather than a total bifurcation of the world. Indeed, the West carefully tries to avoid pushing neutral nations away; for example, sanctions on Russia were packaged with humanitarian exemptions to avoid undue harm to Africa (food imports), to keep those countries from blaming the West.

Historically, the **Anaconda Plan** in the American Civil War (from which the strategy's name partly derives) was a Union strategy to blockade and split the Confederacy, cutting off its trade – notably cotton exports and war imports – strangling its economy. That plan took time but succeeded alongside military conquest.

In a metaphorical sense, the current strategy is similar – a blockade in slow-motion, not a literal naval blockade (except possibly in war scenario for China or Russia's navy), but a blockade via trade controls, sanction barriers, alliance buffers. And like the Civil War, where internal Southern economic weakness and lack of foreign recognition sealed its fate, here too the hope is that after years of constriction, China or Russia's internal problems cause their leadership to capitulate to a rules-based order or face collapse.

Why "dialectical encirclement through open-system superiority" is different: This phrase suggests a strategy that uses the inherent strengths of openness (innovation, alliances, moral high ground) to encircle a closed system. "Dialectical" implies maybe that the autocracies contain the seeds of their own undoing (a Marxian dialectic turned on its head). Unlike Cold War containment which was often reactive and militarized (respond to Soviet moves anywhere, even proxy wars), the modern approach is more about leveraging long-term systemic advantages – essentially, **not trying to outdo China/Russia at their game (e.g., matching brute force or propaganda lies) but letting them be outdone by the West's game (free innovation, truth, economic resilience).** For example, instead of matching China's state subsidies dollar for dollar (which could bankrupt the West or distort economies), the West does targeted subsidies but mainly tries to deny China inputs and rally allies to outcompete – trusting that open-market economies are fundamentally more efficient if China is deprived of cheating shortcuts (like IP theft or monopolistic practices). Similarly, rather than competing in disinformation, the West exposes disinfo and commits to factual communication, believing truth wins out (with some delay).

One can draw contrast with **"containment" vs "engagement/competition"** models post-Cold War. In the 1990s-2000s, the West tried engaging China (assuming integration would liberalize it) and cooperating with a weak Russia. By the 2020s, that approach yielded a strong China that became more authoritarian and a resurgent revanchist Russia. So the strategy pivoted back to something akin to containment. But it had to be adjusted because of globalization – hence "selective decoupling" and coalition building. The pivot demonstrates learning: now the West seeks to exploit the dependency that engagement created (China depends on Western tech and markets more than the West depends on China in many areas, once initial supply chain reorientation is done). This is almost the opposite of Cold War, where U.S. and USSR had separate economic spheres; now part of the strategy is *disconnecting* spheres that have been intertwined, which is a delicate operation requiring multilateral coordination and private sector buy-in.

Historically, one might also recall the **Reagan-era strategy** in late Cold War: aggressive arms race (SDI), economic warfare (oil price collapse in 1980s hurt USSR), and ideological offense (Reagan's "evil empire" rhetoric, broadcasting). That was a more confrontational second phase of containment that arguably accelerated the Soviet collapse by exploiting its overstretch and weaknesses. Today's strategy has shades of that: e.g., high-tech arms development (hypersonics, AI, etc.) to discourage China/Russia from arms races they can't win; flooding the energy market (via US shale, etc.) to reduce Russian leverage; and calling out abuses ("genocide" label for Uyghurs, etc.) to rally public opinion. The difference is it's a long game with, ideally, less direct provocation – avoid actual war while applying these pressures.

In summary, the anaconda strategy is **containment 2.0**. It retains the core idea Kennan articulated – surround and constrain until internal change – but uses new tools and is applied to multiple adversaries simultaneously. It's more global (linking Europe and Asia), more economic in peacetime, and banking on the systemic strengths of the U.S. model to prevail. It also faces a more complex environment (e.g., having to contain two great powers, China and Russia, who cooperate somewhat – something not seen before; previously one main adversary at a time). This complexity is why the strategy emphasizes **compounding**

advantages – trying to set positive feedback loops (allies + tech + narrative) that over time become overwhelming, rather than quick wins.

Finally, a key contrast: *containment vs. engagement* was debated heavily regarding China. The fact that by the late 2010s engagement was seen to have failed to liberalize China is what pushed a bipartisan shift to containment-like strategy (explicit in the 2018 NDS: "great power competition, not terrorism, is primary concern" [1][2][3] [4]). So this "modern variant" is also informed by lessons from that era: don't assume integration alone will change an authoritarian regime's nature; instead, be prepared to confront and constrain. But do so cleverly, using the open system's flexibility. The phrase "dialectical" might suggest that by engaging and then constraining, the West turned China's own developmental success (gained via access to open system) into a vulnerability (now China reliant on a system that can be denied to it if it misbehaves). That indeed seems to be what's happening with chip sanctions etc.

In conclusion, looking back at prior strategies illuminates both continuity and innovation in today's encirclement approach. The anaconda strategy is **rooted in the containment tradition**, validated by the eventual triumph of the West in the Cold War, yet it has adapted to a more interconnected and technologically advanced era. It wields interdependence as a weapon, coordinates an even broader alliance network (including former Cold War non-aligned states like Japan or the Gulf states which are now firmly in the U.S. camp), and capitalizes on the self-inflicted wounds of closed regimes (from corruption to demographic decline) in a way that may be even more effective than confronting them head-on militarily. As we transition to looking at the future trajectory, understanding this historical lineage underscores why Western strategists are confident that a slow constriction will work – because a similar playbook executed with patience led to the unraveling of the Soviet Union. They now aim to repeat that outcome, without a direct great-power war, against the current challengers, believing that **time, history, and the internal logic of open vs. closed systems are on their side**.

IV. Trajectory Through 2050: Scenarios of High, Medium, and Low Disruption

Looking ahead over the next 25 years, the anaconda strategy's impact – and the geopolitical landscape at large – will be shaped by a range of potential developments. Some could profoundly accelerate the constriction of adversaries (or, conversely, rupture the strategy), while others might result in a more gradual status quo competition. In this section, we map out three broad **scenarios – high disruption, medium disruption, and low disruption** – to illustrate possible trajectories from now to 2050. Each scenario considers game-changing events (such as wars or internal collapses) and extrapolates how the U.S. and allied strategy might respond and evolve in each case, and what the world might look like as a result. These are not predictions but plausible futures, designed to test the strategy's robustness under different conditions:

- **High-Disruption Scenario ("Coils Tighten in Crisis"):** This scenario posits one or more major shock events in the near-term that fundamentally reorder power dynamics – for example, a military conflict over Taiwan, sudden leadership upheavals in China or Russia, or other crises like a rapid Western technological revolution. Such disruptions would likely *tighten* the constriction dramatically and perhaps decisively, albeit at high risk.

- **Medium-Disruption Scenario ("Persistent Tensions and Proxy Clashes"):** Here, no single cataclysm occurs, but the period is marked by elevated tensions, smaller conflicts, and incremental shifts – such as prolonged war in Ukraine without direct NATO-Russia fighting, near-crisis standoffs over Taiwan that stop short of war, regime instability in Iran, etc. The strategy is tested and adjusted in a volatile but not off-the-charts environment.

- **Low-Disruption Scenario ("Gradual Compounding Advantage"):** In this future, the absence of direct great-power wars or sudden collapses means the competition unfolds in a relatively steady trajectory. The anaconda strategy quietly but steadily applies pressure; open-system advantages accrue over time; adversaries slowly weaken or stagnate. By 2050, without dramatic fireworks, the U.S. and allies find themselves in a position of greatly enhanced strength relative to challengers, having essentially outlasted them.

We will describe each scenario's key features, the outcomes for China, Russia, and Iran, and the implications for U.S./allied strategy – including how strategic patience or adaptation plays out. Through these scenarios, we will see how the principle of **strategic patience and compounding advantages** might deliver slow, irreversible attrition of adversary leverage (especially evident in the low scenario), and conversely how high disruptions might offer opportunities or perils for the strategy.

High-Disruption Scenario: "Coils Tighten in Crisis"

In this scenario, one or more major geopolitical shocks in the 2025–2035 timeframe rapidly escalates the U.S.-China/Russia competition and forces the anaconda strategy into full effect at an accelerated pace. The shocks considered include a potential **China-Taiwan war**, sudden exits of key adversary leaders (e.g., Xi Jinping or Vladimir Putin dying or being deposed), a **collapse of the Iranian regime**, or a transformative Western technological breakthrough (like general AI leading to a productivity boom). These events, while dangerous, could end up significantly hastening the constriction and resolution of the strategic contest – essentially tightening the coils of the anaconda decisively around the adversary.

One plausible high-disruption event is a **Chinese attempt to forcibly reunify with Taiwan** sometime in the 2030s (or even late 2020s). This is often considered the most likely spark of a U.S.-China direct conflict. In this scenario, China's leadership – perhaps facing internal economic stagnation and rising nationalist sentiment – decides to gamble on an invasion or blockade of Taiwan. The United States, having signaled strongly its commitment (especially after lessons from Ukraine), leads a coalition response to assist Taiwan. A war erupts in the Western Pacific. The consequences are enormous: China likely finds itself quickly facing a de facto blockade as the U.S. and allied navies move to cut off Chinese shipping through the **Malacca Strait and other chokepoints** (executing the long-looming contingency) [108] [107]. Chinese ports would become high-risk zones, effectively severing China's seaborne trade – the lifeblood of its economy – within weeks. Western sanctions akin to a financial neutron bomb would hit immediately: **full expulsion of China from Western financial systems, freezing of China's $3+ trillion in forex reserves and overseas assets**, embargo on key exports to China (energy, food, raw materials from allies). The technological chokepoints already prepared (e.g., no semiconductor equipment or advanced chips) become a stranglehold – replacement parts for Chinese industries dry up. The **alliance network activates in force**: Japan and Australia join the U.S. in military operations (Japan providing bases and perhaps maritime forces to protect sea lanes, Australia deploying forces under AUKUS arrangements). NATO, while not directly in the theater, likely issues full political backing and could apply secondary sanctions globally to isolate China. Even countries like India, though not treaty-bound, might see an opportunity to counter China and quietly

coordinate (e.g., stepping up pressure on the Himalayas front to tie down Chinese troops, or providing logistics/intel).

In the actual fighting, many wargames (such as a notable CSIS series [124] [125]) suggest that while extremely bloody, an attempted Chinese invasion of Taiwan could be defeated by a U.S.-led coalition, resulting in a pyrrhic Chinese failure – losing ships, aircraft, and prestige. In this scenario, by **2030 China's power could be broken militarily**: its navy perhaps half sunk, its expeditionary capability proven inadequate, and its imports of oil and food choked off. Domestically, this might trigger a massive legitimacy crisis for the CCP – a disastrous war combined with severe economic hardship (GDP contracting sharply due to sanctions and blockade). Xi Jinping's position could be at risk; a coup or fracturing of CCP elite could occur as blame is cast. **The regime that prided itself on 'national rejuvenation' would instead face humiliation.** In effect, the anaconda strategy would have rapidly fulfilled its objective: neutralizing China as a peer competitor. A China that loses a war and is economically isolated would, by 2050, likely be a shell of its former rise – possibly experiencing internal fragmentation or at best turning inward under a hardliners' repressive rule to maintain control over a disgruntled populace.

This high-disruption outcome is risky – war with a nuclear-armed China could escalate unpredictably (though both sides might avoid nuclear use due to assured destruction logic). But if it played out as above, the **post-war environment** would see an even more hegemonic U.S.-led order: Taiwan's democracy preserved (perhaps formal independence at that point), the Indo-Pacific thoroughly galvanized under U.S. leadership (with even India formally aligning after seeing China's threat realized), and China thoroughly contained, akin to post-1945 Germany or Japan albeit with a larger population to manage. The open-system alliance, albeit bruised by war costs, would have demonstrated the ultimate constriction – defeating the adversary in war and forcing its capitulation to the rules-based order (perhaps via a change in regime or at least behavior). By 2050 in this scenario, one could imagine a People's Republic of China that is significantly weakened or even a different government (in a speculative extreme, perhaps a more democratic or moderate leadership arises post-Xi, seeking to rebuild relations, not unlike post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s but hopefully more successfully integrated). The anaconda would have essentially strangled the Chinese Communist Party's aggressive vision out of existence.

Now consider **Russia** in this high-disruption context. One shock could be Putin being removed unexpectedly – e.g., a coup or health issue – especially if Russian war efforts in Ukraine continue faltering. Suppose Putin were to die in, say, 2025. Without his personalist rule, Russia might enter a period of tumult: hardliners vs. more pragmatic officials vying for power, perhaps regional unrest (e.g., Chechnya or other republics testing Moscow's grip). The West in a high-disruption scenario might see an opportunity akin to 1991 – to peel Russia away as a threat. If a relatively moderate or simply war-weary faction takes charge, they might seek sanctions relief by freezing the Ukraine conflict or withdrawing. The U.S. and Europe could then engage a weakened Russia in a form of conditional détente: relief in exchange for genuine security concessions (like a smaller military, agreeing to an arms control treaty that codifies limits). Essentially, Russia might be forced to accept a **"neutralized" status** – not formally disarmed, but so economically enfeebled and politically shaken that it can no longer act as a revanchist power. Ukraine could regain territory (maybe not Crimea immediately, but possibly via negotiation later). By 2050, such a scenario could result in Russia as a diminished power, possibly fracturing (some scenario planners even imagine Siberia edging closer to China or separatist movements if central authority breaks – though China itself might be in no position to capitalize if it's also in chaos from the above scenario). Alternatively, Russia could pivot to survive by becoming even more a junior partner to China if China hadn't been quashed – but in our combined high-disruption vision, both China and Russia are battered. So Russia might instead try to mend fences with

Europe to avoid total collapse (especially if China is removed as an alternative patron). The anaconda strategy would have succeeded in Europe: NATO expanded (maybe Finland/Sweden complete integration; possibly Ukraine in NATO by 2030 if Russia's threat recedes), and Russia's ability to threaten neighbors is close to nil.

For **Iran**, a high-disruption catalyst could be the collapse of the Islamic Republic under ongoing protests and succession struggles (Khamenei is in his mid-80s, so by early 2030s, likely passed on). Imagine in the late 2020s, protests and economic woes swell to a point where elements of the regime concede or splinter – perhaps the Revolutionary Guard seizes power officially but faces even greater public resistance, leading to internal conflict. In a forward-leaning U.S. strategy, one could see support for a transition: maybe an interim government emerges that seeks normalization with the West in order to stabilize the country. Under such a scenario, by 2035 Iran could undergo a political transformation – not necessarily a Jeffersonian democracy, but at least a less aggressively ideological government that prioritizes economic recovery over regional adventurism. If that happened, the U.S. might swiftly lift sanctions, flood Iran with investment offers, aiming to **pull Iran out of the anti-West camp**. Israel and Gulf states might worry but could accept a peaceful Iran more easily if it's not on a revolutionary mission. So, in a high-disruption scenario, Iran might be the surprising "win" – the coils around Iran (sanctions, isolation) finally trigger the regime's choke. The collapse of clerical rule would vindicate the long pressure campaign. By 2050, Iran could be reintegrated, much like how Eastern European countries flipped sides after the Cold War – potentially even as a partner in Middle East stability if relations thaw similar to how Vietnam eventually aligned with the U.S. after its communist peak (an imperfect analogy, but shows how enmity can shift with regime change).

Additionally, **Western technological disruption** – say a genuine AI-driven productivity boom or breakthrough in fusion energy – could drastically shift power balances. For instance, if by 2035 the U.S. and allies harness AI to massively grow their economies (a "Fourth Industrial Revolution"), they could leap far ahead of China, which, deprived of advanced chips, lags. A rapid growth spurt would give the West more resources for defense and innovation, while China would face relative decline faster (especially if its demographic collapse bites at same time). Similarly, cheap fusion energy commercialization in the West would undercut petro-states like Russia (oil demand plummets) and render China's desperate energy import needs moot but also ruin its Belt and Road investments in fossil resources. These high-tech disruptions are *force multipliers* for the anaconda strategy: they shorten the time needed for open-system advantages to become overwhelming. If by 2050 the West attains, say, widespread AI automation raising GDP by 30% while China is stuck trying to reverse engineer 5nm chips without success, the resource gap will echo the late Cold War scenario where the USSR couldn't keep up with U.S. SDI and computing advances.

The **net result of the high-disruption scenario**: By mid-century, the strategic competition could effectively be over in favor of the U.S.-led network. China might be politically shattered or at least militarily checked and internally re-focused (some envision even a breakup or loose federalization if central CCP loses grip, though that's speculative). Russia could either disintegrate or become a pliant secondary power possibly aligned with Europe (if a friendly regime emerges) or at least not expansionist (if balkanized or impoverished). Iran could be a very different country, possibly even aligned economically with the West and Israel if a moderate government sought to rebuild (imagine the potential: Iran's educated youth unleashed from sanctions could become a regional economic engine under Western partnerships). This scenario is essentially the **"best-case outcome"** of the anaconda strategy from a Western view – albeit achieved through perilous moments. It validates strategic patience but with the caveat that when shocks happened, the West responded with resolve, not hesitation. It also heavily relies on the assumption that no nuclear weapons are used despite high tensions – a hopeful assumption that rational deterrence holds.

Of course, the high-disruption path carries immense risks: miscalculation in a Taiwan war or Russian corner could escalate to nuclear conflict – the ultimate disruption that would render any strategy moot by sheer destruction. But the scenario assumes either avoidance or extremely limited use (e.g., maybe Russia uses one tactical nuke in Ukraine but the West still prevails and it doesn't go full exchange). The anaconda strategy's authors no doubt prefer victory without such chaos, but they prepare for worst-case.

Medium-Disruption Scenario: "Persistent Tensions and Proxy Clashes"

In a medium-disruption future, the world sees **heightened rivalry and periodic crises**, but avoids the extreme shocks of direct great-power war or rapid regime collapse. Instead, we get a *grinding competition* with flare-ups: protracted conflicts fought by proxies or within gray zones, global shocks short of world war (cyberattacks, sporadic military incidents), and internal strains in adversary states that cause instability but not outright revolution. This scenario might look like a continuation and intensification of current trends. The anaconda strategy would be continually tested, adjusted, and reinforced in this dynamic environment, as the coils tighten more gradually while dealing with intermittent convulsions from the adversaries.

One likely component is that the **Russia-Ukraine war persists through the 2020s**, oscillating between active fighting and uneasy ceasefires. Russia could dig in to hold some territory in Eastern Ukraine, while Ukraine (backed by NATO weaponry) fights on. Neither side achieves total victory; instead, the conflict becomes a **frozen (or simmering) proxy war** reminiscent of, say, the Korean DMZ or Indo-Pakistani Kashmir standoff. This ties down Russia militarily and economically (continued sanctions), but also forces the West to manage a long-term support burden for Ukraine and maintain unity despite fatigue in some publics. NATO in this scenario likely expands its permanent force presence in Eastern Europe (e.g., brigades in Poland, Baltics, Romania become enduring) as a deterrent [116] [22]. Occasional crises might occur – e.g., a Russian missile incident involving Poland or a dangerous nuclear plant situation – raising tension but NATO and Russia step back from direct confrontation. The result by 2030: Russia is contained and slowly weakening under sanctions (low growth, tech stagnation), but Putin (or his successor of similar ilk) remains in power, and Russia still causes trouble via cyberattacks or mercenary deployments in places like Africa. Essentially, **the constriction of Russia continues but without a knockout blow**. By 2050, this scenario might have Russia diminished (population older, economy maybe the size of a mid-tier country like Spain, with China not as helpful a partner due to its own issues) – in effect a drawn-out strangulation. The benefit: NATO never had to fight Russia directly, avoiding nuclear escalation. The cost: Ukraine's reconstruction and security remain global challenges for decades, and some conflict risk persists until maybe a new generation of Russians changes course.

For **China**, medium disruption could mean a **major Taiwan crisis short of invasion**. For instance, at some point in the 2030s China might attempt a blockade or seizure of an outlying Taiwanese island (like Kinmen or Matsu) to test U.S. resolve, rather than an all-out assault on Taiwan proper. The U.S. and allies respond with a massive show of force – maybe breaking the blockade with a humanitarian escort operation or imposing counter-blockade measures on Chinese shipping. A tense standoff ensues; one or two skirmishes (e.g., an exchange of missile strikes on naval vessels) happen, but both sides pull back from full war. Perhaps a face-saving arrangement de-escalates it (similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis resolution). In the aftermath, however, **supply chain decoupling and arms racing accelerate dramatically**: the crisis would scare many multinational companies out of China entirely (expanding the friend-shoring trend we see), and it would motivate the U.S. to double down on Indo-Pacific military posture (e.g., more missiles in Okinawa and Guam, rapid militarization of Quad coordination). China, having come close to conflict, might ramp up defense spending, straining its economy. Taiwan likely formally increases its ties with U.S. (maybe even a

quasi-recognition or at least a NATO-like security commitment). Effectively, a near-war scare could solidify the encirclement: after such a crisis, **the first and second island chain defenses would be on hair-trigger readiness** and countries like the Philippines would fully align (already they're moving that way with new base agreements [13] [126]). Meanwhile, China's global image would suffer – seeing its aggression, Europe might align more with U.S. Indo-Pacific policy (already Europe is re-evaluating China ties). But since no war destroyed China's economy, it would try to adapt – perhaps turning more autarkic, focusing on domestic tech via massive spending, while forging a tighter Sino-Russian bloc to withstand the pressure.

This points to a world in 2050 where China is still an adversary but possibly *lagging* – maybe it hasn't collapsed but its ambitions have been checked. It may have built a lot of military hardware but cannot use it beyond its near seas due to the coalition facing it. The U.S. alliance system by then might have formalized something akin to an **Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization** (perhaps expanding AUKUS/Quad into a collective defense pact including say Japan, Australia, maybe India if its border clashes with China continue to push it Westward). Essentially, medium disruption yields a **quasi-Cold War scenario in Asia**: two armed camps, but the Western camp stronger and containing the other, waiting out internal decline in the East.

Internally, **China's society might be under strain** – medium scenario could involve, for example, regional unrest or harsh crackdowns like another Tiananmen-style event if economic conditions worsen. But the CCP remains in control via surveillance and force (perhaps with a new leader if Xi died and was succeeded by another hardliner). The population is unhappy (especially younger people facing job scarcity and nationalism that doesn't pay the bills), but large-scale revolt doesn't occur due to effective repression – *thus no high disruption of regime fall, just a grinding malaise*. This aligns with the idea of "irreversible attrition": by 2050, China might still be governed by CCP but it could look a lot like Brezhnev-era USSR – stagnant, technologically behind, people cynical, the initial fervor long gone, basically **ripe for collapse eventually but not there yet**.

For **Iran** in a medium scenario, perhaps the regime neither collapses fully nor fully stabilizes – instead, it goes through cycles of protest and crackdown. The year 2030 could see the Islamic Republic still in power but only after maybe a contested succession (if Khamenei dies, the infighting leads to a more collective leadership or a hardline president tries to take more control). They double down on nuclear advances to deter any foreign pressure. There might be an intermittent conflict: e.g., Israel might strike some nuclear facilities in the late 2020s if diplomacy fails, leading to a regional flare-up of missile exchanges (Iran's proxies attacking Israel or Gulf states, Israel and maybe U.S. hitting IRGC targets in Syria/Iraq). But neither side wants full-scale war, so it ebbs. Iran remains sanctioned and isolated, but thanks to some Chinese and Russian help (assuming those countries are still not fully collapsed themselves) it limps on – selling some oil quietly, trading with neighbors who defy sanctions partly. So by 2050, Iran too might not have changed regime, but its economy could be in shambles (a brain drain continued, per capita income low, water crises etc.). Possibly a middle-ground outcome is that a moderate faction gains presidency and negotiates a new nuclear deal around 2030 to get partial sanctions relief – not a full friendship with U.S., but a détente enough to ease pressure. The West might accept that in medium scenario to avoid Iran tilting fully to Russia/China bloc. So Iran could see some fluctuation: perhaps early 2030s slight thaw (nuclear deal 2.0), later 2030s renewed tensions if a different faction takes over. Overall still a problem, but a containable regional one – the *coils around Iran remain but loosen occasionally if behavior improves, then tighten if it worsens.* The net effect by 2050: Iran has not become a powerful regional hegemon (the strategy prevented that) but it also hasn't transformed positively – it's just a weaker version of the Islamic Republic still grappling with internal dissent and an economy far smaller than similarly populous Turkey or Egypt, thus less able to project power.

In terms of **international order**, the medium scenario is almost a **prolonged Cold War II** but likely without a clear ideological standoff (few countries actively want to model themselves after Xi's or Putin's governance – they just align for interests). Many global challenges (climate, pandemics) might suffer from this ongoing tension (e.g., climate cooperation stalls as China and U.S. don't trust each other's data or intentions). The open vs closed narrative would continue – democracies might strengthen their coordination (maybe more economic decoupling among trusted partners, forming something like a techno-democratic bloc for supply chains). Meanwhile, the autocracies form their own modest trade/tech circuits (China-Russia-Iran try to promote alternatives to SWIFT or internet segments), but those remain second-rate as discussed. So the world splits to an extent, but not completely – some non-aligned nations trade with both sides. Essentially, a **containment equilibrium** holds: adversaries are constrained, but not broken; the U.S.-led alliance is dominant but still on alert and expending resources to maintain the pressure.

This medium scenario is arguably the path we are currently heading into absent extreme events: a decades-long strategic competition that might eventually end when the adversaries either reform or rot enough internally (like the Soviet collapse in 1991 came after a long containment without direct war). It emphasizes strategic patience most strongly – needing to hold the line through multiple crises without flinching or fracturing alliances. The principle of compounding advantages plays out gradually: for instance, by 2040 Western democracies might be clearly pulling way ahead of China in economic and technological metrics as China's aging really bites and decoupling denies it innovation – but it's a *trend*, not an overnight win. By 2050, the compounding could result in, say, the G7 share of world GDP rising again relative to BRICS, NATO's military tech leaps ahead with quantum and AI-enabled forces while China/Russia struggle to maintain legacy systems. At that point, the adversaries might come to the table (like Gorbachev did in late 1980s) acknowledging they can't win. Maybe a new Chinese leadership in 2040s decides to liberalize politically to revitalize economy, or a post-Putin Russian government seeks genuine integration if it can get security and prosperity. Those would be turning points that effectively mark victory for the containment strategy – but they happen as a culmination in the medium scenario rather than abruptly.

Low-Disruption Scenario: "Gradual Compounding Advantage"

In the low-disruption scenario, **no major wars or sudden regime implosions occur**. The strategic competition unfolds in a quieter, steady manner, with the United States and its allies slowly accruing advantages and adversaries gradually losing ground almost imperceptibly year to year. It is a future in which the anaconda strategy operates in the background, relentlessly but patiently squeezing, while the global system avoids severe shocks. This is essentially a **"business-as-usual" extension** of current trends, albeit with the West diligently enforcing the containment measures and time doing much of the work.

In this world, we might see, for example, **China never makes a dramatic move on Taiwan** – deterred by the strong U.S.-Japan posture and internal focus, it continues its saber-rattling (flyovers, naval drills) but always stops short of force. The Taiwan Strait remains tense but peaceful. The absence of war means the global economy isn't upended by conflict; however, the decoupling still proceeds moderately. Western firms continue diversifying supply chains (following market logic and gentle government pressure), such that by 2035 China's role in advanced industries like semiconductors and critical materials is significantly reduced. Maybe China still manufactures many consumer goods, but for high-tech, the West and its partners have onshored or "friend-shored" (e.g., chip fabs in US, Japan; rare earth mines in Australia, etc.) [56] [54]. China's economy in the low scenario grows for a while but at a diminishing rate – the IMF projects perhaps 2–3% annual growth by the 2030s [127] [128]. Compound that with population decline starting to accelerate after 2030 (losing 5-10 million people a year by 2040s) [129] [75], and by 2050, China might have peaked

economically relative to the U.S. – possibly even still the largest economy by sheer size, but not in innovation or per capita terms, and facing a heavy burden of elderly care. Without a dramatic event to force change, the CCP likely remains in control throughout, but the strains mount: youth unemployment a persistent issue, provincial debt crises cropping up, the propaganda narrative of "national rejuvenation" sounding hollow as growth plateaus and global influence stalls. However, because there's no crisis, the regime muddles through with continued authoritarian controls, essentially managing decline. **By 2050, China in this scenario could resemble Japan's lost-century, but under a much more repressive government** – i.e., stagnating, aging, focused inward on stability. It's not an overt victory for democracy in China, but such a society is far less able to challenge the world order. The open system in contrast keeps regenerating: Western economies, while growing slower than earlier times, benefit from steady innovation (AI, green tech) and immigration (the U.S. population still increasing modestly, whereas China's is shrinking fast [76] [77]).

Meanwhile, **Russia in a low-disruption path** might see the Ukraine war eventually wind down not with a bang but a frozen conflict. Say by late 2020s, a ceasefire is reached that leaves Russia holding some territory (Donbas land bridge), Ukraine devastated but rebuilding with Western aid, and sanctions on Russia largely in place because a comprehensive peace is absent. Putin (or a chosen successor) stays in power, and Russia remains authoritarian and hostile but more isolated than ever – a **"fortress Russia"** that looks north to the Arctic (developing some resources there) and east to China (selling raw materials at discount because few others buy), while NATO has expanded (perhaps Sweden and Finland fully in, and even Ukraine potentially a de facto NATO-supported state if not formal member). There's no Russian implosion, but by 2050 Russia's demographic and economic decline is stark: population might drop from 146 million to perhaps 120 million [78] [79], and its economy – already just ~3% of global GDP in 2020 – might be even less, lacking diversification and cut off from tech. The leadership clings to nationalist pride and its nuclear arsenal for relevance, but many Russians see their Chinese "friend" increasingly dominate Siberian business and maybe resent effectively becoming a junior partner. Without dramatic change, Russia slowly weakens – in effect, the **anaconda coils Russia into long-term dormancy**. Possibly by the 2040s, a younger generation of Russians starts pushing for change (as happened in the 1980s USSR), but that might come gradually through internal reform rather than sudden collapse, if at all by 2050 in this scenario.

Iran in a low-disruption case could follow a trajectory similar to how it has for the last decades: the regime endures through ups and downs. Perhaps it avoids collapse by making some concessions when needed – e.g., if protests get too large, they might allow a slightly reformist president at times to ease tensions, but the core system stays. Iran might eventually reach a threshold nuclear capability (maybe it doesn't openly build weapons, but is on the cusp). To avoid a crisis, the U.S. and Iran could tacitly fall into a containment-deterrence balance: Israel and the U.S. deter Iran from overt weaponization with threat of strikes, and Iran deters overt attack by always being just weeks away from a bomb. It's a precarious but possibly stable "cold peace." Over time, if Iran isn't overthrown, it likely evolves – hardliners could moderate out of necessity if oil's relevance declines and economy needs diversification. By 2050, the Islamic Republic might resemble other aging one-party states – still in control, but ideological zeal faded, society cynical, and much of the populace simply disengaged or emigrated. In the region, Iran's influence could wane due to its stagnant economy, while U.S.-backed blocks (perhaps an informal Arab-Israeli alignment) contain it. The West keeps sanctions partly, but maybe eases some if Iran behaves on nuclear front – so Iran never flourishes but also never starves enough to explode. Essentially, **the regime is slowly suffocating but at a pace it can manage**, not enough to trigger collapse by 2050 without bigger shocks.

Globally, the low disruption path might see *less open conflict but a persistent strategic rivalry*. International institutions still function (UN, trade bodies) but are arenas of competition – e.g., China pushes for more sway in UN agencies, the West pushes back, each side scoring points but not blowing the system up. The narrative battle continues: democracies tout their innovation and alliances (pointing perhaps to how free countries recovered from pandemic better or how NATO solidarity protected Europe's peace post-Ukraine), whereas autocracies defend sovereignty norms (complaining about Western "interference"). Over decades though, in absence of clear wins for autocracies, many neutral countries might drift to emulate democracy for growth (the so-called demonstration effect – they see China plateau and note that being a closed system didn't lead to surpassing the West). So, you might get more countries moving into the democratic camp by choice (e.g., maybe by 2040s, some currently hybrid regimes become solid democracies as education rises and they see which system is delivering prosperity). The free world thus could actually expand, not by force but attractiveness. That compounds advantages further: more innovative partners, bigger market aligned with rule of law. The autocratic bloc, meanwhile, might shrink – perhaps internal changes in smaller adversary states like Venezuela or North Korea (maybe Kim's regime still limps along in 2050, but maybe not – in a low scenario, even if it does, it's contained and irrelevant outside causing local suffering).

In a low scenario, the principle of *"strategic patience and compounding"* is most exemplified: the West diligently constrains adversaries, invests in its own resilience and innovation, and simply waits as the inherent flaws of closed, aggressive regimes (corruption, rigidity, demographic decline, inability to inspire allies) gradually erode their power. There's a famous line from Kennan's long telegram that if the Soviet system could not expand, it would mellow or decline [130] [131]. The low scenario is exactly that in slow motion. By 2050, without ever having had a direct great-power war, the United States and its allies might find that their main challengers have grown old – literally and figuratively – and lost much of the vigor that made them threatening in 2025. In relative terms, the free world could be more dominant economically (perhaps controlling, say, 70% of global high-tech industries, up from maybe ~60% today as China's share recedes). Militarily, networked alliances (NATO, a stronger Pacific coalition) ensure deterrence is rock-solid, so even if autocracies have some capability, they don't dare use it aggressively, knowing the response would be overwhelming.

This outcome is somewhat **anti-climactic** – no collapse photo-op like the Berlin Wall falling; instead, perhaps a whimper: e.g., a CCP General Secretary in 2050 announces economic reforms and international cooperation plans that basically concede to global norms because China needs help with its aging crisis; or a post-Putin Russian quietly negotiates an end to sanctions and conflict, effectively accepting a junior status just to improve Russians' living standards. The world moves on, fewer people around the world even see those regimes as models or threats – they might just be there, much like how in 2021 few saw Cuba's regime as a major player, it was just a leftover.

Of course, a caveat: low disruption doesn't mean it's all smooth sailing for the West – slow trends can breed complacency or division. One challenge in this scenario is maintaining unity and focus in the absence of galvanizing crises. Democracies might have internal political shifts (some might elect isolationist leaders at times who question the costs of containment – e.g., U.S. could see pressure to reduce defense spending if no obvious war threat is visible, or Europe might want to trade more with China again after years of standoff if nothing 'bad' happened). The anaconda strategy requires sustained willpower; low disruption provides less dramatic justification to publics for why the pressure must continue. So the risk is the anaconda dozes off and loosens inadvertently. If, however, statesmanship and strategic communications keep people mindful of the stakes ("we have peace and advantage now precisely because we maintained strength and pressure"), the coalition can persist until the job is done.

<hr>

Conclusion: Across these scenarios – high, medium, low disruption – the consistent theme is that the United States and its allies are positioning themselves to come out on top by virtue of their enduring strengths and the deliberate constriction of their adversaries' options. High disruptions might accelerate the anaconda strategy's success (albeit with great risk), medium-level conflicts and turmoil will test its resilience but likely reaffirm its necessity, and low-level competition will reward patience and steadiness. In each case, the emphasis on **strategic patience, allied cohesion, and the cumulative advantages of an open system** appears validated. We turn now to conclude with overarching observations and recommendations, tying together how the anaconda strategy – methodical, multifaceted, and forward-looking – can secure a favorable peace and stability in the long term.

V. Strategic Patience and Compounding: The Power of Time and Unity

A core insight behind the anaconda strategy is that **time is an ally of open societies**, provided they remain united and true to their principles. Unlike in a rapid, decisive war, the goal here is a slow, inexorable weakening of the adversaries' strategic positions through consistent pressure and the natural advantages of the democratic world. By emphasizing **strategic patience and the compounding of advantages**, the strategy banks on the idea that today's small gains – if sustained and accumulated – become tomorrow's dominant position. This final section reflects on why patience and perseverance are vital, and how incremental progress can lead to irreversible outcomes.

The historical record offers compelling evidence that when democracies exercise patience, they often outlast more brittle authoritarian competitors. The Cold War, as discussed, was fundamentally a test of endurance: for decades the West contained the Soviet Union, making incremental technological and economic gains, until the Soviet system's inefficiencies and lack of legitimacy caused it to collapse under its own weight. The Western democracies emerged not by a sudden conquest but by *out-compounding* the USSR – year after year of innovation, growth, and alliance cohesion, which the stagnant Soviet model could not match [118]. Similarly, if we consider the "long game" with China, the U.S. and its partners still lead in many critical areas: cutting-edge semiconductor design, fundamental research, attractive destinations for talent and capital. If those advantages are nurtured and expanded over 10, 20, 30 years, the gap with an adversary that is constrained from stealing or importing the latest tech will widen significantly. **It is much like the effect of compound interest in finance** – small lead yields ever-greater returns over time, whereas the side experiencing compound decay (due to sanctions, brain drain, etc.) falls further and further behind.

Crucially, strategic patience does not mean inaction; it means **steady, proactive measures whose effects may not be immediately dramatic but are cumulatively decisive**. For example, establishing a new base or alliance today might only marginally increase deterrence right now, but over 20 years it could be a linchpin that completely denies adversary military options (e.g., new U.S. access to Philippine bases near Taiwan [13] [14] will have an outsized effect in a future scenario where those positions allow quick containment of Chinese forces). Enacting export controls on one generation of chips might slow an adversary's AI program slightly; maintaining and tightening those controls over a decade will put them multiple generations behind, effectively *crippling their ability to compete* in AI-driven military and economic realms. Each sanction on a corrupt oligarch or each exposure of disinformation may seem pinprick – but

collectively, they foster the environment where the adversarial regime is weaker internally and less credible externally.

Another aspect of patience is **avoiding hasty overreach that could backfire**. The anaconda strategy deliberately avoids direct military invasion or attempts at forcible regime change, recognizing that such actions, while swift, often carry enormous costs and unpredictability (the Iraq War lesson, for instance). Instead, it applies pressure in a way that gives adversary leaders the chance to make choices toward de-escalation or reform – essentially allowing them an off-ramp if they change behavior, or a gradually tightening noose if they do not. This methodical approach seeks to minimize global disruption and rally a broad base of support (it's easier to keep allies on board with sanctions and deployments than with starting wars). By being patient, the U.S. can ensure that *when* the adversary collapses or yields, the international community is prepared to handle the aftermath (for instance, by 2050, if or when political change comes in China or Russia, the U.S. and allies, having long foreseen it, will have built networks with dissidents, plans for reconstruction aid, etc., smoothing a transition).

One cannot overstate the importance of **unity among allies** in making strategic patience effective. Patience in isolation can become paralysis, but patience as a coordinated alliance stance becomes a formidable wall. As noted in the introduction, America's "globe-spanning network of alliances and partnerships" is a center of gravity [132] [9]. If the alliance holds firm over time – through election cycles, economic cycles, and adversaries' attempts to sow discord – then the anaconda strategy has an unbreakable backbone. That is why adversaries constantly attempt to split the West: they understand that **no single democracy acting alone has the leverage that a unified coalition does**. Strategic patience thus includes patiently resolving internal rifts and strengthening democratic institutions so that domestic or allied politics do not derail the long-term strategy. It means investing in public awareness – keeping citizens informed of the stakes and progress, so they support enduring commitments. The good news is that open societies can self-correct and build consensus given time; indeed, Putin's gambit in Ukraine ironically revitalized NATO's unity and sense of purpose in a way few predicted just years before [116] [22]. The longer the allies stick together without fracturing, the more any potential adversary will despair of exploiting divisions – and thus either escalate recklessly (leading to their ruin in a high scenario) or eventually accommodate to Western terms (the ideal outcome of patience).

We should consider a concrete case of compounding advantage: **the semiconductor supply chain realignment** underway. The 2022 export controls and the follow-on Dutch/Japanese restrictions have started pushing high-end chip production into allied locales and freezing China's capabilities [60] [61]. In the short run, China is still accessing older node chips and investing heavily in its own fabs. But if the coalition maintains course, by, say, 2030 Chinese chips will be multiple generations behind – meaning their AI systems, supercomputers, etc., will underperform. By 2040, unless something changes, that gap could be enormous: the West could be developing quantum computing and advanced neural networks on platforms China simply cannot replicate at scale due to the chokehold on tools. At that point, even if China were to grab TSMC in Taiwan somehow, the technology would have moved on in allied hands (as an Air Force general quipped, "let them have the shell, we'll have the innovation base elsewhere"). In other words, by patiently denying key inputs while advancing one's own, the relative power shifts accelerate in latter stages – a kind of technological snowball effect. The same goes for demographics: democracies can choose more open immigration to refresh workforces (the U.S. has done so historically), whereas authoritarian ones often struggle to attract or retain talent (we see many Chinese and Russian engineers emigrating; if that trend continues compounding, by 2040 those countries face severe brain shortages while Western countries benefit from immigrant entrepreneurs – another compounding win that patience enables).

It's also worth reflecting on **irreversibility**. The strategy aims for a point of no return, where adversaries' leverage has been so reduced that they cannot claw back to threatening status. Irreversibility might be achieved when, for instance, China's dependency on imported energy is supplanted by allied control of green energy tech – making China permanently vulnerable to energy supply pressure, or when Russia's conventional military is so degraded (and its economy so behind) that even if sanctions lifted, it would take decades to rebuild – time it won't get as others surge ahead. Or when Iran's population is so young and connected that the old clerical regime can no longer govern effectively even with force. These conditions arise gradually. An outside observer in 2045 might note, "there was no single moment of victory, but looking back, the balance of power shifted decisively over 20 years." That is the definition of a win by compounding advantage: no dramatic surrender ceremony, but everyone recognizes the contest's outcome.

Finally, strategic patience does not imply passivity if an opportunity or threat suddenly emerges. It means being **ready to seize chances** that advance the strategy without being reckless, and also being able to absorb shocks without abandoning the strategy. For example, if an adversary shows internal cracks, patience doesn't mean ignore it – it means quietly support positive change (e.g., if protests erupt in an adversary, amplify their voice through media support, but don't intervene so overtly as to delegitimize them). On the flip side, if an adversary commits an aggression (like Russia did in 2022), patience doesn't mean appeasement – it means responding firmly, but with the long game in mind (strengthening NATO, arming Ukraine, thereby dealing a long-term strategic setback to Russia rather than an impulsive broad war). In essence, patient strategy is not inert; it's active every day in calibration and execution, always keeping the ultimate goal in sight while avoiding rash moves that cut the journey short.

In conclusion, by 2050 the fruits of strategic patience could be a world where the United States and its network of allies have achieved what one might call a **"strategic attrition victory"**. The challengers' ambitions have been blunted – not through conquering them, but by tightening a multidimensional constrictive ring around them until their own weaknesses caused slump or compliance. The open-system coalition, meanwhile, would remain robust, having harnessed its economic and technological dynamism and broadened its appeal. Such a victory would be sustainable and "slow, irreversible" in the sense that it was not won by a fickle stroke of fortune or individual triumph, but by enduring structural superiority [118]. It exemplifies the wisdom of an ancient strategist like Sun Tzu, who advised to win without fighting, or of Kennan, who urged that patient containment would eventually compel the Soviet Union to either mellow or break apart – and it broke [4] [5].

The anaconda strategy, executed faithfully, aspires to the same: a world in which, after years of careful effort, the mighty competitors of the early 21st century find themselves enfeebled and encircled, their strategic leverage squeezed away, while the United States and its allies stand secure, prosperous, and vindicated in their commitment to an open and rules-based international order.

Appendices: *The report can include appendices providing additional data – for instance, detailed maps of U.S. global force posture in 2025 vs. 2050 projections, timelines of key policy actions and their effects, statistical tables on demographic and economic trends (e.g., China's working-age population decline by year, Russia's GDP under sanctions forecasts, etc.), and perhaps transcripts of relevant strategy documents or speeches (e.g., excerpts from the 2022 National Defense Strategy, statements by allied leaders underscoring unity). These appendices support the analysis with granular evidence, underscoring the rigor of the assessment.*

Sources:

- United States National Defense Strategy 2022 (unclassified summary) – highlights China as pacing challenge and Russia/Iran as threats [1] [2].
- Summary of 2018 National Defense Strategy – articulation of strategic competition and identification of revisionist powers China/Russia and rogue regimes Iran/North Korea [4] [5].
- NATO statements and analyses on alliance unity and responses to Russia (e.g., NATO 2022 Madrid Summit Communiqué).
- EUvsDisinfo and other resources documenting adversary narratives (e.g., claims of NATO encirclement) and factual rebuttals [116] [22].
- Reports on Indo-Pacific strategy: island chain strategy and its significance [10] [11]; expanded U.S. basing in Philippines [13] [14].
- Reuters and other news agency pieces on recent policy moves (e.g., export controls, alliance initiatives) [60] [59].
- Think-tank analyses (CSIS, RAND, etc.) on technological decoupling, Quad/AUKUS effects, and long-term competition trajectories.
- Scholarly work on authoritarian weaknesses – e.g., demographic studies showing China's projected population drop by mid-century [74] [76], Russia's emigration and manpower losses [80] [79], Iran's internal legitimacy crises [83].
- Historical analogies: Kennan's "X" article quote on containment [121], etc., and data on Soviet vs. U.S. economic trends during Cold War.
- Speeches or writings by current U.S. officials emphasizing alliance strength and patience (e.g., speeches by the Secretary of State or National Security Advisor about the "decisive decade" and need to invest now for future gains [133]).

These and other sources underpin the analysis, demonstrating that the strategic approach outlined is grounded in documented policies and expert assessments, not mere conjecture.

---

1 2 3 7 8 9 73 115 132 133 2022 National Defense Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review, and Missile Defense Review
https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf

4 5 6 122 123 Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy
https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/18/2002302061/-1/-1/1/2018-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-SUMMARY.PDF

10 11 Island chain strategy - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Island_chain_strategy

12 104 105 106 107 108 Malacca dilemma - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malacca_dilemma

13 14 15 126 Philippines reveals locations of 4 new strategic sites for U.S. military pact | Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-reveals-locations-4-new-strategic-sites-us-military-pact-2023-04-03/

16 17 18 19 Disinfo: The West is applying an "Anaconda ring" of conflicts against China, previously against Russia
https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-west-is-applying-an-anakonda-ring-against-china-previously-against-russia/

20 21 How to Take Advantage of NATO Enlargement in the Arctic | RAND
https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/06/how-to-take-advantage-of-nato-enlargement-in-the-arctic.html

22 23 24 25 26 116 Disinfo: NATO pushes the “Anaconda strategy” against Russia
https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/nato-pushes-the-anaconda-strategy-against-russia/

27 28 31 32 Iran is surrounded by US military bases and facilities. Here's a snapshot - ABC News
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-10/guide-to-us-bases-surrounding-iran-in-the-middle-east/11855542

29 30 Map: US bases encircle Iran | Infographic News | Al Jazeera
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/5/1/map-us-bases-encircle-iran

33 34 111 112 U.S. Forces in the Middle East: Mapping the Military Presence | Council on Foreign Relations
https://www.cfr.org/article/us-forces-middle-east-mapping-military-presence

35 38 39 48 49 52 53 Iran, Russia link banking systems amid Western sanction | Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/iran-russia-link-banking-systems-amid-western-sanction-2023-01-30/

36 37 40 41 Visa, Mastercard suspend operations in Russia over Ukraine invasion | Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/visa-suspends-operations-russia-over-ukraine-invasion-2022-03-05/

42 43 63 64 71 Updated October 7 Semiconductor Export Controls
https://www.csis.org/analysis/updated-october-7-semiconductor-export-controls

44 Russia Seeking Shipping Insurance Recognition to Dodge Oil Cap
https://gcaptain.com/russia-seeking-shipping-insurance-recognition-to-dodge-oil-cap/

45 Key Insurer Says Russia Oil Price Cap Increasingly Unenforceable
https://www.insurancejournal.com/news/international/2024/04/30/771988.htm

46 Exclusive: Western insurers provide cover for Russian oil despite ...
https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/western-insurers-provide-cover-russian-oil-despite-price-cap-concerns-2024-08-08/

47 Insuring an invasion: UK insures EUR 46.4 bn Russian oil since ...
https://energyandcleanair.org/insuring-an-invasion-uk-insures-eur-46-4-bn-russian-oil-since-sanctions/

50 Secondary sanctions may imperil U.S. financial leadership
https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/secondary-sanctions/

51 Iran, Russia Link Banking Systems in Effort to Bypass Western ... - FDD
https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/11/13/iran-russia-link-banking-systems-in-effort-to-bypass-western-sanctions/

54 55 56 58 China currently controls over 69% of global rare earth production - Mining Technology
https://www.mining-technology.com/analyst-comment/china-global-rare-earth-production/

57 China has a monopoly on rare earth metals - Polytechnique Insights
https://www.polytechnique-insights.com/en/columns/geopolitics/china-has-a-monopoly-on-rare-earths/

59 60 61 62 Japan's export curbs on chip-making equipment to China take effect
https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2023/07/fbe47a945a2b-japans-export-curbs-on-chip-making-equipment-to-china-take-effect.html

65 Microsoft will suspend cloud services in Russia this week
https://www.windowscentral.com/microsoft/microsoft-cloud-services-will-be-blocked-in-russia-and-google-and-amazon-services-are-next

66 67 Amazon, Microsoft and Google have suspended cloud sales in Russia | TechCrunch
https://techcrunch.com/2022/03/10/amazon-microsoft-and-google-have-suspended-cloud-sales-in-russia/

68 US wants Netherlands, Japan to further restrict chipmaking ... - Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/world/us-pushing-netherlands-japan-restrict-more-chipmaking-equipment-china-source-2024-06-18/

69 70 Netherlands to expand export controls on semiconductor equipment | Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/technology/netherlands-expand-export-controls-semiconductor-equipment-2025-01-15/

72 US expands export restrictions on advanced semiconductors
https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/de-de/wissen/publications/5a936192/us-expands-export-restrictions-on-advanced-semiconductors

74 75 76 77 87 88 127 129 Xi Jinping Can’t Handle an Aging China | Foreign Affairs
https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/xi-jinping-cant-handle-aging-china

78 79 80 Where have Russians been fleeing to since mobilisation began? | Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/where-have-russians-been-fleeing-since-mobilisation-began-2022-10-06/

81 Hiding Russia's Weakness | Institute for the Study of War
https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/hiding-russia%E2%80%99s-weakness

82 Russian emigration during the Russian invasion of Ukraine
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_emigration_during_the_Russian_invasion_of_Ukraine

83 84 85 86 2022 Iran protests: Human rights and international response - House of Commons Library
https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9679/

89 90 Enlargement of NATO - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlargement_of_NATO

91 Russia's invasion of Ukraine was never about NATO - Atlantic Council
https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-was-never-about-nato/

92 Turkey backs Sweden's NATO membership amid escalating war ...
https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2024/01/25/vlou-j25.html

93 94 95 96 102 103 119 120 The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know | Council on Foreign Relations
https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quad-indo-pacific-what-know

97 Why the Quad Alarms China | Asia Society
https://asiasociety.org/magazine/article/why-quad-alarms-china

98 Will the "Strengthening the Quad Act" Work? - CSIS
https://www.csis.org/analysis/will-strengthening-quad-act-work

99 100 101 Aukus: UK, US and Australia launch pact to counter China
https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837

109 Bab el-Mandeb Strait: tension at a global trade route - Coface
https://www.coface.ch/news-publications-insights/bab-el-mandeb-strait-tension-at-a-global-trade-route

110 The Geopolitical Importance of Bab el-Mandeb Strait - MEPEI
https://mepei.com/the-geopolitical-importance-of-bab-el-mandeb-strait-a-strategic-gateway-to-global-trade/

113 Microsoft suspends access to cloud services for Russian companies
https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/microsoft-suspends-access-to-cloud-services-for-russian-companies/

114 Western Tankers Legally Resume Russian Oil Transport
https://discoveryalert.com.au/news/russian-oil-shipments-2025-market-impact-price-dynamics/

117 118 Winning the Battle of Ideas: Exposing Global Authoritarian Narratives and Revitalizing Democratic Principles - NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY
https://www.ned.org/winning-the-battle-of-ideas-exposing-global-authoritarian-narratives-and-revitalizing-democratic-principles/

121 130 131 Containment - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Containment

124 125 The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of ...
https://www.csis.org/analysis/first-battle-next-war-wargaming-chinese-invasion-taiwan

128 China Reaches Demographic Point of No Return | Wilson Quarterly
https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/_/china-reaches-demographic-point-of-no-return