



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

Countering Comprehensive Coercion: Competitive Strategies Against Authoritarian Political Warfare

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The Chinese and Russian governments are currently waging political warfare against the United States and its allies. Although efforts to manipulate public opinion and political debate often receive less attention than armed interventions or military modernization programs, Beijing and Moscow are embarked upon campaigns to suppress dissent, discourage foreign narratives they oppose, generate support for policies they favor, keep their rivals distracted, and mitigate pushback against overt acts of aggression. To date, these efforts appear to be having success.

COUNTERING COMPREHENSIVE COERCION offers policymakers, scholars, and the public a better understanding of the threat we face. It argues that Chinese and Russian malign activities should be viewed part of a unique form of authoritarian political warfare: comprehensive coercion. Unlike most Western nations, China and Russia have long histories of engaging in political warfare, deep insecurities that have driven them to embrace a particularly aggressive brand of political warfare, and highly centralized governments that enable them to integrate and coordinate the diverse elements of political warfare campaigns.

Meanwhile, democratic nations are particularly vulnerable to comprehensive coercion because the open nature of their societies provides many pathways for rivals to shape and influence, while gaps and seams across government agencies can make an effective response difficult to mount. Nevertheless, COUNTERING COMPREHENSIVE COERCION also highlights how the targets of authoritarian political warfare campaigns can better position themselves to compete, not only by reducing their vulnerability but also by adopting more forward-leaning measures of their own.