‘Scapegoat,’ ‘Proxy’ and ‘Base’: A World Powers’ Guide to Domestic Extremist Co-Optation

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade the United States, Russian and Chinese governments have each been implicated in internationally recognized plots to subvert domestic and international law to their own benefit in which the individual countries’ interactions with a domestic extremist element played a pivotal role. While each of these events has garnered widespread media and academic attention, little focus has been directed at the way in which each Great Power interacted with domestic extremism in order to advance its goals. This study uses a Weberian comparative analysis to describe the Chinese internment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the radicalization of the Republican party in the United States, and how domestic extremism was in each case co-opted in order to achieve unpopular but critical goals. This study finds that domestic extremist co-optation is a proven strategy commonly employed by powerful authoritarian regimes around the world to achieve the most imperative and sensitive policy goals. Domestic extremist co-optation as a foreign policy strategy is characterized by the spread of disinformation, the promotion of violence and the concealment of the party responsible. This study identifies three archetypes of domestic extremist co-optation: the ‘scapegoat,’ the ‘proxy’ and the ‘base,’ and empowers future research to increase that number.

Keywords: Domestic Extremism, Great Power Competition, Uyghur, Information Warfare

“Chivo expiatorio”, “representante” y “base”: una guía de las potencias mundiales para la cooptación de extremistas nacionales

RESUMEN

Durante la última década, los gobiernos de Estados Unidos, Rusia y China han estado implicados en complots reconocidos

internacionalmente para subvertir el derecho nacional e internacional en su propio beneficio, en los que las interacciones de los países individuales con un elemento extremista nacional desempeñaron un papel fundamental. Si bien cada uno de estos eventos ha atraído la atención académica y de los medios de comunicación, se ha prestado poca atención a la forma en que cada Gran Potencia interactuó con el extremismo nacional para promover sus objetivos. Este estudio utiliza un análisis comparativo de Webar para describir el internamiento chino de uigures en Xinjiang, la anexión rusa de Crimea y la radicalización del partido republicano en los Estados Unidos, y cómo el extremismo interno fue cooptado en cada caso para lograr objetivos impopulares, pero objetivos críticos. Este estudio encuentra que la cooptación extremista nacional es una estrategia probada comúnmente empleada por poderosos regímenes autoritarios alrededor del mundo para lograr los objetivos políticos más imperativos y sensibles. La cooptación extremista doméstica como estrategia de política exterior se caracteriza por la difusión de la desinformación, la promoción de la violencia y el encubrimiento del responsable. Este estudio identifica tres arquetipos de cooptación extremista nacional: el “chivo expiatorio”, el “proxy” y la “base”, y permite que las investigaciones futuras aumenten ese número.

Palabras clave: Extremismo doméstico, Gran Competencia de Poder, Uigur, Guerra de información

“替罪羊”、“代理人”和“基地”： 世界强国的国内极端操纵之鉴

摘要

过去十年，国际社会认为美国、俄罗斯和中国政府各自为谋取自身利益而颠覆国内法和国际法，其中个别国家与国内极端主义的相互影响发挥了关键作用。尽管每次事件都吸引了广泛的媒体关注和学术关注，但几乎没有研究聚焦于这些强国以何种方式与国内极端主义相互影响，以期实现各自目标。本研究使用韦伯的比较分析法，描述中国对新疆维吾尔族的拘留、俄罗斯吞并克里米亚以及美国共和党的激进化，并描述了这三个事件中国内极端主义如何被操纵，以期实现不合民意但关键的目标。本研究发现，国内极端主义的操纵是一项经证实的战略，全球强大的威权主义政权通常会使用

该战略，以实现最迫切和敏感的政策目标。作为一项外交政策战略，国内极端主义操纵的特征包括散播虚假信息、宣扬暴力并隐藏肇事者。本研究识别了三种国内极端主义操纵的原型：“替罪羊”、“代理人”和“基地”，并鼓励未来研究扩充原型数量。

关键词：国内极端主义，大国竞争，维吾尔族，信息战

Introduction

In less than the space of a decade the world's three greatest powers have each been implicated in internationally recognized plots to subvert domestic and international law in which their interaction with a domestic extremist element within or near their borders played a pivotal role. While extremism has found fertile opportunity in a monopolar world order, recognition of the problem is global. Even the thornier issue of domestic extremism is occupying a greater space in the public perception. But while extremism, its causes, ideologies and organizations are relatively well understood, how existing power structures interact with extremism is less so. Historical examples of Great Power interactions with foreign extremists abound, several prominent examples of meaningful interaction with domestic extremists are also easy to recall, however contemporary literature falls short in describing this critical facet of political policy. While recognition of growing global extremism abounds, understanding of what this means to the status quo is limited to far fewer.

This study seeks to reveal domestic extremist co-optation as a geopolitical strategy exercised by Great Powers the world over and characterized by the appropriation of extremist movements and ideology in pursuit of a geopolitical goal. Three prominent examples of this strategy, occurring in the world's three most powerful countries, have received a great deal of attention from media and academia alike, however few studies have sought to compare them. The fact that three such prominent examples of domestic extremist co-optation happened to occur in the world's three most powerful countries over the past decade may appear to be coincidence or a result of the three countries' prominent position in world media, in actuality it is an indication of the pervasiveness and utility of domestic extremist co-optation as a geo-political strategy. By studying the mass incarceration of Uyghurs in Xinjiang by the Chinese government, Russia's annexation of Ukraine and the Republican Party's metamorphosis into a radical anti-system movement, an understanding can be gained not only of each respective world powers' interactions with domestic extremist but also in what context

that strategy was employed, what factors lead to that decision and what impacts resulted. The utility of this study is plain: without a clear understanding of how existing powers interact with domestic extremism, the international community will remain vulnerable to self-serving distortions of truth, appropriated narratives of aggression and the advancement of unpopular and authoritarian politics.

This study utilizes a Weberian comparative analysis to analyze, compare and contrast three different instances in which one of the World's Powers was implicated in a plot to subvert domestic or international law in which their interaction with a domestic extremist element played a pivotal role. As recent and prominent examples can be found for China, Russia and the United States within the last decade, these examples are natural subjects for this study. This study will analyze the Chinese internment of the Uyghur ethnic group in Xinjiang post 2017, the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014 and the systematic radicalization of the Republican party over the last two decades to answer the following research question: "how do Great Powers interact with domestic extremism in ways which advance their own interests?" The hypothesis: "Great Powers promote the spread of domestic extremism in order to advance their own interests," is adopted to guide the analysis. A detailed analysis of each event in isolation will facilitate a deeper understanding of the causes and impacts unique to each situation before the various factors concerning each

Great Power's interactions with extremism are illuminated. Finally, patterns in behavior can be derived from the causes and implications revolving around each Great Power's decision to interact with extremism.

Chinese Communist Party, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Over the last four years in the misleadingly named Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), the CCP under Xi Jinping has conducted an experiment in coercive social engineering the size and aspiration of which is exceeded in scale only by its wanton inhumanity and the genocidal impact it will have on the Uyghur ethnicity. Best estimates place over 1 million Uyghurs currently imprisoned in re-education and labor camps in the XUAR (Anand 2020, 3; Savrun 2019, 7; Smith Finley 2020, 2). Uyghur society writ large has been subjected to arbitrary detention, forced labor, torture and death (Savrun 2019, 7). Families have been separated and children detained in state-run orphanages en masse, subjected to the same conditions and re-education as their parents (Finnegan 2020, 12; Savrun 2019, 7; Zainab 2019, 488-491). Young girls have been raped, sterilized or forced to marry ethnic Han men (Savrun 2019, 7). CCP policy in the XUAR conflates extremism with Uyghur cultural identity, justifying the forced Sinicization of all aspects of society in Xinjiang in order to stop the spread of "ideological illness" (Anand 2020, 3; Çaksu 2020, 4-5; Smith

Finley 2020, 2; Zainab 2019, 6). Conditions in the camps which utilize re-education, forced labor, starvation, lack of sanitation or medical treatment, cultural, religious and linguistic suppression, torture, rape, sterilization, isolation and familial coercion to force the replacement of “religious affiliation and ethnic identity with secular, patriotic political allegiance,” are so abysmal that victim’s belts and shoe laces are confiscated to prevent self harm. (Byler 2018, 3; Çaksu 2020, 10; Smith Finley 2020, 2; Zainab 2019, 6-8). No section of society is spared internment and deaths are common amongst the elderly and infirm (Byler 2018, 3).

The CCP has consistently denied or downplayed the existence of the camps, first denying their existence before insisting they are vocational training schools after their existence was accepted internationally and finally backpedaling further to calling them counter extremism “re-education camps,” when it was determined the camps held young people as well as the elderly, intellectuals and other facets of society who would have no interest in vocational training (Çaksu 2020, 4). The existence of the camps appears to be related to the CCP’s 2014 ‘Strike Hard against Violent Terrorism’ policy, after which state military presence and arrests in the region increased dramatically and restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly enforced (Mumford 2018, 3-4). By adopting official estimates of the number of religious extremists expected to be found in a given village in the XUAR, the CCP enacted a mass system of internment and

cultural re-education which was accelerated in 2017 despite the drastic fall in extremist violence in preceding years (Zainab 2019, 7). Sinicization appears to be the primary purpose of internment, which reportedly lasts up to 15 years and is organized into 3 degrees of severity: not speaking Mandarin, possessing religious material, and finally studying religion abroad (Çaksu 2020, 7; Zainab 2019, 7). Far from being a novel occurrence in China, the CCP has used Internment Camps to quash political opposition since the 1950’s and as recently as the 2000’s against members of the Falun Gong religious sect (Çaksu 2020, 5). While state repression has increased steadily since the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the United States’ ‘War on Terror’ rhetoric has afforded the CCP effective ‘carte blanche’ to target any outspoken minority for counter terrorism operations (Çaksu 2020, 3-4). As a result, contemporary government rhetoric places the blame on the encroachment of Islamic extremism from the Middle East, not any aspirations for political self determination by the Uyghurs in their traditional homeland (Mahmut 2019, 9).

The ten million members of the Uyghur ethnicity compose fifty percent of China’s Sunni muslim population, however unlike other prominent Muslim ethnic groups in China, the Uyghurs hold strong territorial connections to their homeland, over 99.8 percent of Uyghurs live in the XUAR (Byler 2018, 3; Gladney 2021, 96; Bibikova 2019, 2). Uyghurs share similar education and literacy rates as other minority ethnic groups in China and until relatively re-

cently have been allowed to organize public education through the 'Madrasat Jadid' (new schools) system which spread across central Asia from Imperial Russia in the early 20th century and blended religious and secular education systems (Savrun 2019, 7). However, since the inception of the CCP, Uyghurs have been targeted for cultural repression more so than other Muslim minority ethnic groups in China primarily because of their land-based claims to autonomy and cultural and ethnic differences from the Han ethnic majority. (Byler 2018, 6 3). Violence between the CCP and the Uyghur ethnic group has not been uncommon since the cultural revolution and contemporarily is characterized by brutal crackdowns on Uyghur political demonstrations decrying economic prejudice and violent reprisals against state security personnel and Han immigrants (Sohrab and Ali 2018, 4; Gladney 2021, 89-90; Mahmut 2019, 9-10; Soliev 2019, 2; Bibikova 2019, 6).

Past CCP policies in the XUAR have emphasized Han migration, infrastructure development and economic prejudice which has resulted in mass Uyghur disenfranchisement, poverty, protests and extremist attacks (Byler 2018, 4). The CCP's views of the XUAR are colonial (the XUAR only became Chinese during the Qing dynasty) and prejudiced (Byler 2018, 1; Sohrab and Ali 2018, 4; Zainab 2019, 496). Han are favored for employment and promotion because programs bridging the cultural divide between a Uyghur workforce and Han developers from the East is seen as a drag on the local economy (Zainab 2019, 490). Seen through this

lens, the events in the XUAR resemble a colonial genocide in which the colonizer invades and competes for resources while the indigenous community forms a guerilla insurgency and resists before the coloniser reacts by incarcerating them en masse where they succumb to poor conditions and violence (Smith Finley 2020, 5). This latest crackdown by the CCP is motivated by completely geo-political considerations, however (Byler 2018, 6).

The XUAR is not only home to large deposits of oil, gas and precious minerals, it occupies a strategic location along China's connection to the West and represents a unique opportunity to advance China's dominance in the surveillance and security industries (Çaksu 2020, 19; Mahmut 2019, 3; Smith Finley 2020, 4; Bibikova 2019, 2; Zainab 2019, 490). By committing genocide against the Uyghur ethnic group in Xinjiang, Xi Jinping intends not only to secure the XUAR's extensive natural resources, securitize China's western border and staging point for the CCP's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an overland pan-Eurasian trade network which would simultaneously establish a Chinese pole of world influence, but also to provide a fertile test bed for China's explosive surveillance and security industries which China in turn intends to dominate, capitalize and export via the BRI (Byler 2018, 6; Çaksu 2020, 13; Bibikova 2019, 2; Savrun 2019, 8; Smith Finley 2020, 6; Zainab 2019, 489-490). China's national surveillance network is already extensive, funnelling public and private data mined from apps and smartphones into a massive police da-

tabase termed Skynet (Çaksu 2020, 13). Chinese authorities collect biometric data from these apps including facial traits, gait and language, and the surveillance in the XUAR goes even further (Çaksu 2020, 13). This mass surveillance and suppression campaign has been termed 'terror capitalism' due to its use of the "terrorism" label to create a space where normal human rights no longer apply and the full weight of the military industrial complex can be brought to bear against a target population (Çaksu 2020, 17). Here too, the influence of United States (US) Government 'War on Terror' rhetoric is palpable and is increasingly reflected in CCP policy.

While minority ethnic group rights have been enshrined in every Chinese constitution since 1911 and more recently CCP policy has promoted cultural and religious exchange between ethnic Uyghurs and international Islam, economic and security concerns have increasingly led China to pursue a course of religious and cultural sinicization (Anand 2020, 9-11; Mahmut 2019, 11; Finnegan 2020, 5). The results are policies outlawing the daily expressions not only of Islamic life like prayer, ablations or abstinence, but also common aspects of secular life such as holidays, social gatherings, refusing to submit to biometric scans, not behaving in a patriotic manner or owning camping equipment (Anand 2020, 3; Çaksu 2020, 14; Finnegan 2020, 8). The policies enacted by the CCP are so restrictive that a growing number of scholars posit that they are intended actually to inflame extremism.

For years CCP policies such as Han migration and economic prejudice have alienated Uyghurs and created fuel for extremism (Sohrab and Ali 2018, 2). More recent policies outlawing aspects of daily life seem designed to increase the divide between Han and Uyghur communities and inflame resistance amongst the Uyghur population (Mahmut 2019, 10). Furthermore, the mass internment of Uyghur society, far from achieving the stated goal of re-education, is expected to result in a future wave of extremist activity (Soliev 2019, 3). Finally the erosion of the tenets of mainstream Islam from the Uyghur community will leave them unprotected from more extremist fringe ideologies (Mahmut 2019, 4-10). Why is there such a disconnect between the CCP's stated goal of a 'harmonious society' and the policies it is enacting in the XUAR? In truth the CCP's 'harmonious society' rhetoric is a euphemism for a 'homogenous society,' and its policies reflect this dichotomy (Çaksu 2020, 21). The CCP does not wish to mitigate the issue of Uyghur extremism, but to inflame it with decades of prejudicial economic policies, using the resulting violence to justify the eradication of the Uyghur culture entirely, conveniently establishing a secure, culturally Han base in the XUAR from which to enact its regional geo-political aspirations (Çaksu 2020, 8; Finnegan 2020, 9). The CCP plan involved securely containing and agitating an increasingly volatile Uyghur extremist movement at the heart of its greatest economic project. The risk was high and CCP leadership needed someone with experience sup-

pressing domestic insurgencies to lead the initiative.

In 2016 Chen Quanguo, Communist Party secretary of Tibet, was transferred to serve as the Party secretary of Xinjiang (Çaksu 2020, 4; Smith Finley 2020, 5). Chen was known for his work in Tibet as the architect of grid-system securitization, a grid like system of security checkpoints and patrols including mass surveillance and profiling, the same system is now at work in the XUAR although on a much larger scale (Çaksu 2020, 4; Smith Finley 2020, 5). The availability of biomedical sequencing technology from western corporations has made biometric surveillance a practical and fruitful option, authorities collect DNA during enforced “free health checks” and employ facial and gait recognition technology en masse (Çaksu 2020, 14). Mosques require identity cards to enter and public places are subjected to mass video surveillance. Chen went further, instituting a social surveillance program including homestays with Uyghur families by Han ‘relatives’ who stay with the family for weeks on end, assessing their culture, language, and religious practices, sometimes over multiple visits before making a recommendation on incarceration (Byler 2018, 1; Çaksu 2020, X11; Zainab 2019, 3).

In sum, the repressive restrictions on daily life, the ever present surveillance and the mass detention all serve to suppress Uyghur society and erode the cultural roots connecting the ethnicity. Families are separated by incarceration, adults imprisoned

and re-educated, children raised in state orphanages under much the same conditions (Çaksu 2020, 10; Mahmut 2019, 7; Soliev 2019, 3; Zainab 2019, 494-495). Cultural and religious practices are punishable by imprisonment and re-education, Mandarin is imposed and the traditional language outlawed, children are adopted and raised by the state (Sohrab and Ali 2018, 6; Mahmut 2019, 7). International critics and relatives of those imprisoned living abroad face coercion to return to the XUAR, blackmail to inform on their neighbors or relatives and intimidation to stay silent about their family’s treatment (Çaksu 2020, 10-14; Finnegan 2020, 12; Smith Finley 2020, 19). At a time when the rest of China is loosening its birth restrictions and the birth rate is rising, the birth rate in the XUAR is falling by as much as 24% per year as the result of a mass birth control and sterilization drive resulting in a seven fold increase in sterilizations in the XUAR, more sterilizations than were performed throughout all of China over the last two decades (Smith Finley 2020, 8-14). According to the UN convention on Genocide, separating children from their families, enforcing sterilization, rape, sexual slavery and sexual violence all represent crimes against humanity (Smith Finley 2020, 11). It is clear then that the CCP’s actions in the XUAR are crimes against humanity, but do they constitute genocide?

Despite the hesitancy of much of the international community to attribute the label of genocide to events in the XUAR, often preferring instead the label of cultural genocide, the example

of the CCP's actions in the XUAR are textbook. This hesitancy to label genocide stems from the misconception that genocide is necessarily bloody or violent, when in fact the eradication of the cultural conception of an ethnic group is frequently enacted through education and isolation (Finnegan 2020, 3-11; Smith Finley 2020, 13). The United Nations defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." (Finnegan 2020, 3). The events in Xinjiang clearly meet most if not all of the prerequisites. Even the notoriously difficult to satisfy requirement of "intent to destroy, in whole or in part," is illuminated by CCP rhetoric on the subject.

Having co-opted 'War on Terror' messaging for use against ethnic minorities following 2001, CCP rhetoric surrounding the XUAR and the Uyghurs has increasingly taken on the terminology of epidemiology (Smith Finley 2020, 12; Mumford 2018, 5). An official Communist Party communication, obtained in audio by Radio Free Asia (2018) explains how Uyghurs, merely by being muslim, are infected with a religious ideological disease which if left unchecked will spread

throughout society like a virus, destroying it. The report continues to say that having gone through re-education and recovering from the ideological disease doesn't mean one is permanently cured and that repeated imprisonment may be necessary (Radio Free Asia 2018). Clearly the CCP is making a case for the ongoing internment of a significant proportion of the Uyghur population for cultural re-education. While this may not result in the literal deaths of the majority of the Uyghur people, it is expected to enact a cultural trauma so deep that the Uyghur ethnic group will cease to exist (Çaksu 2020, 17).

While the international reaction to the mass internment of the Uyghurs has been vocal, it has largely been symbolic. China is an important economic partner of most countries in the world and wields an exaggerated degree of political influence making meaningful repudiation unpalatable to most countries, although meaningful steps are being made to ban the security products developed as a result of the mass internment of Uyghurs (Byler 2018, 7; Smith Finley 2020, 22). In addition the vocal campaign of antagonistically anti-Chinese rhetoric pursued by then President Trump throughout his administration, muddied the waters of Sino-American relations, making any meaningful dialogue about the XUAR impossible (Smith Finley 2020, 21). In the Biden era, revelations about a phone conversation between then President Trump and Xi Jinping in which Trump encouraged Xi to continue the mass internment of Uyghurs has reinvigorated political support to censure

the CCP (Smith Finley 2020, 22). Until a meaningful international response can be marshalled, CCP assurances that prisoners are being released remain uncorroborated and over one million people remain interned in the XUAR (Finnegan 2020, 13).

Russia United, The Republic of Ukraine

2014 found a multitude of geopolitical stressors old and new converging with explosive consequences in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine's steadily westward political march in the post Soviet era was interrupted by the Russian linked Yanukovich administration who reversed course, setting off what would become, amidst a lethal government crackdown, the Orange Revolution. Yanukovich was deposed amid overtures of support from US Obama administration officials (Saluchev 2014, 5). It was not yet known in Ukraine nor the US, but a strategic horizon had just been crossed and a chain of highly rehearsed events, little understood in the US, was set into motion which would see a huge and economically vital portion of Ukraine ceded bloodlessly to Russian annexation before leaders in Kiev were aware of what was happening. Collectively, this chain of events can be described as Hybrid Warfare or New Generation Warfare, a strategy Russia had spent the previous decade perfecting (Iasiello 2017, 10).

Russian interest in the region derived primarily from the deep water port at Sevastopol, and thanks to a

highly unpopular contract extension awarded by the Yanukovich government, Russia's only year-round warm water port and staging point for the Black Sea Fleet for another twenty five years (Grant 2015, 12; Iasiello 2017, 4). However, as the site of a famous World War Two Soviet victory, Sevastopol also possesses a near-mythical status in a resurgent Russian nationalism, Putin's ruling ideology. Originally annexed by the Russian Empire in 1855, Crimea hosts a substantial Russian diaspora and a Russian leaning polity, to many Russians in Crimea and elsewhere, Sevastopol was a Russian city on a Ukrainian peninsula (Saluchev 2014, 3). However, in 2014 the Russian lease of the base at Sevastopol was under threat of cancellation by an increasingly anti-Russian Ukrainian government which was simultaneously approaching NATO membership, which in itself would pose a dynamic-shifting obstacle to Russian influence in the region (Saluchev 2014, 2). The Russian military, while larger than that of Ukraine, did not possess a numerical or tactical advantage drastic enough to ensure a quick victory, meaning international intervention and either a ceasefire or a long drug out war would be the certain results of an invasion (Motin 2019, 13). Vladimir Putin appeared to be out of options, but to him the decision was clear.

Ukraine's steady march towards NATO membership represented an existential threat to Russia not only by threatening to eliminate a strategically vital port, but also by challenging Putin's governing narrative of a Russian Nationalist Revival and the establishment

of a Russian pole of world influence to counter that of NATO (Treisman 2016, 2). In addition, joining NATO would complicate any future Russian intervention (Treisman 2016, 2). NATO membership represented a closing window of opportunity for Putin. In that way the Orange Revolution may have been a signal that a pro-Russian administration could not thrive in Ukraine and that NATO membership was now inevitable. However the political instability resulting from the Orange Revolution and the ouster of a democratically elected, if highly unpopular and repressive leader gave Putin the cover necessary to take action. For years prior to 2014, Russian funded NGO's had led an anti-West insurgency in Ukrainian politics, funding political parties, media outlets and extremist groups, even distributing Russian passports to the residents of Crimea (Kuzio 2010, 28-38). In this infosphere the Orange Revolution became a suitable pretext for what Putin would later call a "Humanitarian Intervention," but what was in reality a brazen and opportunistic invasion of Ukrainian National Sovereignty to secure strategic territory and foil an adversarial advance, disguised by a flood of media stories detailing Ukrainian atrocities, murdered Russians and the right to self determination (Kuzio 2010, 35; Treisman 2016, 2).

In the days following Yanukovych's flight, Russian Special Operations Forces (SOF) left their base at Sevastopol disguised as civilians and made contact with Russian-funded extremists. On February 27th, Russian SOF, disguised as and accompanied

by pro-Russian rebels, surrounded Ukrainian military bases and government buildings across the Crimea in what appeared to be a bloodless coup by the Ukrainian citizens of Crimea (Bukvol 2016, 4-5). Russian information operations boosted this perception, as well as rhetoric of Ukrainian aggression, muddying perceptions of events (Kuzio 2010, 35; Treisman 2016, 2). By the time the Kiev government was aware of Russia's intentions in Ukraine, a referendum for independence had already been passed in Crimea with overwhelming support, albeit under highly suspect conditions (Gedmin 2014, 2; Iasiello 2017, 7). Before Kiev could even comprehend that its territorial sovereignty was under attack, Russia had already entered Crimea under a fallacious pretext, neutralized any agents of the Ukrainian government that could pose an obstacle to annexation while disguised as a rebel movement and staged an illegal referendum on independence in order to prop up an arguable if ultimately false claim to control over Crimea under international law, solidifying Russian control over the peninsula (Bilkova 2015, 31-37; Gedmin 2014, 2). With Sevastopol secured for the foreseeable future and a growing rebel movement ignited in Ukraine, Putin could then shift focus to the issue of Ukraine's NATO membership. By infusing the rebel movement in Donbas with equipment, advisors and fighters and massing Russian military forces along the Ukrainian border for 'military exercises,' Russia was able to spread the conflict from Crimea to the mainland and destabilize the country in

the first months of the new government, simultaneously dashing any hopes for an imminent invitation to NATO (Bukvol 2016, 4-5; Bilkova 2015, 31-37; Kuzio 2010, 38).

The issues Russia's actions in Crimea present to the international community are obvious: Russian military forces left their bases in Ukrainian territory, overwhelmed the Ukrainian military stationed there and occupied government buildings before staging illegal referendums on independence and Russian annexation (Bilkova 2014, 7). Under the UN General Assembly's 1974 definition this is *prima facie* evidence of aggression, or the use of military forces within the territory of another state with the intent of annexing a portion of that state's territory (Bilkova 2014, 7-23; Marxsen 2016, 13). The referendum too falls under question. Although it is a right recognized under International Human Rights Law that citizens may pursue political self-determination, a single referendum on independence is insufficient to grant the territory in question independence, the expected outcome instead being steps towards a semi autonomous relationship with the parent state (Grant 2015, 2-11). The Kremlin's rhetoric of "protecting ethnic Russians," and "Ukrainian atrocities," while false, reflected a narrative perception of the western leaning government in Kiev and its anti-Russian policies in Crimea which alienated the Russian sympathetic population there and lent weight to propaganda claiming the disenfranchisement of ethnic Russians (Katchanovski 2015, 10; Marxsen 2016, 21). Furthermore Western overtures of

support before and during the Orange Revolution added to the perception of the movement as a Western proxy, a narrative Kremlin information operations exploited (Saluchev 2014, 6).

This combination of information operations, military force and political coercion used in conjunction is termed Hybrid Warfare and over the last decade and a half has been honed into Putin's coercive foreign policy instrument of choice (Iasiello 2017, 10). The example of Georgia is informative for Russian actions in Ukraine. First used in Georgia in 2008, Russia's experimentation with Hybrid Warfare tactics originally made significant use of conventional military forces in conjunction with information operations in an infosphere prepared by Russian funded political NGO's and extremists (Nilsson 2018, 17). In Georgia in 2008, years of political instability had allowed rebel movements in two separate regions of the country to persist (Kurban and Ergun 2020, 4). Russia sought to solidify a hold over Georgia's strategic military and economic position while simultaneously delaying the growing movement for NATO membership in Georgia (Hamilton 2018, 22; Kurban and Ergun 2020, 2; Motin 2019, 7; Nilsson 2018, 13). Like in Ukraine six years later, Russia made heavy use of information operations to influence international perceptions of the battlespace, although unlike in Ukraine, Georgia was prepared to counter Russia's information offensive and Russia was quickly recognized as the aggressor in the situation (Gedmin 2014, 2; Nilsson 2018, 49). Also unlike Ukraine, Russia made extensive use of every branch of

its military in the Georgia operation including artillery, aircraft and the navy (Kurban and Ergun 2020, 6; Lavrov 2018, 25; Motin 2019, 10). In subsequent operations, Russia would come to rely less and less upon the conventional military element, and instead highlight covert action in conjunction with pervasive information operations as it did in Ukraine in 2014 (Tasiello 2017, 9).

Within days Putin's goals for Ukraine were accomplished. He secured Sevastopol for the Black Sea Fleet, delayed or prevented Ukraine from entering NATO and boosted his Russian Nationalist Revival ideology to Russians and their neighbors (Kolesnikov 2015, 15-25). After the annexation of Crimea, the Russian economy reeled from a combination of punitive sanctions and falling oil prices but support for Putin's narrative of a resurgent Russia, besieged on all sides by self-serving Western interests, which is the only currency which truly matters to Putin's hold on power, is greater than ever before (Alexseev and Hale 2019, 12; Kolesnikov 2015, 15).

The Republican Party, The United States of America

For over the past two decades, the modern Republican party has been undergoing a dramatic metamorphosis, initiated before the formation of the Tea Party movement, a reactionary conservative movement formed to protest relief spending during the 2008 financial crisis (Abramowitz 2021, 1). With funding

from the Koch Network and other industry donors and support from FOX media, the Tea Party movement became an insurgent faction in the Republican Party which took root into a reactionary conservative movement focused on contemporary social issues in America and opposed to what it perceived as the erosion of White Christian and male hegemony in the Nation (Abramowitz 2021, 1). The movement swept through the Republican party like a wave, replacing the existing party structure with Tea Party insiders (Abramowitz 2021, 1). This combination of industry funding and reactionary conservatism would prove to be a winning combination for the movement which has since dominated the Republican party. Since the early 2000s, increases in industry lobbying which disproportionately target extra-party fringe groups to the exclusion of the mainstream Republican Party has driven a shift in focus, away from traditional Conservative values to an aggressively industry-friendly platform of corporate tax cuts and regulatory rollbacks (Pierson 2017, 12).

The Koch brothers, perhaps the most prolific conservative industry activists in the country, have spent decades building a network of industry friendly political organizations—lobbying groups, think tanks, political action committees and media organizations not to mention dark money groups and litigators, all tasked with dragging the Republican party and with it, American economic policy inexorably to the right, eliminating environmental protections, employee protections and corporate taxes (Skocpol

and Hertel-Fernandez 2016, 5). Since the Tea Party effectively took over the Republican party after 2008, the Koch Network has become deeply embedded within party infrastructure, supplanting the traditional career path for Republican politicians (Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016, 12). The result is a career path which rewards freshman politicians with lucrative and influential positions in Koch Network political organizations, such as Americans for Progress, which will in turn make the politician even more influential in Republican political circles (Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016, 12). These positions in Koch Network political organizations serve to indoctrinate young politicians with neo-conservative values like industry sympathy and reactionary conservatism, who carry that influence with them in later posts within the Republican Party (Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016, 12). By embedding itself within the structure of the Republican party, the Koch Network has created an environment where successful politicians have Koch affiliations and politicians hoping to become successful seek out those affiliations (Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016, 12). This practice has created a feedback loop in which economic radicalism, while contrary to the wishes of a largely rural and blue collar constituency, is rewarded with greater influence within the Republican party (Skocpol and Hertel-Fernandez 2016, 12). This arrangement, which left unchecked could result in a terminal degree of constituency alienation, necessitated a drastic shift in Republican rhetoric.

Its previous positions on financial conservatism, national security, family values and others abandoned, the Republican party became a party without a platform (Cobb 2021). Rather than advancing a policy vision for America, the Republican party has advanced a doctrine of political polarization by railing against what has been a nearly unbroken trend of gradual liberalization in American politics and culture spanning generations (Cobb 2021). In this fight the ends justify the means and all normal rules regarding decorum and the rule of law have been left behind. The resulting tribalism witnessed the vast majority of Republican politicians locked in goose step behind an authoritarian and white supremacist president whose propensity for racially prejudicial policies was outweighed only by his assertions of political omnipotence (Cobb 2021; Rondeaux 2021; Smith 2021). By amplifying aggressively anti-liberal messages and a sense of political tribalism, conservative media has driven the growth of an ‘outrage industry,’ coercing the reactionary support of a constituency which generally doesn’t benefit from its policies, and is often harmed by them (Gabbatt 2021; Pierson 2017, 4). Blurring the line between political rhetoric and incitement to violence, right-wing media organizations increasingly target the most extreme fringes of society, pandering conspiracy theory and extremist political commentators to an audience that finds itself either increasingly alienated or increasingly enthralled (Brookhouser 2021, 39-42; Gabbatt 2021). The same shift in worldview is reflected in

Republican politicians who, more than ever before, openly support extremist organizations, anti-government conspiracy theories and political violence (Smith 2021; Zitser and Ankel 2021).

While rhetoric has increasingly grown more extreme along the political right, politicians are advertising their support of extremist organizations and an internet anti-government conspiracy gone viral is coagulating into a cohesive political movement (Edmondson 2021; Zitser and Ankel 2021). Security provided by members of militia organizations such as the Proud Boys or Oath Keepers are an increasingly regular facet of Republican rallies, where elected members of congress whip up the crowd with exhortations to violent revolt in the name of preserving American Democracy (Edmondson 2021; Gabbatt 2021). Conspiracy theory is central to this rhetoric and varies from the commonplace (the 2020 election was stolen) to the deranged (Donald Trump is God's chosen champion, single handedly battling an international diabolic cult of world leaders headed by George Soros, Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton known as the 'Deep State' intent on running a global child sex trafficking ring in order to harvest adrenochrome from its victims on an industrial scale) and has permeated mainstream Republican media and political discourse from state legislatures to the White House (Chandler 2020, 2; Papasavva et al. 2021, 2; Zitser and Ankel 2021).

While at first references to the QAnon conspiracy theory made by elected Republicans appeared to be a

calculated political move to gain a following in those movements, believers in the conspiracy theory have become a political force of their own (Zitser and Ankel 2021). Representatives Marjorie Tayler Greene R (GA) and Lauren Boebert R (CO) openly supported the QAnon conspiracy before and during their run for congress and while both have since backpedaled on their beliefs, this is merely a knowing political move to satisfy their critics while assuring their QAnon base that their beliefs are well represented (BBC News 2021; Zitser and Ankel 2021). Furthermore, QAnon's movement into mainstream politics is advancing at an alarming rate, as of last check 36 QAnon supporters are running for congress across seventeen states in 2022 (Zitser and Ankel 2021).

Among even radical Republican politicians, Trump enjoys a messianic degree of influence among QAnon supporters, a fact which Trump leveraged heavily in the second half of his presidency, whipping up support amongst some of his most extreme constituents in preparation for what he expected would be a fight for the election. Among his prolific Twitter offerings, Trump posted or retweeted posts espousing aspects of the QAnon conspiracy theory 216 times and while it was at times unclear if Trump was familiar with the tenets of the conspiracy theory, it was clear that he was aware of their unwavering support for him and he wasn't alone (Dickson 2020, X1; Smith 2021). Since 2019, retired Lt. General and past Trump administration National Security adviser Michael Flynn, has weaponized the QAnon conspiracy theory,

using his military experience running psychological operations in Afghanistan and his status as a Trump ‘insider,’ to promote, organize and distill an army of ‘digital soldiers,’ essentially citizen investigators and vigilantes, with a sense of urgent duty to uncover the truth about the Deep State (Rondeaux 2021). Corporate filings show that Flynn had been working on a mass social media influence project as far back as 2017 when he was National Security Adviser for then-President Trump, but supposedly only began working with QAnon in 2019, apparently as a means of mitigating some of his legal fees which resulted from presenting false testimony to the Mueller investigation (Rondeaux 2021).

QAnon originates from an anonymous message board popular with the right-wing extremist community in late 2017 and while its following was initially limited to that message board, conscious efforts to spread the conspiracy theory by some of its supporters resulted in it blossoming into a social media movement with a significant presence on every major platform (Aliapoulos et al. 2021, 9; Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 39; Zuckerman 2019, 8). Narratively, the QAnon conspiracy theory offers little change from prominent conspiracy theories that have pervaded the zeitgeist over the preceding generation, however organizationally, QAnon represents a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between social media and public perceptions of reality (Aliapoulos et al. 2021, 2; Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 40; Chandler 2020, 4). Q, the supposed originator of the QAnon con-

spiracy theory and holder of privileged government clearance, communicates with the public via a series of thousands of vaguely worded posts which the community refers to as ‘breadcrumbs’ (Aliapoulos et al. 2021, 2; Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 40). A series of community run aggregator sites called ‘bakers,’ collect these breadcrumbs from anonymous message boards and determine their authenticity by comparing the post’s unique tripcode to a list of those thought to have been used by Q (Aliapoulos et al. 2021, 2). The bakers then offer their own interpretation for what that particular breadcrumb means in the wider context of the QAnon conspiracy theory (Aliapoulos et al. 2021, 2). This means that the vast majority of QAnon conspiracy theory adherents have never personally interacted with any of Q’s posts, but have merely been exposed to the opinions formulated by other prominent members of the movement.

In QAnon ideology, adherents combat the Deep State by exposing its existence to the world (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 4). Individuals advance within this movement by interpreting Q’s drops in ever more convincing or viral ways, the goal of course being to attract as many new adherents as possible (Chandler 2020, 4; Aliapoulos et al. 2021, 11; Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 39). This means that the QAnon movement, while appearing to be directed from above by the shadowy figure of Q, is in reality driven by the interpretations of a small and ephemeral group of influential activists (Papasavva et al. 2021, 6). This means

that the QAnon movement as a whole, while cohesive to its founding narrative, is incredibly unstable and subject to influence not only from radical members of its own group, but also outside actors seeking to steer a quickly growing and politically extreme voter base in an advantageous direction (Aliapoulios et al. 2021, 2).

One need look no further than January 6th, 2021 for an example of the potential repercussions of this instability. Fearing the possibility of an electoral loss in 2020, then President Trump ramped up rhetoric of election tampering and a possible coup months before the election, firing up a base which became increasingly convinced, despite all evidence to the contrary, that a political coup was taking place and that democratically elected incumbent Donald Trump was being deposed in a blatant attack on American Democracy (Kaplan and Sapien 2021). Energized by this alarmist rhetoric, thousands of citizens receptive to Trump's message flocked to the Nation's Capital in January in an attempt to block the certification of President Biden (Kaplan and Sapien 2021). Within hours the mob, which included numerous members of prominent right wing extremist organizations including QAnon, the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, had broken into the capitol, ransacked and looted its interior and beaten several capitol Police officers, one of whom would die from his injuries (Kaplan and Sapien 2021). While Republican reactions to January 6th have characterized the mob as a peaceful protest or even a tour group, revelations about

weapons stockpiling and the organization of tactical ground teams tasked with finding and detaining prominent members of the opposition, as well as then vice president Mike Pence indicate that members of the mob that stormed the Capital on January 6th intended to commit violent insurrection (Lokay, Robinson and Crenshaw 2021, X). Far from being a tipping point, Republican reticence to hold to account the growing extremist element running rampant in its party ensures that January 6th is merely a beginning (Kaplan and Sapien 2021; Rondeaux 2021). The Republican party has accepted the vocal support of extremist organizations and integrated some of the most radical elements of the conservative universe into its very structure (Cobb 2021). These shifts in Republican party values, organization and strategy are tectonic and represent less a normal shift in party politics than a failing party's co-optation by powerful financial backers and vocal extremist agitators (Karson and Cunningham 2021). As Donald Trump succinctly put it at CPAC 2021, "We have the Republican Party," and the forces behind its take over are unlikely to alter course (Cobb 2021).

Findings and Discussion

In the XUAR, three goals dominate China's policy decisions: the establishment of the BRI and thus a Chinese pole of influence, the domination of the security and surveillance industries and finally the ethnic homogenization and thus securitization of a strategically vital border province. The pursuit

of this last goal in particular supports the implementation of the other two by securing the BRI's base and providing a test population for the security and surveillance industries. This appears to be a situation in which the primary objective of securing the BRI is conveniently supported by the lesser objective of boosting the security and surveillance industries. In pursuit of these goals, China has revived its use of labor and re-education camps, a coercive strategy long favored by the CCP as an answer to dissident elements, complete with torture, rape, murder and forced sterilization. It is evident from China's actions that its long history of anti-Uyghur policies in the XUAR reflect the party's intentions now more than ever and that it is willing to go to any length to achieve them, even genocide. If this weren't concerning enough, the fact that China has successfully shielded itself from international response using a combination of disinformation and economic coercion does not leave much hope for a change in CCP policy.

To justify this mass incarceration of Uyghurs and the suppression of Uyghur culture in the XUAR, China has co-opted extremism by making a 'scapegoat' of the Uyghur population. In this view, a relatively small Uyghur extremist movement is blown into Nationally apocalyptic proportions, pervading all aspects of Uyghur culture and necessitating a comprehensive and militaristic reaction. In this narrative China doesn't want to commit these actions in the XUAR, but is left little choice as a failure to act would mean the death of the Nation. The idea of Chinese culpability in

stoking the extremism that actually exists with decades of economic marginalization meanwhile, is replaced with a convenient political zeitgeist provided by the West: Islamophobia. Thanks to easily re-purposed 'War on Terror' rhetoric propagated by the US, the CCP scapegoated international Islam, clearing the way for decades of prejudicial policies in the XUAR. It is clear then that China does not desire to mitigate extremism in the XUAR, China seeks to use extremism itself as a scapegoat to justify a final solution for the Uyghur ethnicity.

Putin's actions in Ukraine also betray a long and familiar relationship with extremism co-optation. Its use first recognized in a modern military context in Georgia in 2008, Russian support of extremist elements in that country provided the diplomatic cover necessary to launch a phony humanitarian intervention which ended with the effective annexation of a significant and growing proportion of Georgia's territory by Russia. This strategy was repeated, albeit more skillfully in Ukraine when Russia successfully annexed Crimea and stoked a rebellion in the mainland under the cover of a Russian-financed independence movement. Clearly Russia not only engages in extremist co-optation, it favors a 'proxy' relationship with those extremists. Furthermore, this strategy of extremist co-optation and support, rather than being a 'last-ditch' strategy for when more conventional means have failed, appears to be Putin's foreign policy tool of choice and can be found in every country in which Russia has a strategic interest including its

neighbors, Europe and the United States (Denning 2021). By infusing extremism with money and influence, Russia aims to destabilize countries it sees as obstacles to its strategic interests. In this way Russia uses extremism as a proxy for its own influence, benefitting from a shield of plausible deniability which complicates reprisals for its actions.

Like China, the goals Russia hopes to achieve using extremist co-optation are primarily geo-political but with lesser economic elements. Russia's primary geo-political goal is to counter NATO's influence, simultaneously establishing a Russian pole of world influence under the ideology of a resurgent Russian nationalism. This would have the added benefit of creating a competing trade and treaty organization to that of NATO and further drawing Russia's neighbors under its economic influence. The deep sea port at Sevastopol also played a large role in Putin's strategic calculus. As Russia's only year round warm water port, Sevastopol represented a clinch-pin in Russian national security and Geopolitical and economic interests in the Middle East. The prospect of losing access to this port was a red line to Putin and while approaching NATO membership may have been a more concerning problem overall, the loss of Sevastopol in particular was a more temporally pressing one. This, combined with the fact that a revolution had just taken place in Kiev and a more desirable period of political instability in Ukraine could hardly be imagined, caused Putin to take action and use a previously co-opted Ukrainian extremism as dip-

lomatic cover for an organized, covert military annexation.

In the United States the goal of the Republican Party and its industry financiers is the corporate domination of economic policy in the United States. Insurgent factionalism within the party, funded by a shadowy network of industry backers and promoted by reactionary conservative media resulted in a dramatic shift in party leadership and policy. The GOP's traditional base, growing more and more alienated as a result of a party no longer responsive to their wishes, had no stake in an ideology which had once touted financial conservatism and family values but now pandered to Billionaire interests at every opportunity. Under the risk of political irrelevance, the Republican party and the financial interests which oversaw its takeover recognized that a new and energetic base was necessary to avoid the party's dissolution. This is why the example of the Tea Party movement is so instructive. An astroturfed conservative movement, voicing primarily economic grievances was appropriated by a radical conservative wave whose concerns were not only entirely social but were the result of a world-view embedded in paranoid racism. In this ideology, America (specifically white, rural America) is in recession, being drug down by self-serving Liberal policies and under threat of being overwhelmed by the resulting wave of immigrants and refugees. This rhetoric, with its overtures to economic recession, not only resonates with a significant degree of the population during a period of global economic recovery, its

rhetoric of invasion and political conspiracy also incites a smaller and more focused subset of the population to violent radical action (Brookhouser 2021, 39-42).

Thus the answer to the party's question of relevancy was answered by the co-optation of a new extremist base and corresponding social platform. Where before the neo-Republican party had been dominated by the economic concerns of its financial backers to the exclusion of its constituency, now it cloaked its goals of corporate tax cuts and deregulation in a haze of reactionary social conservatism, casting out invitations to extremist elements of any kind, long alienated by mainstream politics to join its newly co-opted and growing 'base.' By promoting an extreme conservative media environment, the Republican party could now energize its new base at will, no longer necessitating the inconvenience of a party political platform but instead by demonizing and resisting the opposition and by extension the establishment at every opportunity. The rule of law is forgotten in this contest as every action taken against a liberal establishment, no matter how unpopular, ill conceived or illegal it may be, is justified to the party's new extremist base (Brookhouser 2021, 39-42). Thus Republican political polarity, adopted as a doctrinal red herring to distract an alienated constituency from unpopular policies and aided by an extremist conservative media landscape, has metamorphosed into a polarized reality in which the world one lives in is not determined by what one sees or feels, but on which side of

the political divide one finds themselves. In this juxtaposition of reality autocrats are saviors, elections endanger democracy and any attempt to counter this view are dismissed as originating from one who has yet to 'pierce the veil.'

The similarities between these examples are many. First, each case study involves either an openly authoritarian government, or in the case of the Republican party, a nominally democratic organisation with blatant overtures to authoritarianism. Second, in every case, the motivating factor for engaging with extremism was existential, representing a geopolitical stick so huge that to ignore it would mean terminal injury to the most closely guarded interests of the organization. In addition the relationship each Great Power pursued with extremism is characterized by a desire to increase extremist power. In Ukraine and the United States, a more powerful extremist element reflected greater popular support for the organizations which promoted it. In China, rhetorical CCP goals of alleviating extremism in the XUAR are overshadowed by the reality of decades of prejudicial policies which appear intent on fanning extremist sentiment. In this case, the long term promotion of Uyghur extremism will afford the CCP a convenient and legally plausible justification for ever harsher measures against the Uyghur population, the inevitable result of which will be the annihilation of the Uyghur ethnic group. Cumulatively, this proves the hypothesis: "Great Powers promote the spread of domestic extremism in order to advance their own interests."

In each case, the primary methods the Great Power used to interact with its co-opted extremist element were via information, where in every case, the Great Power disseminated rhetoric promoting public perceptions of the power held by the extremists, and financial investment. In Ukraine and the US, financial investment went straight to the extremist organizations, while in China, the financial investment instead went to remedial measures to contain the co-opted extremism. Also, the Great Power in every case benefited from a degree of political instability in the environment in which it was operating. In every case this served to muddy perceptions of events and grant the Great Power a greater degree of autonomy through anonymity. Tellingly in each case studied, the Great Power in question adopted a strategy of extremist co-optation as a means of gaining support for what it knew would be very unpopular policy decisions. In China, the CCP inflated the specter of international terrorism to justify a final solution to the long-standing issue of ethnic prejudice and Uyghur colonization. In Ukraine, a Russian backed extremist movement conflated Russian strategic interests with the right to secession of an economically vital portion of a sovereign European. In the United States the Republican Party co-opted an extremist base and reactionary platform to distract from its goal of advancing highly unpopular industry-centric policies. It appears as though the desire for a degree of deniability, if only at face value, permeates the decision to engage in extremist co-optation.

Of special note is the degree of similarity between the Russian example of extremist co-optation and the American example. In Ukraine, Russia cultivated an anti-establishment extremist element with the goal of advancing Russian policies. In the US, the neo-Republican establishment did much the same thing with an existing extremist anti-establishment movement. In light of Russia's propensity to use extremist co-optation as a tool of foreign policy and revelations about Russian connections to American extremist organizations, it is also possible to see the Republican party's co-optation of extremism as an element of Russia's strategy of extremist co-optation within the United States. In this view, Russian links with Republican Politicians and international right-wing extremist movements are leveraged to boost a growing anti-establishment movement, co-opting Republican leadership along the way and simultaneously furthering Russia's goal of weakening American hegemony and establishing a Russian pole to counter that of NATO. There are problems with this view however, primarily that despite the fact of Russian influence operations in American media and political channels, the sole attribution of America's growing problem with right wing extremism to a Russian operation not only circumvents America's historic responsibility in cultivating domestic extremist movements, but negates any possibility of that problematic history being healthily reconciled.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how domestic extremist co-optation is a favored tool of Authoritarian regimes around the globe. In a modern context of mass interaction via social media its utility becomes viral. With no more than an influx of capital and media, an interested government (or corporation) receives access to ready made and often self-sustaining polical Swiss army knife, able to distort perceptions of reality, justify otherwise inconceivable policy measures and perhaps most importantly, to offer its users anonymity throughout. The fact that the world's three greatest powers trusted this strategy to achieve policy goals so important that to fail would mean an irreversible blow to international power and status indicates that far from being an experimental or specialized strategy, extremist co-optation is mainstream, and a common instrument in authoritarian foreign policy. Portents for its future applicability are dark, as with many things the internet and more specifically social media has influenced global communication channels and the spread of extreme ideologies in unexpected ways, and the recognition of its utility in swaying public opinion in

general and extremist rhetoric specifically is rapidly growing. One concerning truth, more than any other, is indicated by the expansion of a commercial extremist co-optation industry. 'Scapegoat,' 'proxy' and 'base' are unlikely to remain the only recognized methods via which extremist co-optation can serve the goals of powerful actors.

While this study sought to present a complete and rounded representation of events across the world, several obstacles stood in the way of that goal. This study is limited to only three prominent examples of extremist co-optation from recent history and which happened to be associated with authoritarian leaning governments. Future studies broadening the scope of sampling to include older and lesser known events carried out by governments of any political ideology would provide a greatly enhanced degree of balance in perceiving extremist co-optation's historic use and potential utility. Furthermore this study only analyzed instances of domestic extremist co-optation, a broader study analyzing extremist co-optation of all origins, while a historically daunting task, would inevitably yield a deeper, more nuanced and more impactful view of this geo-political phenomenon.

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