

The Future of Global Competition & Conflict Final Report: Comparative Analysis

A Media Ecology & Strategic Analysis (MESA) Group

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Executive Summary

This report provides a comparative analysis of Chinese, Russian, Iranian, and Venezuelan media narratives regarding visions of the future of global competition, including their instruments of exerting power (DIME), purported vulnerabilities and necessary capabilities, projected allies and adversaries, views on the future of global order (FGO), the US, and EU, as well as the available means by which global competition should be managed. Statistical modeling on these media narratives revealed concerns for informational and cultural vulnerabilities and demonstrated the importance of maximizing economic and diplomatic capabilities. China was the only nation to view the FGO positively, largely due to its projection of itself as a rising power within the global order with the economic and technological ability to succeed in future global competition. All of the nations shared in having an exceptionally negative perspective on the US and its role within the global order.

Implications on US security

- Potential Challenges to the US
 - US competitors express rising insecurity within the international system threatening greater destabilization of the international order. Future conflict may increase if nations view the order as increasingly unstable, or unable to provide benefits for their participation, resulting in those nations turning more to militarization.
 - While US pressure appears to be weakening Russian and Iranian abilities to compete in a future conflict, the US must ensure it maintains the diplomatic support of its allies.
 - Russia appears committed to developing alternative diplomatic and economic partnerships with Eurasia and China. To maintain US advantage over Russian strength, the US should consider developing policies mitigating Russian-Chinese diplomatic and economic partnerships.
 - Views of the US as in decline threatens to inhibit future US influence. The US should consider developing a strategy highlighting its diplomatic and global leadership potential, especially in areas such as technological innovation, showcasing its ability to drive future global economic growth.
- Potential Openings for the US
 - US competitors appear vulnerable to US leadership regarding multilateral economic and diplomatic partnerships. US ability to maintain multilateral diplomatic and economic partnerships, especially with Western European countries, can be a force multiplier when dealing with Iran, China, and Venezuela.
 - US offering of economic pacts and technology sharing could be powerful inducements for Chinese and Venezuelan cooperation. Invitations to diplomatic and economic cooperation can lessen the chances for conflict and attract partnerships if managed strategically; nations need to be able to see themselves as benefiting from the global order, especially in areas of economic growth.
 - Chinese interests appear amenable to US interests economically and in multilateral institutions. US-China cooperation on economic and diplomatic issues can help support US influence and stabilize international order.
 - The US media and information dominance is a significant advantage and a concern for Russia and Iran specifically. Cultural encroachment as well as the ability for the

US to set the parameters of, and narratives on, international events among allies using media are weapons of global competition that are acknowledged vulnerabilities by Russia and Iran.

Visions on the Future of Global Competition

- **Chinese narratives** present the future of global competition as an economic battle centered on free trade and technological development. China views rising nationalism and isolationist policies in Europe and the US as undermining global stability and presents itself as a global leader supporting international institutions such as the UN and WTO. Successful competition requires promotion of diplomatic ties, domestic technological innovation, and continued reforms. China remains optimistic in its ability to lead the world and manage a peaceful global order.
- **Russian narratives** present the future of global competition as one whereby Russia is in conflict with the Western-led global order. Chief Russian concerns include its perceived domestic economic and technological declines, requiring Russia to develop greater Eurasian economic ties, especially with China; and Western information warfare causing societal disruptions and an unraveling of Russian national identity, requiring Russia to reinvest in the promotion and protection of culture across key industries. Russia is seen as maintaining its great power status and aspiring to be the main guarantor of security in a new global order; challenging US and EU backed institutions and establishing alternative multilateral partnerships to diminish US influence.
- **Iranian narratives** present the future of global competition through a regional lens whereby diplomatic and informational instruments of power are key for its ability to lead the Shia Crescent and combat the US attempts to isolate it. Iran is shown as under siege from an onslaught of US rhetoric and US leveraging of the international community against it and argues that US actions are in violation of international law and norms. The US is seen as aiming to divide the Shia Crescent, and Iran blames the US for its own internal weaknesses as well as for aiding in the militarization of the Middle East. To succeed in the future global order, Iran calls for greater regional unity within the Shia Crescent and greater diplomatic influence with the EU to balance against the US.
- **Venezuelan narratives** present the future of global competition in ideological terms where imperialist nations of all sorts, including the US, China, and Russia, compete for their own economic and political influence globally. Latin America, and Venezuela specifically, are seen as suffering the consequences of this competition, as the power brokers of the global order care little about the impacts of competition on the well-being of other nations. Venezuela sees itself as vulnerable to the outside military, diplomatic, and economic influences, especially due to its domestic turmoil and failed economic policies. Authoritarian politics, and corruption, are viewed negatively and seen as undermining humanitarian needs. Venezuela sees itself as lacking capabilities to influence foreign nations and calls for new directions in engagements with the diplomatic community and through regional economic trade relations.

Statistical Models of Media Perspectives¹

- **Positive Drivers of the FGO:** Iranian, Russian, Chinese, and Venezuelan media present the future of the global order more positively as expressions of their diplomatic and economic capabilities increase, and as mentions of diplomatic vulnerabilities and foreign competitors decrease. Media discussions of integration and alliance with other nations within the global economic system are keys to favorable projections of what the future holds for the international system. Demonstrating diplomatic voice within the global order and competency within the global economy lend themselves toward more optimistic presentations of the future.
- **Positive Drivers on Nation's Role in the Global Order:** Iranian, Russian, Chinese, and Venezuelan media project a positive perspective of their nation's role within the global order as mentions of informational vulnerabilities and articulations of necessary military capabilities increase.
 - Both Russian and Iranian media discuss informational vulnerabilities within broader conversations of shoring up and maintaining cultural homogeneity related to specific regional areas of influence (FSU countries, Shia Crescent); discussions of military capabilities are framed as in defense of sovereign territory and areas of influence. For both Iran and Russia, a critical part of national identity expressed in media narratives relates to regional solidarity; one of the most dangerous aspects of Western influence is seen as its ability to wage information and cultural warfare using media.
 - Chinese media present a more favorable perspective on their role within the global order as discussions on diplomatic capabilities increase, and mentions of foreign competitors decrease. For Chinese media, the role of their nation in the global order is as an emerging superpower committed to global economic fairness and equality, and demonstrating its leadership through the expression of its diplomatic prowess and lack of direct competitors.
- **Negative Drivers towards the US:** Iranian, Russian, Chinese, and Venezuelan media all present the US negatively. This is largely because the US is presented as an instigator of tension & conflict, a waning imperialist power, and/or a direct competitor in sectors deemed important to the nation. The perceptions of the US become more positive only as media discussions of competitors and conflict management decrease. The ability of the US to project information warfare via media is a significant concern for all of the nations; important to this concern is the underlying discussion of the US as a lawbreaker and often unfair actor in respect to the global order.
 - Critical to Russian and Chinese media perspectives of the US are informational capabilities and vulnerabilities. Russian perspectives of the US become more negative as mentions of their own information capabilities and vulnerabilities are discussed. Chinese perspectives of the US become more positive as discussions of their own informational capabilities increase, and mentions of information vulnerabilities decrease.

¹ See: Predictive Models of Perspectives on Role in the Global Order p. 17.

- **Positive Drivers towards Western Europe:** Iranian, Russian, Chinese, and Venezuelan media perspectives on Western Europe became more positive when discussing alliances and when foreign sources were present within news stories. The importance of Western Europe overall within these presentations of the global order is twofold: First, Western Europe as a conceptual block of nations is seen as a traditional ally of the US. Diminishing the purported strength of that alliance, showing Western Europe as seeking new alliances outside of the US, and demonstrating points of common concern between other nations and Western Europe highlights the waywardness of the US in relation to the global order. Second, Western Europe is presented as generally committed to open market principles, diplomacy, and fairness. Thus, presenting the shifting alliances of Western Europe helps to cast legitimacy on the grievances and international leadership of other international actors like Russia, China, and Iran.
 - Chinese media's presentation of Western Europe was more influenced by mentions of diplomatic, informational, and economic vulnerabilities; as Chinese vulnerabilities were discussed less, presentation of Western Europe became more positive.
 - In Iranian media, as discussions of conflict management increased and mentions of competitors decreased perspectives on Western Europe were more positive.

Introduction

The Keys to a Shifting Global Landscape

The challenges and changes currently taking place across the international system are enough to give any objective observer serious pause for concern. Detailing all of the drivers of those challenges and changes, and the resulting potentials for serious global consequences, would produce an exhausting list, and perhaps cultivate a more pessimistic outlook on the future of global relations than is necessary. This study offers a uniquely global perspective on the future of the global order from nations largely considered as rivals to the US. Such a macro approach in analyzing discussions of these changes and challenges to the international system revealed a few critical tension points as the principle disruptors to the current global order.

- *The global economic market battleground:* A flashpoint for how the future of the global order is discussed follows how nations understand their ability to participate fairly within the global economic market while protecting their own domestic economic interests from being undermined. The issue of fairness as it relates to the ability to protect domestic industries from foreign encroachment, transact freely within the international market, and utilize the mechanisms of international trade to rise out of economic poverty is an expressed desire across the nations within this study. The leveraging of coalesced, pocketed, alliances in protection of specific assets and industries, rather than an international framework of fair competition is viewed widely as problematic and escalating challenges to the global order.
- *The media and information battleground:* The interconnectedness of people to information globally provides educational and entrepreneurial opportunities to citizens around the world, and builds genuine international communities in online spaces. However, information access and the asymmetrical dominance of Western media distribution across the internet creates challenges to traditional mechanisms of influence within regions of relational and cultural proximity as well as among domestic youth. Protecting culture and cultural influence, while maintaining information access and networking abilities, are important matters for the global community to resolve.
- *The diplomatic battleground:* The workings of the international system are foundationally centered on the concept of voice and the right to be heard by other nations in the creation and equal application of policies, rules, laws, and norms. The general perception of a breakdown within this larger international community is linked to the rise of nationalistic concerns for economic and information protection. The lack of transparent interactions, the unwillingness of other nations to evaluate how their actions impact the others within the international system, and diplomatic blame games over high stakes international issues have rendered having a diplomatic voice an existential necessity rather than a cooperative function. The uncertainty over US actions within the international diplomatic community and the outright rejection of diplomatic norms have left a leadership vacuum within the global order that has muddled the democratic underpinnings of how international disputes are approached. The ability to contest unfavorable narratives and the need to forge

interpersonal alliances among leaders are necessary tools in such a changing global order; such tools create potentials for misunderstanding and miscalculated conflict.

- *The military battleground:* The interconnectedness, and rapid development, of military systems and hardware to technological developments and software opens new uses and vulnerabilities for competing actors. On the one hand, cyber and asymmetric warfare operating within the gray zone provide the ability for measured and calculated military responses that are non-lethal, nuanced, and short of outright military conflict. However, the untested nature of these tactics and complex interdependence of factors in cyber environments mean that even the most measured responses can result in significant unintended consequences.

Understanding these areas of tension within the global order as critical challenges helps contextualize the findings of this study more concretely for the reader.

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

Theory

Media narratives on the global order inform domestic populaces on what issues are most important and what their roles are in the international order. Analysis of domestic media reveals how a political community comes to see themselves and others. News media functions as a ritualistic (re)construction of interests, identities, and future aspirations; within this are narratives that form to combine actors, agents, scenes, and plotlines into comprehensible stories regarding key events and actors. Identification of the narrative themes within domestic media reporting can unveil the enduring stories a political community comes to hold.

Narratives reveal such perceptions because they reflect and constitute how nations understand security by drawing upon the social, cultural, commercial, economic, environmental, and political environments with which security is contextualized. The spectrum of issues that a given narrative can absorb and structure within its form is an indicator of a narrative's resonance and conveys the degree to which certain narratives can shape and mobilize domestic populaces. Embedded in media narratives are perceptions of national identity, the identities of other strategic actors, and the international system that help to reveal the final purpose (or desired end state) towards which national and societal actions are committed.

Strategic narrative analysis serves to identify and assess these elements, as well as examine form and shifts in narratives over time that are indicative of patterns and future behavior. Identification of these narrative variables then allows for an examination of the interests and expectations of these nations in relation to the US and the future global order. This knowledge allows US policymakers to take actions to shift these narratives in ways conducive to US interests.

Methodology

The final report on Global Competition and Conflict for the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) examines a total of 620 news media articles from Russian (n=166), Chinese (270), Iranian (122), and Venezuelan (62) news sources. The findings here represent a mixed methodological approach of quantitative content analysis using the DIME (diplomatic,

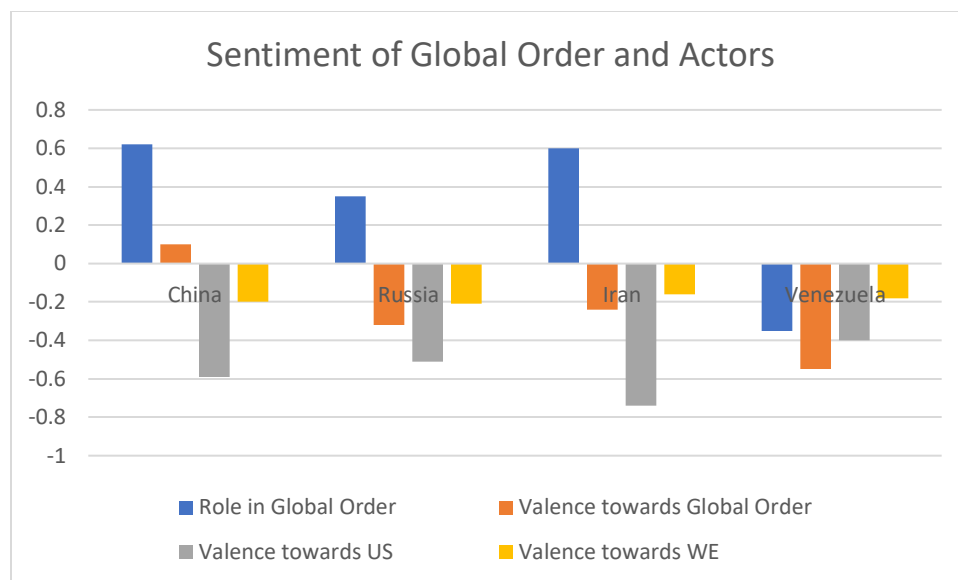
informational, military and economic) framework in relation to global competition, as well as a qualitative narrative analysis examining act, scene, agent, instrument, and purpose of the stories told within the news media (see Appendix A). Multiple news media sources from each nation were accessed using the Factiva online database which aggregates and stores international news media; sources were selected based off of audience size and availability (See Appendix B). These articles were specifically sampled from news articles related to the global competition using a series of native language keywords (See Appendix C) directly related to the topic. Further, findings from previous studies conducted by the MESA Group specific to China, Iran, and Russia over the past five years that allow for a broader discussion of narratives across a multitude of events and topics are referenced in relation to global competition. Articles were examined across the timeframe of January 1, 2014 to June 1, 2019.

Findings

Comparative Analysis

Summary: Sentiment Analysis of US, Western Europe (WE), the Global Order, and Nations' Role in the Global Order

- All of the nations, with the exception of Venezuela, view the role of their nation in the global order as strong. China presents itself as an emerging superpower, while Russia and Iran view themselves as necessary regional counter-balances to the US and the West. Only Venezuelan media present their nation as weak and ineffectual within the current global order.
- Chinese media have a positive outlook on the global order; other nations take a pessimistic view on how the changes to the global order will be made manifest.
- All of the nations portray the US as a negative actor within their media. However, Iranian media statistically holds the most negative views of the US.
- All countries view Western Europe negatively, though far less negatively than the US is viewed.



Views on Global Order

Chinese media presents the nation as standing in for US global leadership, given the US's global retreat over the past few years. As such, China describes its role as supporting the post-WWII international architecture created by the US, which, according to Chinese narratives, the US is now undermining. Chinese media warn against isolationism and nationalism and advocate for a doubling down on globalization policies and multilateral institutions.

The media from Iran, Russia, and Venezuela all present the global order in a negative light with Russia and Venezuela both taking positions that accentuate the leading role of the US in the global order and show that the order itself is declining in its influence. Iran, by contrast, makes a point of differentiating Western Europe from the US in respect to the global order. The US is presented in Iranian media as a deviant from the rest of the functioning world order and appeals to the rest of the international community to hold the US accountable for its intentionally harmful international practices.

Table. Articles mentioning perspectives of global order.

	Russia (N = 166)	China (N = 270)	Venezuela (N = 62)	Iran (N = 122)
Article mentions	N= 94 (57%)	N= 203 (75%)	N= 33 (53%)	N= 95 (78%)
Valence (Mean) (1=positive, -1=negative)	-.32	.10	-.48	-.24

Role in Global Order

Russia, China, and Iran are all presented by their respective media as having an established and important role in the global order. Russia is presented as a sort of swing actor, whose commitments to alliances with one party over another can sway the balances of power in the international system. China is presented as a rational global superpower committed to international order and building a fairer international system. Iran is presented as the preeminent regional

opposition power in one of the most important regions in the world. Iran’s role as unifier and leader of the Shia Crescent and its various coalitions to challenge the US and Israel is its key identity in the global order.

Venezuela, however, is vastly different from these other three. Venezuelan media focus on the decline of the US and the consequences of economic globalization in creating power vacuums that are giving rise to more authoritarian politics. Authoritarianism is seen as a key concern threatening the global order, spilling over to Venezuelan domestic politics. Venezuela is shown as largely unable to influence the global order, and is rather subjected to, and victimized by, the disruptions to that order.

Table. Articles mentioning the country's role in the global order.

	Russia (N = 166)	China (N = 270)	Venezuela (N = 62)	Iran (N = 122)
Articles mentioning Russia’s role	N= 55 (33%)			
Valence (Mean) (1=positive, -1=negative)	.35			
Articles mentioning China’s role		N= 219 (82%)		
Valence (Mean) (1=positive, -1=negative)		.61		
Articles mentioning Venezuela’s role			N= 17 (27%)	
Valence (Mean) (1=positive, -1=negative)			-.35	
Articles mentioning Iran’s role				N= 60 (49%)
Valence (Mean) (1=positive, -1=negative)				.63

Perspectives on the US

All of the national media examined in this study present the US in a negative manner. For Venezuelan media, that negativity involves a distrust of the authoritarian tendencies it sees in US politics. In Russian media, that negativity surrounds sanctions on the Russian economy and the opposing geopolitical interests that have pitted the US against Russia. Chinese media focus on the retreat of the US from the very international organizations it helped establish in the creation of the modern global system. Chinese frustration at the US comes from what it views as an unfair reshuffling of international rules and trade agreements in order to prevent less prosperous nations from rising and modernizing as new international powers. Iranian presentation of the US is much more damning and largely aims its criticisms squarely at the current US administration; which it shows as hypocritical, dangerous, and desperate for a demonstration of political solvency.

What is noteworthy about these findings is that from all four vantage points, the US is presented as a power declining in its ability to influence and dictate terms to the larger international community.

Table. Perspectives on the US.

	Russia (N = 166)	China (N = 270)	Venezuela (N = 62)	Iran (N = 122)
Article mentions	N= 98 (59%)	N= 108 (40%)	N= 35 (56%)	N= 92 (75%)
Valence (Mean) (1=positive, -1=negative)	-.51	-.58	-.40	-.74

Perspectives on Western Europe

Russian media narratives more often than not coalesce discussions on Western Europe and the US into that of the West in general. While nuance is present in some instances, largely Western Europe is seen as generally amenable to the positions dictated by the US. Venezuelan media principally mirrors this coalescence when discussing Europe in relation to the state of the global order. China offers more subtly, particularly in relation to trade. The EU is seen as both a potential ally and competitor, with Chinese narratives positively stressing the importance of EU-China trade relations and the role of the EU in supporting multilateral diplomacy. However, negative evaluation of the EU comes from concerns regarding rising isolationist and nationalism, especially in the wake of Brexit.

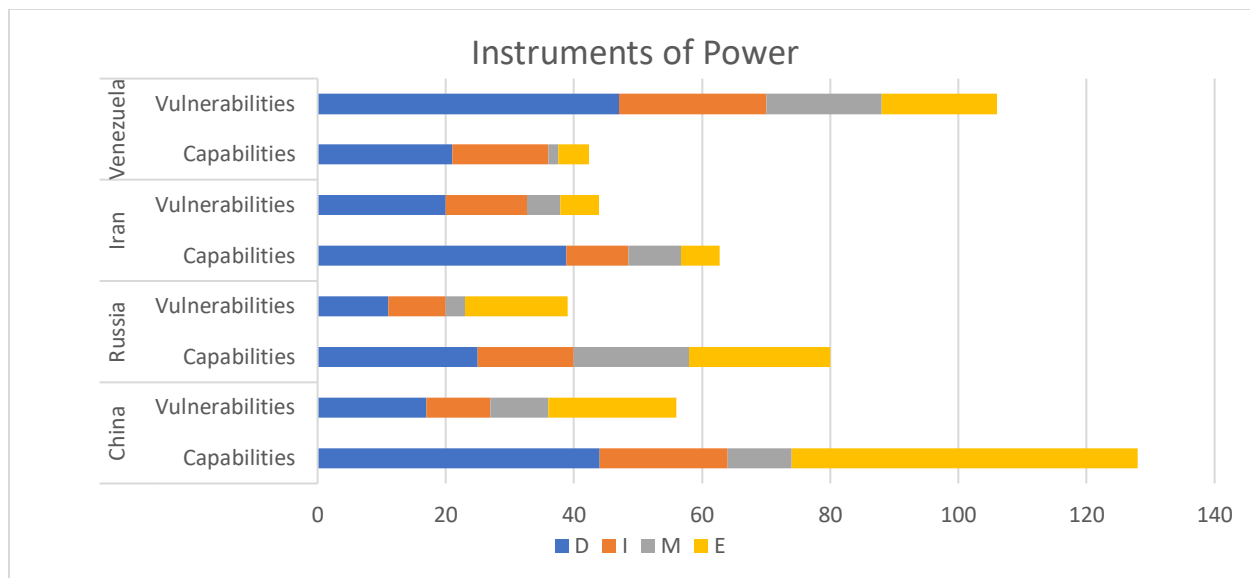
Iran offers much more distinction in its discussions of Western Europe in relation to the global order, largely because it views certain states within Western Europe as capable of breaking with the US in support of sanction relief on Iran and reestablishing the framework of the Iranian nuclear agreement. Iranian media often present Iranian officials as appealing to leaders of Western Europe to be cognizant of US hypocrisy and to remove/ignore unfair penalties placed on Iran by the US and its coalition partners.

Table. Perspectives on Western Europe.

	Russia (N = 166)	China (N = 270)	Venezuela (N = 62)	Iran (N = 122)
Article mentions	N= 72 (43%)	N= 49 (18%)	N= 11 (18%)	N= 43 (35%)
Valence (Mean) (1=positive, -1=negative)	-.21	-.22	-.18	-.14

Summary: Instruments of Power within the DIME Framework

- Venezuelan media focus on diplomatic vulnerabilities and capabilities.
- Iranian media focus on diplomatic capabilities.
- Russian media highlight economic vulnerabilities and all of the DIME aspect capabilities with relative equality.
- Chinese media focus on economic and diplomatic capabilities, as well as economic vulnerabilities.



Vulnerabilities

Chinese narratives on vulnerabilities concerning global competition primarily revolve around economics; specifically, maintaining a stable global order where countries continue policies promoting globalization and free trade. Free trade is viewed as necessary in China's domestic policies promoting technological innovation which fuels its economic growth. Isolationism and nationalism are seen as the key threats to globalization, with China calling for nations to reaffirm their commitments to multilateral institutions supporting free trade. Militarily, Chinese vulnerabilities arise from Japanese and US militarism in the Asia Pacific. US and Japanese actions are viewed as attempts to contain China stemming from misunderstandings of China's peaceful rise.

Similar to China, Russian vulnerabilities relate to economics, specifically the loss of economic advantages. Russian narratives often contextualize economic decline in relation to the sanctions imposed by the West. According to news media, Russia lacks resources for new investment projects, lacks modern technologies, has weaknesses in human resource management approaches, has weaknesses in its ability to compete in global industries, has a dependency on oil exports, has weak economic diversification, and, overall, has a poor economic outlook going forward. Russian leaders are often quoted as urging new economic initiatives and projects, as well as pointing out the need for foreign investments and support of national production. There is a shared understanding that Russia's lack of technological expertise has resulted in a stagnant economy. Similar to Venezuela, Russian media express concern for Western propaganda and information warfare, causing societal disruptions. Russian society is shown as trending away from American and European societies in terms of development, and the result is a concern for Western influence intentionally undermining Russian progression.

Iranian media also highlighted diplomatic and informational vulnerabilities as the principal concerns of the state. Iranian media pointed to US-led attempts to isolate Iran as the causes for the noted vulnerabilities; Iran is shown as under siege from an onslaught of US rhetoric and the US leveraging of the international community. Military and economic vulnerabilities are rarely mentioned, largely because the conversation on vulnerabilities are rarely shown in the context of

just the Iranian state. Rather, vulnerability is seen within a larger regional context that focuses on vulnerabilities to political and religious unity/identity of the Shia Crescent.

Venezuela was a significant outlier in discussions related to vulnerability when contrasted to the other three. Venezuelan narratives regarding its vulnerabilities are anchored in the nation’s own lack of global influence and domestic instability, which leave the country open to what it perceives as intentional interference from the US and distrust towards both China and Russia. The fragility of the Venezuelan state is notable in the expressed concerns for Venezuela’s role and declining influence in international organizations, especially economic/trade-related organizations; as well as concerns for foreign propaganda intentionally disrupting Venezuelan society.

Table. Articles mentioning DIME vulnerabilities.

	Russia (N = 166)	China (N = 270)	Venezuela (N = 62)	Iran (N = 122)
Diplomatic vulnerabilities	N=19 (11%)	N=45 (17%)	N=29 (47%)	N=25 (21%)
Informational vulnerabilities	N=15 (9%)	N=26 (10%)	N=14 (23%)	N=15 (12%)
Military vulnerabilities	N=5 (3%)	N=23 (9%)	N=11 (18%)	N=7 (6%)
Economic vulnerabilities	N=27 (16%)	N=54 (20%)	N=11 (18%)	N=7 (6%)

Capabilities

Chinese narratives regarding necessary capabilities are used to define Chinese strengths in affirming its continued growth in global leadership, including its promotion of multilateral mechanisms for coordinating global economic policies and dispute resolution mechanisms premised on dialogue and resolution within the UN. China’s global preeminence and growing international influence require continued diplomatic and economic partnerships, especially in promoting its Belt and Road Initiative. Importantly, military capabilities are not stressed. Instead, the deepening domestic and international economic development is needed to aid in China's description of its "peaceful rise" and manifold benefits to other nations (economic development, diplomatic stability).

Russian media focus on necessary domestic economic capabilities. Competitiveness in science and technology is shown as more important than competitiveness in traditional military developments. Conveying a cogent strategy of domestic economic growth requires media to highlight a needed capability in relation to how the state is addressing the said need. Initiatives aimed at countering potentials for the economic decline are major elements of media narratives discussing necessary economic capabilities. Diplomatically, Russian media express the need for improved US-Russian relations, as well as the need to continue to extend relations with China.

Unique to Iranian media is the cultural and regional focus in discussing necessary capabilities. The dramatic focus of Iranian media on diplomatic capabilities is attributable to a perspective that sees the foundational commonality of Islam as a relational tool to be harnessed to address the failures of the region; specifically, important are the capabilities of a unified and stable Shia Crescent.

Venezuelan narratives describing what capabilities the country should pursue are sparse and tend to focus more on current crises. Little is offered in terms of a forward-focused vision for what Venezuela needs to compete in the global order. Nonetheless, a common narrative theme exists present in all nations covered; a call to shore up diplomatic relations. Venezuelan media

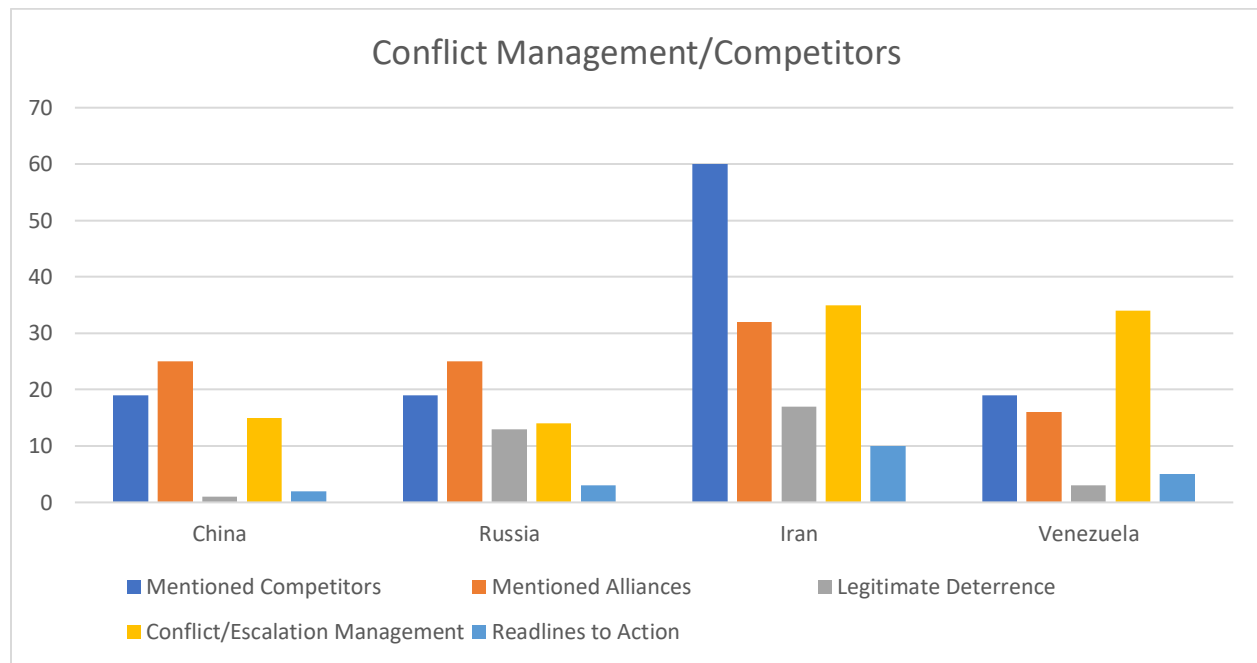
describe necessary diplomacy as part of a grander pursuit of a fairer, more cooperative, and multinational order to promote economic growth and protect itself against foreign intervention.

Table. Articles mentioning DIME capabilities.

	Russia (N = 166)	China (N = 270)	Venezuela (N = 62)	Iran (N = 122)
Diplomatic capabilities	N=42 (25%)	N=120 (44%)	N=13 (21%)	N=49 (40%)
Informational capabilities	N=24 (15%)	N=53 (20%)	N=9 (15%)	N=13 (11%)
Military capabilities	N=30 (18%)	N=27 (10%)	N=1 (2%)	N=8 (7%)
Economic capabilities	N=36 (22%)	N=147 (54%)	N=3 (5%)	N=8 (7%)

Summary: Conflict Management

- Russian and Iranian media are significantly more likely to mention actions that are viable deterrence options compared to China and Venezuela.
- Venezuelans and Iranian media are more likely to mention plans, policies and/or pathways to deal with escalating tensions compared to Russian and Chinese media.



Managing Global Competition

Russian and Iranian media both express concerns for the maintenance of their own regional power and national sovereignty, that involve more frequent conversations on deterrence. Russian news media frequently stresses cultural roots, historical ties, and common religion with FSU countries. Russia views FSU countries as areas of their regional influence and urges both the US and China to avoid intervention activities towards these states. Similarly, Iran sees its areas of regional influence, and its own state sovereignty, as being under attack by US strategists. Iranian

media express numerous scenarios whereby Western intervention in Iranian areas of influence should be deterred and countered. Iran’s focus on conflict management is largely a direct commentary on actions taken by the US that are viewed as requiring some form of conflict management and reciprocal action.

Venezuela, on the other hand, addresses conflict management in relation to what is described in the media as necessary multilateral cooperation in order to manage global conflict and curtail imperial ambitions of the US, Russia, and China. Once again, the powerlessness of Venezuela to define its own identity in the global order is noteworthy.

Table. Articles mentioning conflict management.

	Russia (N = 166)	China (N = 270)	Venezuela (N = 62)	Iran (N = 122)
Legitimate Deterrence	N=21 (13%)	N=3 (1%)	N=2 (3%)	N=17 (14%)
Conflict/Escalation Management	N=23 (14%)	N=40 (15%)	N=21 (34%)	N=38 (31%)
Redlines to Action	N=5 (3%)	N=5 (2%)	N=3 (5%)	N=8 (7%)

Predictive Models

Perspectives on the Future of the Global Order

Overall, the significant predictors on the future of the global order include mentions of necessary diplomatic capabilities ($B=.174$), mentions of competitors ($B= -.095$), mentions of necessary economic capabilities ($B= .101$), and mentions of key diplomatic vulnerabilities ($B= -1.02$). $R^2= .063$, $F=7.11$, ($p= .000$). Perspectives on the future of the global order became more positive as mentions of diplomatic and economic capabilities increased, and mentions of diplomatic vulnerabilities and competitors decreased.

- Within **Russian** media, as discussions on competitors decreased, outlook on the future of the global order became more positive. This may be attributable to Russian insecurities about its ability to compete internationally with its current labor pool and manufacturing abilities.
- Within **Iranian** media, as mentions of economic vulnerabilities increased, perspectives on the future of the global order became more positive. This result is attributed to mentions on economic vulnerabilities in Iranian media being made as appeals to the larger international community to fairly evaluated Iranian actions.
- Within **Venezuelan** media increased mentions of necessary military capabilities led to more positive outlooks on the future of global order. The basic ability to defend Venezuelan territorial integrity from imperial-minded powers is the driver for projections of how a weakened Venezuela can navigate the changes happening within the international system.
- No predictive model was able to be formed with the data from **Chinese** media.

Perspectives on Role in the Global Order

Overall, the significant predictors of perspectives of role in the global order include mentions of necessary military capabilities ($B=.135$) and mentions of key informational vulnerabilities ($B=.115$). $R^2=.033$, $F=5.96$, ($p=.003$). Having a positive perspective of their nation's role in the global order is linked to an increase in discussions addressing informational vulnerabilities and articulating the necessary military capabilities of the nation.

- Within **Russian** media, as discussions on informational vulnerabilities increased, Russia's role in the global order was presented as more positive. This variable had a specific cultural link to FSU countries and concern for protecting a Russian sphere of cultural influence. The Russian role in the global order is linked to protecting its regional influence against encroachment.
- Within **Iranian** media, more positive perspective of their role within the global order occurs when mentions of larger regional culture and Shia unity are also discussed. The Iranian role in the global order is linked to regional leadership and as a unifying force of Islamic culture.
- Within **Chinese**, media as discussions on needed diplomacy increased, and mentions of competitors decreased, Chinese media presented a more favorable perspective on their role within the global order.
- No predictive model was able to be formed with the data from **Venezuelan** media.

Perspectives on the United States

Overall, the significant predictors of perspectives of the United States include mentions of competitors ($B=-.200$) and mentions of conflict management ($B=-.131$). $R^2=.072$, $F=12.87$, ($p=.000$). The US is viewed more positively as discussions of competitors and conflict management decrease.

- Within **Russian** media, the model for of perspectives of the United States included mentions of competitors ($B=-.329$) and necessary information capabilities ($B=-.215$). $R^2=.175$, $F=10.09$, ($p=.025$). The US is viewed more positively in Russian media as discussions of competitors and needed information capabilities decrease. The US is most often seen as an aggressive competitor and wielder of disinformation tactics, absent these characteristics the presentation of the US becomes more favorable.
- Within **Chinese** media, the model for of perspectives of the United States included mentions of necessary information capabilities ($B=.324$) and key information vulnerabilities ($B=-.224$). $R^2=.080$, $F=4.55$, ($p=.013$). The US is viewed more positively in Chinese media as discussions of information capabilities increase, and discussions on information vulnerabilities decrease. The ability of China to match US information narratives and present itself to the world in its own terms creates a more balanced presentation of the US within Chinese media.
- Within **Iranian** media, the model for perspectives on the United States included only one variable, mentions of competitors ($B=-.417$). $R^2=.174$, $F=18.94$, ($p=.000$). The US is viewed more positively in Iranian media as discussions of competitors decrease. The tremendous negative coverage of the US in Iranian media, coupled with this finding, reveals that the US is considered almost exclusively through a lens of competition from Iranian media.

- Within **Venezuelan** media, the model for perspectives on the United States included only one variable, mentions of necessary military capabilities ($B = .351$). $R^2 = .123$, $F = 4.62$, ($p = .039$). Similar to other findings related to Venezuela, security is the principal concern of the state when engaging foreign actors within the international system.

Perspectives on Western Europe

Overall, the significant predictors of perspectives of Western Europe include discussions of alliances ($B = .235$) and inclusion of foreign political sources within media ($B = .168$). $R^2 = .074$, $F = 6.92$, ($p = .02$). When discussions of alliances and inclusion of foreign sources were present within news stories, the perspectives on Western Europe were more positive. The importance of Western Europe as a potential committal ally is represented by these nations as demonstrative of declining US influence in the global order and as legitimating grievances toward the US.

- Within **Russian** media, the model for of perspectives of Western Europe was the same as the overall model with discussions of alliances ($B = .266$) and inclusion of foreign political sources within media ($B = .227$). $R^2 = .114$, $F = 4.42$, ($p = .016$).
- Within **Chinese** media, the model of perspectives of Western Europe included the following predictors: mentions of key economic vulnerabilities ($B = -.358$), key diplomatic vulnerabilities ($B = -.291$), and key information vulnerabilities ($B = -.288$). $R^2 = .281$, $F = 5.87$, ($p = .002$). As discussions on these vulnerabilities decreased, the Chinese media perspectives of Western Europe were more positive.
- Within **Iranian** media, the model of perspectives of Western Europe included the following predictors: mentions of conflict management ($B = .502$) and mentions of competitors ($B = -.341$). $R^2 = .196$, $F = 4.88$, ($p = .013$). As discussions of conflict management increased and mentions of competitors decreased, perspectives on Western Europe were more positive.
- No predictive model was able to be formed with the data from Venezuelan media.

Conclusions

The findings of this study show important media trends among US rivals. Trepidation about information vulnerabilities, concern for maintaining spheres of cultural influence, and the importance of access to the global economic system all loom large. The necessity of fairness across the international system and the need to construct a new global system with more equitable leadership are important commonalities in the media coverage because they point to a perceived decline in US status.

The US faces competitors with rising insecurity about the stability of the global system. As China attempts to assume a leadership role with arguments for its ability to create economic prosperity and system equality, nations like Iran and Russia are attempting to carve out and secure areas of regional influence. Competitor nations are keen to exploit fractures in trade and diplomacy between the US and its traditional Western European allies while presenting the US as a common enemy, creating alliances of convenience among competitor nations. Demonstrating US strength in global leadership initiatives, particularly in technological innovation and/or leveling of global economic inequalities are potential strategies in the promotion of US influence.

The ability of the US to leverage economic partnerships provides significant advantages in promoting cooperation and demonstrating the benefits of working within a US-led global order benefit. However, the US must be intentionally demonstrative of how cooperation is mutually beneficial and addresses inequalities within the global system. Chinese interests appear amenable to US interests economically, and US-China cooperation on economic and diplomatic issues can help support US influence toward stabilizing the international order.

Ultimately, given the interconnectedness of economic and information systems, the nature of global competition is changing, and in some areas significantly accelerating. The US has DIME framework capabilities that make it a formidable force in the global order. Of particular importance in the US arsenal is learning to use and leverage the informational and technological advantages in ways that promote US global leadership.

Appendix A

Category	Code	Description
Key Vulnerabilities: Stated critical weaknesses of the state.	Diplomatic	Lack of diplomatic ties with power broker nations, ambassadors removed; international institutions-useful/effective or not; creation of new institutions.
	Information	Threats on cyber, AI, technology networks; including cultural information and nationalism; informational propaganda.
	Military	Expressed military weakness: troops, equipment, infrastructure.
	Economic	Sanctions, trade threats, trade espionage, economic growth-or weakness/decline; access to markets or institutions.
Necessary Capabilities: Stated capabilities seen as required to compete in the global order.	Diplomatic	Hosting summits, having representation in international forums. Requiring international recognition.
	Information	AI, tech networks; cultural development; Note: informational capabilities under economic umbrella were not included here.
	Military	New weapons systems, military developments required for security in shifting global order
	Economic	Descriptive keys to economic growth: industries, strategies, alliances, etc...
Escalation Management		Conflict escalation is the process by which conflicts grow in severity over time. This category identifies mentions of ways to combat, thwart, or bypass conflict escalation.
Legitimate Deterrence		The action of discouraging an action or event through instilling doubt or fear of the consequences, recognized as viable and legal in the eyes of the actor; "We have a response."
Competitors		Mentions of direct competition challenging the nation's interests in some critical capacity.
Alliances		Mentions of cooperative alliances, treaties, trade and/or closeness between the nation and others.
Redlines		Directly stating that if actor x does y, military response will ensue.
National Perspectives: Stated viewpoints related to the	Country's role in the global order	World order is considered the global decision-making body comprising the bulk of nation state actors, this code requires a stated outline of the specific role of the host nation in relation to that larger body.
	Future of the global order	World order is considered the global decision-making body comprising the bulk of nation state actors, this code requires a direct statement on changes/shifts/maintenance of that decision-making body.

functioning of the global order	United States	Any editorial type claim on the actions of, state of, future of the United States.
	Western Europe	Any editorial type claim on the actions of, state of, future of the Western Europe nations (as a united bloc).
Each news article was also examined for the following elements: presence of a foreign media source citation, foreign political source direct quote, foreign government agency direct quote, foreign civil society (academic, industry professional, celebrity) direct quote.		
Each news article was assessed by the following narrative components: Act (what happened, direction of action), Scene (when and where action occurred), Agent (who performed the action), Agency/Instrument (mechanism behind how the action itself was performed), Purpose (why the action occurred, toward what end was the action intended).		

Appendix B

Sources

Russian media: Komsomolskaya Pravda, Kommersant, Moskovskiy Komsomolez, Izvestiya, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Trud, Argumenty i Fakty, TASS, Interfaks, Rosbalt, Russia Today (RT), Life.ru, RBK, Vedomosti, Gazeta.ru, Vesti.ru, Lenta.ru, Dozhd, RIA Novosti.

Chinese media: People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, Global Times, China Daily, China News Service, China.com, 163, Cankao Xiaoxi, Caixin

Venezuelan media: El Universal - SABI, El Universal, Dinero, La Red, Correo del Orinoco El Carabobeño, Venezuela, Notitarde.

Iranian media: Iran Daily, Iranian Student News Agency, Al Alam News, Alvefagh online, FARS News Agency, Tehran Times

Appendix C

Keywords

Russian media: *геополитическая конкуренция, глобальная конкуренция, мировая конкуренция, международная конкуренция, глобальный порядок, международный порядок, мировой порядок, глобальное влияние, мировое влияние, международное влияние, геополитическое влияние*

Chinese media: *地缘政治竞争 or 全球竞争 or 国际比赛, 全球秩序 or 国际秩序, 国际影响力 or 全球影响力 or 地缘政治影响*

Venezuelan media: *competencia global or Competicion internacional or competencia geopolítica, orden global or orden internacional, influencia global or influencia internacional or influencia geopolítica*

Iranian media: *مسابقة دولية or مسابقة عالمية or النظام العالمي, المنافسة الجيوسياسية, سلطة عالمي, النظام الدولي or سلطة دولي*