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China-Russia Cyber Cooperation and the Impact of State Surveillance and Digital Authoritarianism on the Global Order

Dr Swasti Rao®

Abstract

The autocratic regime of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has set up the most sophisticated system of surveillance and influence operations that are connected with digital authoritarianism and espionage not only over its own people but also against the rest of the world. Over its years, People's Republic of China (PRC) has established a complex and dynamic system of exerting its influence in the world and hitting at the vulnerabilities of its adversaries by technology. In the absence of any democratic accountability, judicial checks or opposition, the CCP has embarked upon an array of unethical usages of technology as an integral part of its economic statecraft, particularly through networks in the Digital Silk Road (DSR). China has extended their surveillance and censorship technology to other autocratic regimes. The article analyses the problematic fledgling alliance between PRC and Russia and its impact on global order.

Introduction

This article will analyse some key aspects in the Chinese grand strategy of information warfare and surveillance (Chinese influence operations) for strengthening the Chinese state. Subsequent sections will discuss its domestic and international impact on the world. It will conclude with discussing the gravity of the fledgling cyber-alliance between China and Russia and its impact on global order including countries like India.

Key Concepts

For analysing Chinese influence operations, key concepts and key actors responsible for operationalising the concepts mentioned above need to be understood:¹

- 'United Front' refers to a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policy that consists in eliminating internal and external enemies by controlling groups that could defy its authority and constructing a structure around the Party to serve its interests, simultaneously projecting its influence abroad.² It refers to unity in purpose among different actions that must lead to the same goal.
- 'Three Warfares' represent the core of China's 'political warfare', i.e., a form of non-kinetic proneness to conflict aimed at overcoming an opponent without a fighting through the creation of an environment favourable to China.³ A wartime and peacetime undertaking, it encompasses influencing, shaping and controlling public opinion, and perpetrating psychological and legal warfare. To support and reiterate these warfare techniques of the CCP, Beijing also indulges in 'Active Measures', these include unethical measures like disinformation, counterfeiting, sabotage, discredit operations, destabilising foreign governments, provocations, false-flag operations and manipulation, aimed at weakening social cohesion and the creation of front organisations to carry out different aspects of the three warfares.⁴

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