

***NEW COLD WARS: CHINA'S RISE, RUSSIA'S INVASION, AND
AMERICA'S STRUGGLE TO DEFEND THE WEST***

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BOOK-REVIEW**

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Abstract

In his 2024 volume "New Cold Wars: China's Rise, Russia's Invasion, and America's Struggle to Defend the West", David E. Sanger examines how the optimism that followed the Cold War gave way to renewed global confrontation.

Drawing on extensive reporting and interviews with key policymakers, he traces how the United States' attempts to integrate Russia and China into a liberal world order instead fueled authoritarian backlash. Sanger explores the rise of China as a technological and military superpower, Russia's aggression in Ukraine, and the challenges facing American leadership amid shifting alliances and eroding trust.

Keywords: New Cold War; United States; Russia; China; Geopolitics

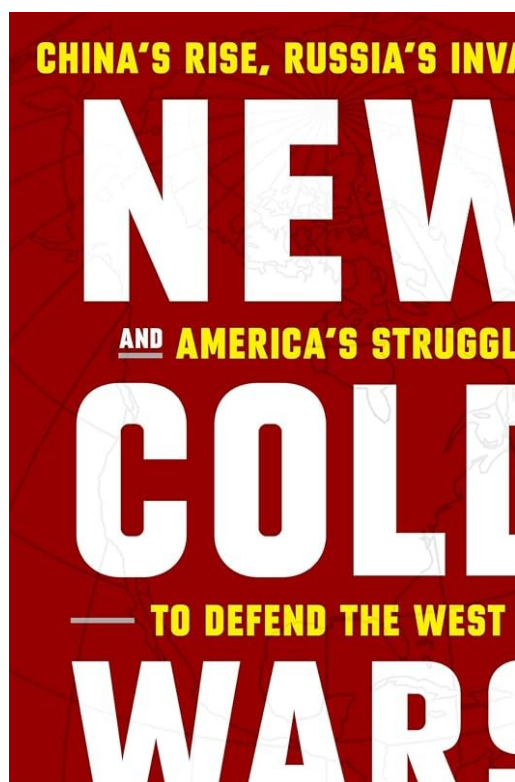
David E. Sanger presents a historical account of how the United States and its Western allies became involved in a variety of New Cold Wars against China and Russia. As Sanger illustrates, the current escalation, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine or the highly competitive economic war against China is part of two decades of evolving trends that attest to the inherent authoritarian and antidemocratic nature of the Russian and the Chinese regimes. The book is divided into four parts.

The first part of the book delves into the 1990^s and the 2000^s. It was a time when the American leadership generally and truly believed that economic globalization and free trade would bring, across the entire globe, not just prosperity but also political liberalization and democratization. As Sanger stresses throughout the book, this was naïve thinking on the part of America's leaders. From the outset the author focuses on events relating to the United States' relationship with Russia and China, both of which would become in the coming decades its new cold war adversaries.

During the early 2000^s, at the time of Bush Jr.'s administration, the US expanded its collaboration with Russia in a number of common strategical policies, such as Islamic terrorism and trade. However, Putin's Russia became more and more dissatisfied with the actions of NATO in Eastern Europe. The war in Georgia is explained by the author as the consequence of an incapacity of the American leadership to understand Putin's deep animosity toward NATO. A similar story unfolded in the relationship with China. Opening the communist republic to free trade was hoped to bring political liberalization and prosperity for both the Chinese and the Americans. Just like the optimism regarding Russia faded by the

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late 2000s, a parallel disenchantment took place here as Washington exposed more and more cases of Chinese economic espionage.



The author encapsulates the general feeling among the American public and its leadership as such: in a quarter century, America went from viewing China as an economic opportunity and diplomatic partner to wondering if our technology and political competition placed us on an eventual course toward war¹. However, despite the growing tensions and the clear signs of opposition to a unipolar American world which the Russians and the Chinese were now fully displaying it was not until the mid-2010^s that Washington developed strategies to cope with these newly founded rivalries. However, Trump's chaotic style of government, his position toward the US allies and his ambivalence in regard to both Russia and China crippled a coherent policy. *In the Trump years, America's capability to shape the world shrank. Allies were regularly insulted and unsurprisingly had no interest in signing up to Washington's initiatives. Adversaries thrived. Putin exulted in an American president who believed Russian propaganda over American intelligence findings. China expanded its reach in every domain, delighted that America was wrapped up in contested elections, two impeachments, and an attempted insurrection.* The rest of the book relates on more recent events happened during the Biden Administration.

The second part argues that, when Biden took office, Washington shifted from an ambivalent Trumpian strategic policy toward a fully developed confrontational one. Moreover, it was a departure also from Obama's policies. Obama's credo that a peaceful coexistence with China could still be possible appeared to be gone in the new Democratic

¹ Quotations are extracted from the e-book version of the book and so they don't mention the quote's page, [New Cold Wars: China's Rise, Russia's Invasion, and America's Struggle to ... - David E. Sanger - Google Cărti](#) (08.11.2025)

Administration. When it was revealed that the Russians were behind the cybernetic attacks on the American oil pipeline system in 2021, Biden strongly condemned the attack and the political leadership behind it. The Russian invasion in Ukraine that came in 2022 was the consequence of Washington's difficulties at home (some of which resulted from the disastrously executed retreat from Afghanistan), its declared strategic reorientation toward the Pacific, which left its European allies disoriented, the imperialistic drive of Putin and the personal ties of friendship between Putin and Xi Jinping.

By this account, the Russian invasion in Ukraine is presented by the author as part of both Putin and Xi's clear strategy of overcoming American unipolarity. It is in fact the general argument of Sanger in explaining the New Cold Wars. They encompass conflicts sustained by Putin and Xi's close friendship. It is unveiled by the epigraph he used at the beginning of the book, which reproduces a short dialogue between the two leaders at the Kremlin in March 2023: Xi Jinping: – *There are changes happening, the likes of which we haven't seen for 100 years. Let's drive those changes together.* Vladimir Putin: – *I agree.*

The third part of the book discusses in detail some of the conflicts that are part of the New Cold Wars. One major event is, of course, the 2022 Russian invasion in Ukraine. As Putin is firm and unshakable in its intention for imperialistic territorial expansion, and this feature did not change at all during two decades, *in the end, the question of why Putin invaded may be less interesting than why so many in the West, from Washington to Berlin, missed the signals.* This is in fact a major thread across the book. Why, across almost two decades, did the Western leadership, and in particular Washington, not comprehend the signals of Russian and Chinese intention and determination for territorial expansion, economic supremacy or just challenging of the American unipolar world? How could Washington have let Russia and China form an alliance against American interests?

The book has a general feeling of scolding the American political elites for their inability to handle these issues at the right time before they had erupted into military conflicts, non-military diplomatic tensions (the case of Taiwan and the highly criticized visit of Nancy Pelosi there in 2022) or economic conflicts. The New Cold Wars also brought remnants of the nuclear threats that the world was accustomed during the First Cold War. This happened during the Ukraine-Russia war, when Moscow was constantly threatening to use the nuclear weapons. Furthermore, these New Cold Wars are global in scope. The fight is not only on the Ukrainian battlefield but it is also one of expanding influence on other continents, such as Africa, Asia or the Pacific.

The fourth part of the book generally makes an argument about the endurance of the New Cold Wars, at least for the near future. It also paints an image that these new conflicts can turn finally to a similar conclusion as the First Cold War, in favor of Washington. The war in Ukraine rallied the Western allies to a common cause, inspired them with a renewed leadership, while the economic sanctions and the economic competitive war are taking a toll on the Russian and Chinese economies. However, as we find in the book's epilogue, these new conflicts cannot and should not be understood through the lenses of the First Cold War which was in essence a conflict full of predictability. What characterizes the current conjuncture is its inherent unpredictability. The world of conflicts is here to stay and the near future could see them even multiplying.

Overall, the book has a merit in presenting an account of the escalation between the US, Russia and China and presenting the current conflicts that are world changing. All of this is based on a rich source of key informants and behind the scenes knowledge. However, the book is not in any way more than a journalistic description and investigation of what the

author calls the New Cold Wars. There is no coherent attempt to theorize what the New Cold Wars mean in relation to the First Cold War and how they are qualitatively different.

Furthermore, much of the explanation is based on an elite-oriented perspective. For example, as the book states, the main reason for the alliance between Russia and China is the personal friendship of Putin and Xi Jinping. Despite its inabilities to thoroughly explain developments, the book through its rich description of the events is an important contribution to the fields of international relations and security studies.