**HOW DOES RUSSIA AND CHINA’S GEOGRAPHY SHAPE THEIR NATIONAL & FOREIGN POLICIES?**

**RUSSIA:** “Vladimir Putin is just a normal Russian autocrat who looks out at the world from the point of view of Russia's geography. What he sees and knows is that Russia encompasses half the longitudes of the earth, yet it has a population smaller than Bangladesh, and it has no natural borders in the west towards Europe, which meant that not only did the French and the Germans invade in the guise of [under] Napoleon and Hitler, but so did the Swedes, the Poles, and the Lithuanians in earlier times of Russian history.

So Russia requires a buffer zone in Eastern Europe. So what if the Warsaw Pact [from the Cold War] has fallen? Russia will use every means at its disposal—crime groups, intimidation, thuggery, and, particularly, manipulating natural gas exports and where and how Russia builds energy pipelines—to reconstitute [rebuild] a buffer zone in the former Warsaw Pact [Eastern Europe].

Putin knows he doesn't have the military bandwidth to completely reoccupy Central Asia, yet he will maneuver. Putin knows that his greatest real strategic enemy is not the United States…it's China. Russia and China have land borders going thousands of miles. What is now the Russian Far East…was part of China up until 1860. China is a demographic behemoth [giant] that's growing mightily, that wants to extend its corporate and demographic reach into the Russian Far East, into former Soviet Central Asia. China is building roads and rail lines and pouring cash and building gas links all through former Soviet Central Asia, and it's driving the Russians crazy.”

**CHINA: “**China has a good geographic scenario and a negative geographic scenario. Its positive geographic scenario is that China is set to expand in search of strategic minerals, metals, and resources like timber and hydropower, into the Russian Far East, into Central Asia especially, and to retain control of Tibet. China is at its maximum point geographically since the high Qing Dynasty over 200 years ago.

But here's China's dilemma. The ethnic Han core of China [90 percent of Chinese] is mainly a function of central China and coastal China. To the north, China finds ethnic Inner Mongolians. To the west, it finds Muslim Turkic Uighurs. To the southwest, it finds Tibet. The Dalai Lama may be a spiritual figure for Western elites, but he's really a geopolitical factor. He's a geopolitical factor because Tibet controls more water than maybe any other place on the earth. It controls…the river systems that provide water for West Bengal in India, for Bangladesh, and for much of China.

If you take away Tibet from China, you're left with a rump [piece of] China…without water. So this ethnic Han core [has to] look to these high plateau and grasslands in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang province in the west, Tibet in the southwest, where there are ethnic groups who have had difficult historical relations with the Hans.

So the Chinese leadership says, ‘The West wants us to liberalize? Are they crazy? We're not going to give up central control, because if we start allowing more individual freedoms, we'll have ethnic insurgencies up and running [by the groups that control the water].’ This is China's geographically based dilemma.”