

MARCH 2017

RECALIBRATING U.S. STRATEGY TOWARD RUSSIA

A New Time for Choosing

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Executive Summary

These are turbulent times for American foreign policy. Nowhere are the challenges facing the United States more evident than in U.S. policy toward Russia. Drawing on scholars across several disciplines and perspectives, CSIS conducted a year-long study that sought to achieve two goals. First, to provide policymakers with a clearer understanding of Russia's strategic motivations and objectives, along with the tools it could use to advance its goals. Second, to lay out a comprehensive strategy to secure U.S. and transatlantic interests in the face of the complex Russia challenge set.

The Choice

- A fundamental choice faces the Trump administration: either it can work to defend and bolster the global system America helped create, or it can aid in the system's destruction, through intent or neglect, and start anew. This choice extends beyond U.S. strategy toward Russia, but is foundational to the direction any such strategy will take. In turn, how the United States approaches Russia will reverberate throughout its world affairs, setting expectations for allies, partners, and potential foes alike.
- President Putin has made his preference clear. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian security policy has been suffused to greater and lesser degrees with a sense that the West did not accord it sufficient respect as a great power. Russia's propensity to use force to right this perceived historical wrong has risen over the years, commensurate with its growing military prowess and economic and internal stability. Moscow today is viewing its options through the lens of a security dilemma that defines U.S. strength as its own weakness, and vice versa. It sees control of its periphery as central to its own security, and Putin may be seeking to reap domestic political benefits through foreign escapades abroad. Russia is testing its tools of coercion, which are increasingly unconstrained by the rule of law, and finding them sufficiently effective to meet its objectives. It does not want a war, but it is finding it can get a lot done without one.
- Accommodating Russia's preference would mean more than developing a new understanding with Russia about Europe's security. It would mean rethinking the values and organizing principles, including the role of the United States in the world, that have served as the foundation of global security since the end of World War II. It would mean a world in which political decisions are made by great powers for smaller powers; where borders can be redrawn by force; where liberal democratic values fall victim to autocratic whims; and where existing international obligations are no longer valid.

The Challenge

- Defending the international system against Russian attempts to undermine it will require addressing two interrelated problems. First is the degree of disrepair within the West's core institutions, which has been exposed and exploited by the second (more obvious) problem—Russia's renewed aggression and opportunism. The first cannot be expected to spontaneously fix itself and requires concerted action across the United States and Europe to revitalize our institutions and inoculate our societies against illiberal trends. The second will not abate while Moscow is reaping such benefits from the situation as it stands. Indeed, Russia's incentives today appear to push it toward more activism, rather than less.
- The weaknesses that have been revealed in the current international system extend beyond and are rooted deeper than the Russia challenge, but Russia is exploiting the West's vulnerabilities and increasing them. These weaknesses include the tone and

polarization of U.S. and European politics, our susceptibility to disinformation, the disengagement and disenchantment of our publics (who have largely forgotten why NATO and the European Union were created), growing income inequality, the lack of transparency and corruption in our governments, Europe's divestment in defense, and the lack of clear and shared priorities.

- Russia's revisionist turn is not the only significant challenge the U.S.-led international order faces today. In both the United States and Europe, the Russia challenge competes for attention and resources with a range of other threats: large-scale migration as well as terrorism spawned by disorder in the Middle East; economic dislocation; the rise of populism; and the continued if uneven rise of China and other non-Western powers. In contrast to the Cold War, the Russia challenge is rarely sufficient to promote unity of purpose among Western allies, especially with the emergence of populist, pro-Russian movements in several Western states.
- Russia's rebellion against Western-prescribed rules, norms, and values makes use of a range of military and nonmilitary levers. Its nonmilitary coercive tools, such as cyber infiltration and political influence operations, are being used to strong effects. It is likely still calibrating what can and cannot be done at acceptable risk, but insofar as these tools can be impactful at less human and financial cost than military tools, the United States and Europe dismiss these capabilities at their peril.
- In the conventional military realm, Russia continues to modernize and build. It has combined its niche capabilities with a low bar for the use of force to ably do more with less. Russia's armed forces remain well below the capabilities of the United States and NATO, but they are sufficient to Russia's preferred means of using them: smaller-scale operations with comparatively limited goals in defined regional spheres. The United States and its allies, by contrast, have been overly hesitant and reactive in using the wide and global array of tools at their disposal.
- Almost every facet of the collective Western response to the Russia challenge—from its overly cautious tactics to its insufficiently realistic assumptions—remains far removed from what is required to adequately manage it. To believe that Russia is committed to risk reduction, transparency, and predictability is a dangerous starting point that will lead the West astray. Russia is playing a different game—one in which Western leadership and existing institutions are to be challenged and in which threats, ambiguity, and violence have emerged as effective, and thus preferred tools. Moreover, dissonance among allies is only serving to further embolden Russia and broaden its goals. The United States and its allies must chart a clearer course in their Russia strategy, and take a bolder approach in its implementation.
- A bolder approach to Russia does not equate to warmongering or taking reckless action without concern for the consequences. It also does not mean challenging Russia at every opportunity. However, given what is revealed in this report regarding Russian motives, past use of force, instruments of power, and so-called redlines, it is logical to conclude there exists a wide gulf between the steps that have been taken to date and the steps that could be taken in the future to increase the West's leverage vis-à-vis Russia without sparking a conflict, or even coming close. This will entail lessening the West's sensitivity to Russia's reflexive protestations and false indignation, while also taking into account Russia's interests and perspective.

The Strategy

- U.S. strategy should aim to defend the current global order, protect the transatlantic relationship, and manage the Russia challenge in a way that avoids direct hostilities, discourages the sowing of global instability, and builds ties with the Russian people. This should be done until Moscow stops playing the spoiler and begins to work constructively to develop and strengthen security in Europe and the world—a long-term proposition to be sure. In support of these objectives, the United States should pursue actions across three key pillars: strengthen, contest, and cooperate.
- **Strengthen the health of our democracies, institutions, and defenses.** First, the West must shore up its vulnerabilities not simply to Russian coercion, but to all that makes Russian coercion possible. The United States and its allies will not be credible critics of Russian aggression if they do not provide a strong alternative example. Among other things, this requires practicing what we preach, standing up for human rights and democracy in Russia and elsewhere, reinvesting in NATO and expanding NATO-EU cooperation, reevaluating global interests and establishing clear priorities, and building resilience among allies and partners.
- **Contest Russian attempts to undermine U.S. interests.** Second, the United States needs more-robust offensive and defensive measures to contest Russia's increasingly aggressive actions. Russia's challenging of the international order will not be constrained only by punitive measures imposed after the fact, but must also be shaped by the proactive imposition of a predictable set of policies and actions that makes clear the United States' boundaries and expectations. This means shaping a new relationship paradigm, together with our transatlantic partners, that puts more onus on Russia to comply with international norms rather than simply imposing consequences for breaching them. The sooner that the West adjusts its expectations and begins standing firm in defense of its interests, the better able it will be to shape events vice fall victim to them. A stronger approach may include creating a predictable schedule of progressing sanctions, conducting proportional offensive cyber activities, increasing and optimizing the U.S. and overall NATO conventional military presence in Europe (including greater allied burden sharing), doing more to combat Russian propaganda, and supporting non-NATO nations, including Ukraine, in their right to maintain sovereignty.
- **Cooperate where advantageous and feasible.** Finally, engagement with Russia on areas of mutual interest is not only wise but necessary. The United States must approach engagement selectively, cautiously, and with firm limits. It must remain steadfast in upholding its core values, remain clear-eyed about Russia's motives, and understand the potential tradeoffs that deal-making with Russia might entail. Engagement that degenerates into endless accommodation does not serve U.S. or allied interests. For now, the United States and its allies may wish to focus on areas where cooperation is both advantageous and feasible. This may include: improving crisis communications and transparency measures, maintaining nuclear nonproliferation and moving forward on bilateral nuclear and conventional arms control, and working together in the Arctic.
- Attention should be paid to any potential opportunities for interaction across these pillars—particularly between the contest and cooperate pillars—that could create leverage for the United States as it seeks political concessions in its negotiations with Russia. The more strongly the United States contests Russian attempts to reshape the security landscape, the greater the opportunities later to cooperate on acceptable terms. In other words, escalate to negotiate.

- U.S. leadership in forging a common approach with allies will also be essential. The role of the United States as a leader in NATO provides a unique platform to resolve disputes and drive the agenda. While it is crucial that European voices be at the center of European policy, the United States must be prepared to push back against calls for greater isolationism and accommodation and rally allies to remain resolute in defending the rules-based international order.
 - ◊ **The Importance of Europe.** While focused on Russia, this report also emphasizes the importance of Europe. This is not meant to suggest that Russia's ambitions are geographically limited. Europe, however, is where U.S. political, economic, and security interests come into greatest tension with Russian interests and where the stakes are arguably the highest beyond America's own shores. This is because the U.S. interest in Europe extends well beyond preserving the ideal of a just and stable global order.
 - ◊ Next to the strength of our constitutional democracy, our alliance structure is America's greatest foreign policy advantage. Europe is home to a number of the United States' most capable and willing coalition partners, who have fought and died alongside the United States in every major combat operation since the turn of the twentieth century. Joint action under NATO adds legitimacy and capability to U.S. interventions and U.S. military bases in Europe enable rapid global force projection. Intelligence relationships with European allies multiply the United States' ability to maintain awareness of common threats. Despite needing to grow, the collective defense budget of European allies amounts to \$300 billion annually, more than quadruple Russia's defense budget. The European Union is the United States' largest and most important economic partner, with trade totaling over \$1 trillion in goods and services in 2014 alone, supporting an estimated 2.6 million U.S. jobs. Additionally, the United States' close relationship with Europe provides powerful diplomatic influence that can shape allied decisionmaking in a way that is beneficial to U.S. political and policy imperatives, as well as to American business interests. Appeals for nations to "buy American" will have less resonance with allies that feel abandoned or threatened.
- This approach in some ways builds on the strategy of the Obama administration. However, it is neither reluctant in implementation nor averse to accepting some escalation risk (criticisms that have been levied against the Obama administration's strategy). It is decisive and forceful in nature and defined by the defense of U.S. interests.

Now is the time for choosing a clear path that manifests a high U.S. priority on European and transatlantic security. Should it rush to make deals with Russia to secure lesser objectives, the United States may well find itself sacrificing a more fundamental goal: advancing a global order that benefits our people, our economy, and our constitutional values. Standing resolutely by our allies and our treaty commitments is central to upholding that order. This approach will speak to Putin's Russia in the language it best understands: power and resolve. At the same time, it seeks to avoid miscalculation and escalation by finding avenues for cooperation where possible and by adapting deterrence approaches to signal effectively across the full spectrum of Russian security threats.

GREENLAND

RUSSIA'S INTERVENTIONS AND ENTANGLEMENTS





FINLAND

NORWAY

SWEDEN

EST.

LAT.

LITH.

RUSSIA

KALININGRAD BELARUS

POLAND

GERMANY

CZE.

UKRAINE

DONBAS

SLO.

TRANSNISTRIA

AUS.

HUN.

SWZ.

CRO.

ROMANIA

CRIMEA

SLV.

BOS.

SER.

SOUTH OSSETIA

ITA.

MON.

KOS.

MAC.

BUL.

ABKHAZIA

GEO.

ALB.

GRC.

TURKEY

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

SYRIA

IRAQ



INTRODUCTION

Introduction

U.S. policy toward Russia is at a crossroads. Should the Trump administration seek to make fundamental accommodations with Russia over European security or should it continue to promote the promise of a Europe, whole and free? This question is linked to a broader choice about whether the United States centers its foreign policy around promoting the global system it helped to create, lead, and bolster since the end of World War II or whether it seeks to aid in the system's destruction, through intent or neglect, and start anew. The latter means not simply developing a new understanding with Russia about Europe's security. It means rethinking the values and organizing principles that serve as the foundation of global security, including the role of the United States in the world.

In October 1964, Ronald Reagan delivered the speech that would launch his political career. It was titled "A Time for Choosing" and, in it, he argued against sacrificing American values in exchange for a quick peace with an aggressive Soviet Union. The choice we face today is not about whether to return to the Cold War paradigm of 1964, which is neither desirable nor possible. Nevertheless, Reagan's words resound today as the United States and its allies are being challenged and tested by Russia in ways thought inconceivable only a few years ago. The Trump administration's

foreign policy legacy and the future of the international order will be shaped in no small part by how the United States chooses to manage the Russia challenge. This is a new time for choosing.

The Russia challenge sits at the intersection of two interrelated problems. First, Moscow's gambles have exposed and exploited the degree of hidden disrepair within the West's core institutions. The discovery—which has likely surprised Putin as much as it has leaders in the United States and Europe—does much to discredit the West's misguided faith in the sus-

taining power of good intentions absent proper upkeep. Second is Russia's renewed aggression and opportunism, which fed off both the West's internal disrepair and its lack of collective political will in mounting sufficient resistance. Indeed, the Kremlin must be reveling in the unanticipated successes it has found in testing Western strength and resolve. Its experiments, aided by the pressures of a migration crisis and economic stagnation, have revealed and deepened fissures within NATO and the European Union and will not abate as long as they continue to pay such dividends.

We judge that President Putin will attempt to build on his success, taking advantage of a change in U.S. political dynamics to further undermine the European security architecture, along with the principles underpinning it. The United States must be prepared for this and strive to manage the Russia challenge in a way that recognizes Moscow's security requirements, yet takes a bolder stance in defending and advancing its own. While acknowledging that existing institutions are imperfect, the United States must also recognize that the system's complete dismantling will create less security, not more, and that any path forward will be more effective if it builds on the existing foundations of the global order. To succeed, such a strategy must take account of Russia's interests and perspective. Sacrificing long-term U.S. interests in exchange for what would amount to short-term Russian compliance, however, would be a bad deal with tragic consequences. This report offers our best advice to the new U.S. administration on how best to navigate this complex and difficult path.

Scope and Objectives

To contribute to the new administration's Russia policy development, CSIS conducted a year-long study that sought to achieve two goals. First, to provide policymakers with a clearer understanding of Russia's strategic motivations and objectives, along with the tools—conventional, unconventional, nuclear, and nonmilitary—it could use to advance its goals, primarily in Europe but with implications

around the world. Second, to lay out a comprehensive strategy to secure U.S. and transatlantic interests in the face of the threats Russia's goals and approaches pose.

We view Russia's shift toward a more belligerent security posture as an enduring reality, not an aberration. This is the product of long-standing Russian beliefs, coupled with an increasing recognition that it can advance them more effectively today than was possible in years past. We argue, however, that neither the United States nor its allies in Europe have made the necessary conceptual shift to accept the long-term Russia challenge, nor determined the strategic objectives that their policies should advance. The West's approach to date has been insufficient to meet the threat, and dissonance among allies is only serving to embolden Russia and broaden its goals. The United States must, therefore, center its Russia policy, and, indeed, its European and global strategies, on an unadulterated assessment of interests, priorities, and vulnerabilities, identify achievable objectives, and, on this basis, articulate acceptable tradeoffs against other global requirements. To this end, our report offers the framework for a comprehensive strategy toward Russia, one derived from analysis and insights regarding key elements of past U.S. policy toward Russia; historical Russian reactions to major events on its periphery; and the tool sets each

SACRIFICING LONG-TERM U.S. INTERESTS IN EXCHANGE FOR WHAT WOULD AMOUNT TO SHORT-TERM RUSSIAN COMPLIANCE WOULD BE A BAD DEAL WITH TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES.

side can bring to bear in advancing its national interests.

This project brought together experts from CSIS's International Security, Europe, and Russia and Eurasia programs to develop integrated regional and functional insights and generate broad policy solutions. It was informed by three workshops—two in Washington, D.C., with senior U.S. scholars and expert policy practitioners, and a third in Brussels, Belgium, with European experts and policymakers at NATO and the European Union—in addition to a study trip to Kyiv and Moscow. The report is organized into five chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1: Understanding the Russia Challenge - Chapter 1 provides an overview of shifts in Russian and U.S. foreign and security policy during the Cold War to better understand both continuities and changes in Russia and U.S. approaches over time, with an emphasis on assessing whether Cold War-era containment and deterrence strategies

RUSSIA'S TOOLKIT

1. MISINFORMATION (Germany)

Jan. 2016: Stirs public outrage in Germany over migration by amplifying false media reporting about a crime that did not occur.

2. TERRITORIAL CLAIMS (Arctic)

Feb. 2016: Formal presentation of Russia's claim to 460,000 square miles of Arctic Ocean seabed to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf under UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

3. AIR-SEA VIOLATIONS (Baltic and Black Seas)

Sep. 2016: Russian military aircraft conduct maneuvers near U.S. ships and aircrafts operating in the Baltic and Black Sea.

4. CYBER ESPIONAGE & POLITICAL SUBVERSION (United States)

Summer–Fall 2016: Hacks into U.S. political organizations and the email accounts of political figures. Leaks information to third-party outlets to influence the U.S. presidential election.

5. MILITARY AID (Nicaragua)

Aug. 2016: Donates 50 tanks to the Ortega regime, shoring up its security ties that include a satellite tracking station and military access to ports and airfields.

6. MILITARY EXERCISES (South China Sea)

Sep. 2016: Conducts naval exercises with China in the South China Sea.

7. ECONOMIC AID (Venezuela)

Oct. 2016: Inks new energy deals with Caracas and extends loans to support the Maduro government.

8. ENERGY DEALS (Turkey)

Oct. 2016: Mends ties with Turkey and signs a deal to build a major natural gas pipeline under the Black Sea.

9. PUTSCH (Montenegro)

Oct. 2016: Suspected of orchestrating a failed coup attempt in Montenegro in an attempt to derail its accession to NATO.

10. ARMS SALE (Iran)

Nov. 2016: Discussions with Iran over a potential \$10 billion arms sale.

11. NUCLEAR THREATS (Norway)

Nov. 2016: Warning from senior defense parliamentarian that Norway would be targeted by Russian nuclear forces if Oslo allowed a small unit of 300 U.S. Marines to deploy on a rotational basis.

12. STOKING CONFLICT

(Eastern Ukraine) *Ongoing:* Continues to provide support and arms to separatists in eastern Ukraine.

13. MILITARY BUILDUP (Southwest Russia)

Ongoing: Deploys thousands of new troops along Ukraine's borders.

14. DESTABILIZATION (Europe)

Ongoing: Provides funding and support to European far-right and far-left fringe parties.

15. UNDERSEA ESPIONAGE (North Sea & Atlantic)

Ongoing: Russian submarines and spy ships operate with increasing frequency near undersea cables.

IN ACTION IN 2016

16. MILITARY INTERVENTION (Syria)

Ongoing: Continues its intervention in the Syrian Civil War in support of the Assad regime.

18. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (China)

Ongoing: Expanding political, military, economic, institutional, and cultural ties with China.

17. OCCUPATION (Crimea)

Ongoing: Continues illegal occupation of Crimea despite international condemnation.



*For illustrative purposes only. List is not comprehensive.

remain applicable to the contemporary Russia challenge. It then provides a brief synopsis

power and position in the international system (e.g., changes in Russian military capabilities),

and capabilities. We also review how the Kremlin has used both military force and its other instruments of power in recent years, and what lessons might be learned from those experiences.

RUSSIA'S SHIFT TOWARD A MORE BELLIGERENT SECURITY POSTURE IS THE PRODUCT OF LONG-STANDING RUSSIAN BELIEFS, COUPLED WITH AN INCREASING RECOGNITION THAT IT CAN ADVANCE THEM MORE EFFECTIVELY TODAY THAN WAS POSSIBLE IN YEARS PAST.

Chapter 4: U.S. and Allied Instruments of Power – Chapter 4 evaluates the key political, economic, and military instruments of power available to the United States in managing the Russia challenge. It considers the benefits and drawbacks of employing nonmilitary tools ranging from economic sanctions to information operations. For military instruments, it analyzes the state of U.S. military posture in Europe

and the forces and capabilities necessary to deter aggression and defend U.S. interests in light of Russia's military modernization. The nine U.S. and allied capabilities examined in this chapter include: precision strike, air superiority, integrated air and missile defenses, naval and maritime forces, ground forces and combined arms warfare, special operations forces, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), electronic warfare, and cyber. Specific recommendations are offered for how the United States and its allies can build upon and better leverage existing military advantages, as well as mitigate current and emerging capability gaps.

Chapter 5: Responding to the Russia Challenge – The report culminates in a comprehensive strategy for managing the Russia challenge. It offers an assessment of the impact of U.S. and allied efforts to date and

of Russian foreign policy and U.S.-Russian security relations in the modern era. Finally, it analyzes potential Russian motivations and objectives.

Chapter 2: Case Studies on Russia's Use of Force – To better understand what motivates Russia toward either military action or restraint, Chapter 2 looks back at instances where Russia faced choices regarding the use of force. It examines six post-Cold War events to illuminate Russia's calculations on using, or not using, force to advance its interests. The case studies focus on Russia's policy and actions with regard to: (1) the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1998–1999; (2) NATO enlargement in 2004; (3) Ukraine and the 2004–2005 Orange Revolution; (4) the war with Georgia in 2008; (5) intervention in Ukraine from 2013–2016; and (6) intervention in Syria from 2014–2016. The cases analyze systemic factors such as Russia's

state-level factors (e.g., domestic political dynamics, economic conditions), and individual factors such as the roles of key Russian decisionmakers. The case studies are tied together by a cross-case summary that identifies key causal mechanisms driving changes in Russian foreign and security policy, with a particular emphasis on factors that affect Russia's propensity toward the use of force and toward confrontation with the United States and its European allies and partners.

Chapter 3: Russian Instruments of Power – Chapter 3 provides an assessment of the current state and prospective evolution of Russian political, economic, and military power, including coercive tools such as cyber and information campaigns. We discuss how Russia has reformed its armed forces and draw some conclusions about what that means for Russian effectiveness

identifies the risks of failing to confront Russia in a more meaningful way. In detailing the value of the transatlantic relationship and other key U.S. interests, it lays out six strategic objectives that should drive the new administration's approach to Russia. The ways and means of the strategy are defined across three organizational pillars, including actionable steps under each that should be pursued simultaneously and credibly alongside U.S. allies and partners.



CHAPTER

01

Understanding the Russia Challenge

Russia's efforts to challenge the European and transatlantic security order rest on a set of motives and interests that have been met with an ability to advance them through military and other means. The CSIS study team sought to first assess these Russian motivations and capabilities in order to inform and shape the answer to a harder question—and one this report ultimately endeavors to answer—what to do about it. To provide a baseline for understanding the Russia challenge and the threat it poses, this chapter will explore relevant aspects of the U.S. approach to the Soviet Union and set the stage for a deeper discussion (in subsequent chapters) on Russia's motives and past use of force, the contents of its toolbox, and potential points of leverage.

U.S. Policy during the Cold War

While the contemporary Russia challenge is in many ways distinct from that once posed by the Soviet Union, the West's success in managing the Soviet threat during the Cold War is worth studying for whatever lessons it can provide for today's more competitive European security landscape. From the late 1940s, Western strategy toward the USSR centered on the notion

of containment. As described in 1947 by its architect George F. Kennan, containment entailed “confront[ing] the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.”¹ Kennan believed that Soviet hostility and expansionism were driven not by insecurity vis-à-vis the West, but by the very nature of the Soviet regime, which in his view arose “mainly from basic inner-Russian necessities which existed before [the] recent war and which exist to-

day.”² These necessities resulted from the fact that:

Russian rulers have invariably sensed that their rule was relatively archaic in form, fragile and artificial in its psychological foundation, unable to stand comparison or contact with political systems of Western countries. For this reason, they have always feared foreign penetration, feared direct contact between [the] Western world and their own, feared what would happen if Russians learned [the] truth about [the] world with-

*out or if foreigners learned [the] truth about [the] world within. And they have learned to seek security only in [the] patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.*³

Only by portraying the USSR as a besieged fortress, Kennan believed, could the Soviet leadership justify to its own people the repressions and privations it was imposing on them.

Kennan's analysis portended that Western efforts to improve relations with Moscow through concessions, integration of the USSR into Western-backed multilateral institutions, or negotiations would continue to fail. Only through what Secretary of State James Byrnes called "firmness and strength" would the West be able to prevent the extension of Soviet power until such time as the nature of the Soviet state itself changed and Moscow no longer needed the specter of a hostile world to legitimate the repressive system it was operating at home.⁴ This approach entailed preventing Soviet military aggression at least in areas of core strategic interest, such as Western Europe, but also limiting Moscow's ability to subvert Western governments from within by delivering on the promise of prosperity, equality, and justice at home and reducing the attraction of the Soviet-backed alternative.

Kennan's views about the geographic scope of U.S. interests, as well as the nature of the "counter-force" necessary to contain Soviet expansionism, changed over time; however, in the context of the Cold War, Kennan was a proponent of restraint, arguing

that the United States needed to prioritize its interests (preventing Soviet expansion in Europe was a high priority; stopping Communist takeovers in China, much less Southeast Asia, was not). He also argued that the United States should rely primarily on nonmilitary forms of influence to weaken the appeal of the

Soviet Union ever contemplated such an attack in the first place.⁷ Deterrence was no panacea, however. Even before the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb in 1949, and with the Soviet military still recovering from the enormous losses sustained in World War II, the United States was able to prevent a Soviet sei-

KENNAN BELIEVED THAT SOVIET HOSTILITY AND EXPANSIONISM WERE DRIVEN NOT BY INSECURITY VIS-À-VIS THE WEST, BUT BY THE VERY NATURE OF THE SOVIET REGIME...

Soviet model in Western Europe, through initiatives such as the Marshall Plan.⁵ Others, including Kennan's successor as director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff Paul H. Nitze, argued for a more robust variant of containment that prioritized military power—including preparation to fight and win a nuclear war—as the key to deterring Soviet aggression, and which applied to the jungles of Southeast Asia as much as to the plains of Central Europe.⁶

A key component of the U.S. containment strategy was deterrence, both conventional and nuclear. Most importantly, deterrence succeeded in preventing an all-out conflict between the USSR and the United States, or a Soviet attack on U.S. allies in Western Europe—though some scholars question whether the

zure of divided Berlin, but not the seizure of power by Soviet-backed Communist parties in a number of Eastern European countries from 1947–1949.⁸

Nor was the United States able to deter Soviet military interventions against states that lay outside the Western bloc, including Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). Some scholars claim that the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia point to the insufficiency of mere military or nuclear superiority in effective deterrence, while others note that the asymmetry of interests in these cases made deterrence impossible, since Moscow knew that Washington did not value Hungary or Czechoslovakia (which were already members of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact) highly enough to risk nuclear escalation.⁹ The examples of the



Vice President Richard Nixon argues with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during the “Kitchen Debate” at the American National Exhibition in Moscow.

Moscow, Russia, July 24, 1959

Credit: National Archives/
Richard Nixon Presidential Library

Communist takeovers in Eastern Europe and the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia point to one of the principal challenges inherent in a deterrence-based strategy, namely how to make deterrence work in situations where there is an asymmetry between the sides’ perceived stakes—where they may be important for one but closer to existential for the other.

Conversely, deterrence worked well when the United States was able to effectively and credibly communicate the seriousness of its interests, for instance when U.S. intelligence discovered the Soviets installing nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962. Similarly, despite the Soviet Union’s conventional military superiority in Europe, Moscow never launched an attack on a NATO member state. For a country like Turkey, membership in NATO (which came in 1952) effectively ended Soviet efforts to establish domination through military means, a sign that Moscow took NATO and its security guarantees for members seriously.

Russia’s Post–Cold War Accommodation

Though Russia has chafed at the post–Cold War security order for most of the period since the Soviet collapse, Moscow’s efforts to directly challenge that order were limited. It criticized steps taken by the United States and its allies that it viewed as inimical to its own security—but each time grudgingly accepted them. Among these steps were the accession of countries in Central and Eastern Europe to NATO (first in 1999 were the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland); the use of force without UN Security Council authorization in Serbia and later Iraq; and the Bush administration’s withdrawal from the Antibalistic Missile (ABM) Treaty coupled with its commitment to building a missile defense system in Europe.

In each case, Western interlocutors attempted to assuage Moscow’s concerns by arguing that these steps were in Russia’s

interest as well. NATO enlargement, the United States asserted, would help stabilize countries on Russia’s borders, while a European missile defense system would deter Iran from developing missiles that could hit targets in Russia as well as in Europe. Moscow, however, rejected these arguments, demonstrating that it continued to define its interests as distinct from those of the transatlantic community. Rather, it viewed itself as an outsider to the existing system of regional security based on the idea of a rules-based order in Europe centered on transatlantic institutions, whose doors remained open to states across Europe, including former constituents of the USSR.

Russia’s accommodation to shifts in the post–Cold War security landscape that it opposed was the result of both Russia’s relative weakness for much of the 1990s and 2000s, and the priority that Moscow continued to place on maintaining generally productive relations with the United States, European Union,

**U.S. Secretary of State
Hillary Clinton and Russian
Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov
press a “reset button” to symbolize
improving relations between the
United States and Russia at the start
of the Obama administration.**

Geneva, Switzerland, March 6, 2009

Credit: U.S. Department of State



and even NATO—if only because there was no real alternative. The 2008 invasion of Georgia became the first time since the end of the Cold War that Moscow used force to halt what it viewed as changes to the status quo that were detrimental to its interests. While there were many reasons behind the Kremlin’s decision to send forces into Georgia in August 2008, the Georgian government’s open aspirations to join NATO, which the alliance had endorsed at its summit in Bucharest a few months earlier, appears to provide the strongest explanation for Russia’s willingness to use force.

Yet in the aftermath of the Georgia War, Russia and the transatlantic community moved quickly to resume cooperation. Before the end of 2008, the Bush administration was seeking a resumption of dialogue. In early 2009, the new Obama administration proclaimed its interest in “resetting” relations with Moscow, a step that entailed downplaying not only the Georgian conflict, but also the divergent

views of European security prevailing in Moscow and in Washington. NATO membership, at least for former members of the Soviet Union, was effectively put on the back burner. The United States and Russia made a major new push on arms control, committing in the New START agreement to further reduce their deployed nuclear warheads and trying (unsuccessfully) to find common ground on the fraught question of missile defense. Russia also became an integral part of the Northern Distribution Network, which NATO established to move supplies into and out of Afghanistan. In 2012, the United States initiated another round of major U.S. Army force reductions in Europe.

Following Vladimir Putin’s return to the presidency, accompanied by the outbreak of substantial antigovernment protests in Moscow and other cities in late 2011 and 2012, the “reset” soon gave way to a much more confrontational era between the West and Russia, and Russian foreign and security policy has

taken a much more assertive turn, particularly in Europe.

Putin’s Russia Defines a New Foreign and Security Policy

Elements of the contemporary Russian challenge are reminiscent of an earlier era. Unlike the bulk of the previous two decades, the current confrontation appears to entail Russia’s fundamental rejection of the post-Cold War European security order, along with active attempts to subvert and ultimately overturn that order. Since Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012, the Kremlin has increasingly portrayed Russia as a civilization unto itself, prioritizing policies designed to establish it as an independent player in a global order it sees as multipolar.

In Europe, Russia’s revisionist turn has been characterized by the use of military force (in Ukraine), as well as the deploy-

ment of various levers of influence across Europe to undermine both European and transatlantic unity and lay claim to a sphere of influence across much of the former Soviet Union. Putin's Rus-

tion (i.e., binding some fraction of the post-Soviet states into an economic and political bloc intended as an analog and competitor to the European Union) and a "pivot" to Asia. Until re-

WHY IS RUSSIA DOING THIS? THE ANSWER APPEARS TO BE A COMBINATION OF MOTIVE AND ABILITY. IN OTHER WORDS, THE KREMLIN WANTS TO AND IT CAN—WITHOUT MAJOR CONSEQUENCES.

sia increasingly seeks to present an alternative political model, a kind of authoritarian capitalism that appeals to nationalism and "traditional values" in a time of change and upheaval across much of Europe.¹⁰ This alternative model aims to capitalize on the disaffection that many Europeans feel with the status quo. Galvanizing it is the Kremlin's support for a range of illiberal parties, quasi-NGOs, media outlets, and other "fellow travelers" within European states, along with its appeals to "compatriots" within the former Soviet Union.¹¹ Of course, this model is less coherent and has fewer proponents than Communism did, but it is also more fluid and capable of appealing to a wider range of constituencies, thanks in part to Moscow's increasingly sophisticated and varied communications platforms.

In Asia, two important pillars of Russia's approach have been the focus on Eurasian integra-

tion, this has focused mainly on China, which the Kremlin increasingly identifies as the major driver of growth at a time when Europe remains stagnant.¹² More recently, Russia has also incorporated outreach to Japan and southeast Asian nations, with varying degrees of success. Indeed, the Kremlin now portrays these two approaches as the twin pillars of its efforts to create a "Greater Eurasia" that will act as an alternative, and competitor, to the liberal Western order.¹³

Why is Russia doing this? The answer appears to be a combination of motive and ability. In other words, the Kremlin wants to and it can—without major consequences. While experts and scholars may disagree on how to prioritize them, Russia's aggressive actions seem to reflect a combination of four main drivers: internal, external, historical, and geopolitical.

- Internally, Putin is seeking to hold onto power and distract from several significant domestic political challenges, including Russia's economic troubles, rampant corruption, income inequality, long-term demographic decline, and the Kremlin's lingering legitimacy concerns following the anti-regime protests and subsequent crackdowns in 2011–2012.¹⁴ Putin may view foreign escapades abroad as a way to rally the people around the flag, so to speak, and raise his approval rating despite no longer being able to deliver on the economic growth he had previously provided to the Russian people.

- Externally, Russia views its security as a zero-sum proposition vis-à-vis the West, and the encroachment of NATO and the European Union eastward as a threat to its political and economic influence, as well as to its own security. Some analysts view the United States and its European allies as ultimately responsible for provoking Russian hostility.¹⁵ John Mearsheimer, for example, argues that Russia is lashing out after being backed into a corner by the West, which dismissed Russian security concerns and underestimated its willingness to use force. In this sense, annexing Crimea was a defensive act to secure what Russia perceived to be core interests under threat when it appeared Ukraine was again on the path to integration with the West.¹⁶

- Russia may also be seeking to right what it considers to be a historical wrong. It is fundamentally dissatisfied with the post-Cold War bargain struck

with the United States and Europe at a moment of profound weakness. It may therefore be using its rediscovered military and economic might in order to reshape the European order more favorably. Its actions in Ukraine were a step forward, a test of Western resolve, and an effort to divide the West in order to lay the groundwork for further aggression by Moscow.¹⁷ Having found success, likely more than it anticipated, Russia has been emboldened to continue to challenge the Euro-Atlantic order it so resents, and to force the United States and its allies to account for Russian interests on major international challenges.

- Finally, from a geopolitical perspective, Russia sees control of its periphery as critical to its own security. As a country with few geographic barriers and which has been repeatedly subjected to invasion from the East (Mongols), South (Tatars), and West (Napoleonic France and Germany in both world wars), Russia has long sought to maintain a buffer zone around its core regions. Whether through direct conquest or informal domination, Russia has traditionally pursued a strategy of defense in depth. Such considerations informed Moscow's domination of Cold War Eastern Europe, as well as modern Russia's hostility to a NATO presence on its borders.

Regarding Russia's ability to act on these motivations, most scholars agree that over the

past 15 years, Russia has at least partially recovered from the collapse of the Soviet Union and reemerged as a substantial military power. In fact, many point to high energy prices over the course of the 2000s and the rebuilding of Russia's military in more recent years as the primary enabler of its increasingly assertive behavior toward its immediate neighbors, its disregard for Western institutions and norms, and its willingness to accept punishments and forfeit cooperation with the United States and Europe in pursuit of its strategic objectives.

Russian actions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria emphasize the extent to which Moscow is willing to use its military power to achieve political ends. While Russian capabilities remain far short of what the Soviet Union had, they are sufficient to spark fears in much of Central and Eastern Europe about Moscow's ability to either carry out a conventional invasion, particularly of the Baltic States, or to spark

RUSSIA HAS IN MANY WAYS BEEN MORE SUCCESSFUL, AT LOWER COST, THAN IT COULD HAVE DREAMED.

unrest or seize territory without triggering a full-fledged military response under NATO's Article 5 collective defense guarantee.¹⁸ In either case, Russia is expected to employ a mix of nonmilitary and military means, including

special operators (like the "little green men" who appeared in Crimea in the spring of 2014), irregular forces, and *agents provocateurs*. Combined with Russia's efforts to manipulate the media in numerous post-Soviet as well as European countries, these low-level kinetic operations provide a foundation for what some now refer to as "hybrid," "grey area," or "integrated" warfare. This approach was also a Cold War staple, notably in the Communist takeovers in Eastern Europe in the late 1940s, as well as subsequent Soviet military operations from Hungary to Afghanistan.¹⁹ As during the Cold War, looming in the background is the Russian nuclear arsenal, which Putin and others have invoked to signal the dangers of escalation in the event of a confrontation between Russia and the West.²⁰

Russia is likely calculating that its actions hold a low risk of failure, while the direct and indirect costs likely to be imposed after the fact by the West remain manageable. Its newfound assertiveness on the global stage has borne fruit, although not necessarily the fruit Moscow thought it was planting. Russia has in many ways been more successful, at lower cost, than it could have dreamed. Its intervention in Ukraine has led to firm Russian control

of the Crimean Peninsula and a simmering insurgency in eastern Ukraine, as well as a standoff with the West, that has paradoxically enhanced Russia's stature and presented it as a counterweight to the United States at home and abroad—albeit at the

Soviet Forces Withdraw from Afghanistan
Feb. 1989

Berlin Wall Falls
Nov. 1989

GERMAN REUNIFICATION Sep. 1990

-East Germany

WARSAW PACT DISSOLVES Jul. 1991

- Poland
- Czechoslovakia
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria

SOVIET UNION DISSOLVES Dec. 1991

- Ukraine
- Belarus
- Kazakhstan
- Georgia
- Uzbekistan
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Estonia
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Kyrgyzstan
- Moldova
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan

Putin
Becomes President
Dec. 1999

Russian
Financial
Crisis
Aug. 1998

\$4.1 Trillion

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT
(Constant 2014 USD)

5 Million

MILITARY PERSONNEL

\$385 Billion

DEFENSE SPENDING
(Constant 2014 USD)

396 Million

POPULATION

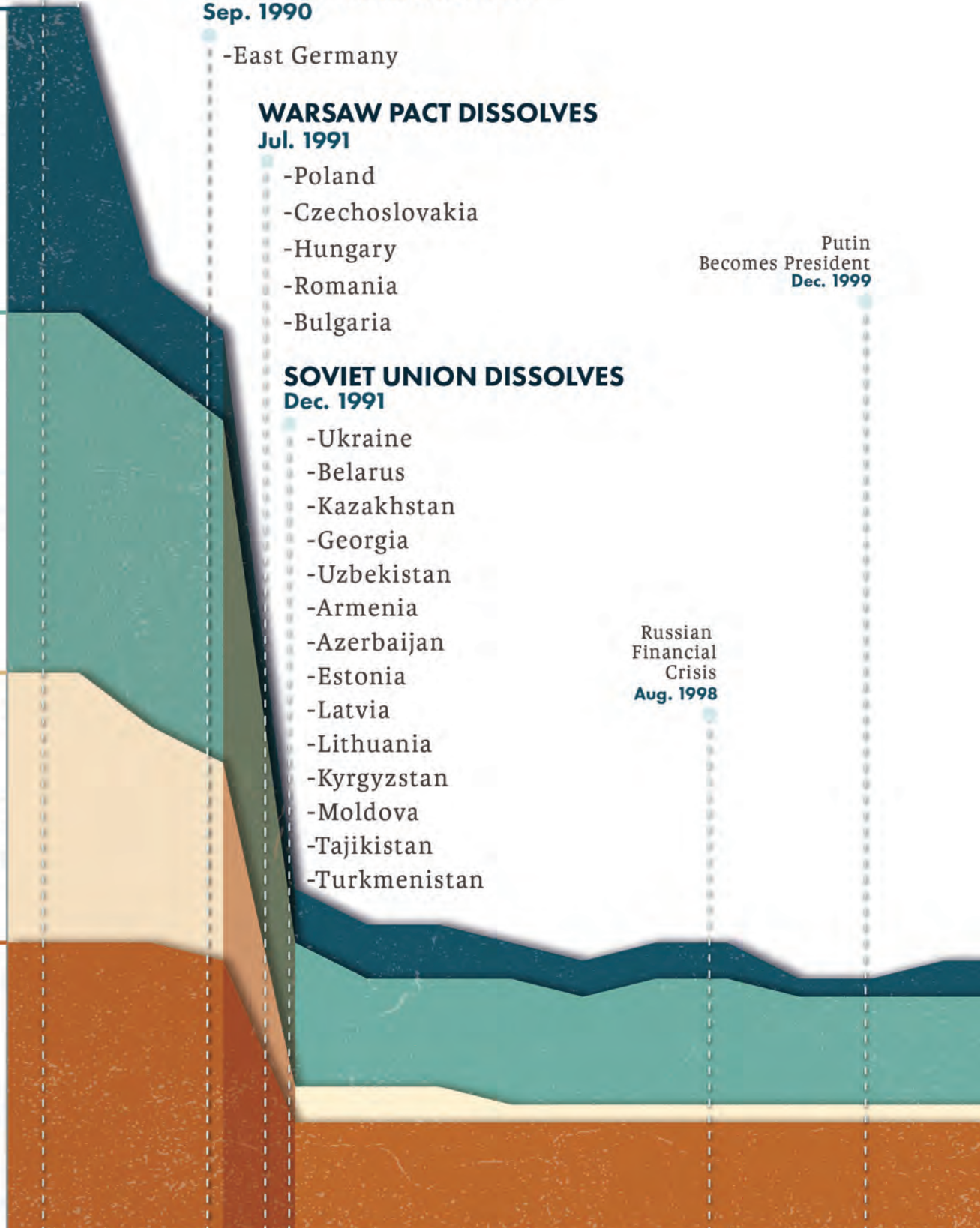
Source: World Development Indicators, The World Bank; Maddison Project; SIPRI Military Expenditure Database; IISS Military Balance; IMF; Correlates of War Dataset on National Material Capabilities (v5.0)

1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001

Warsaw Pact & Soviet Union

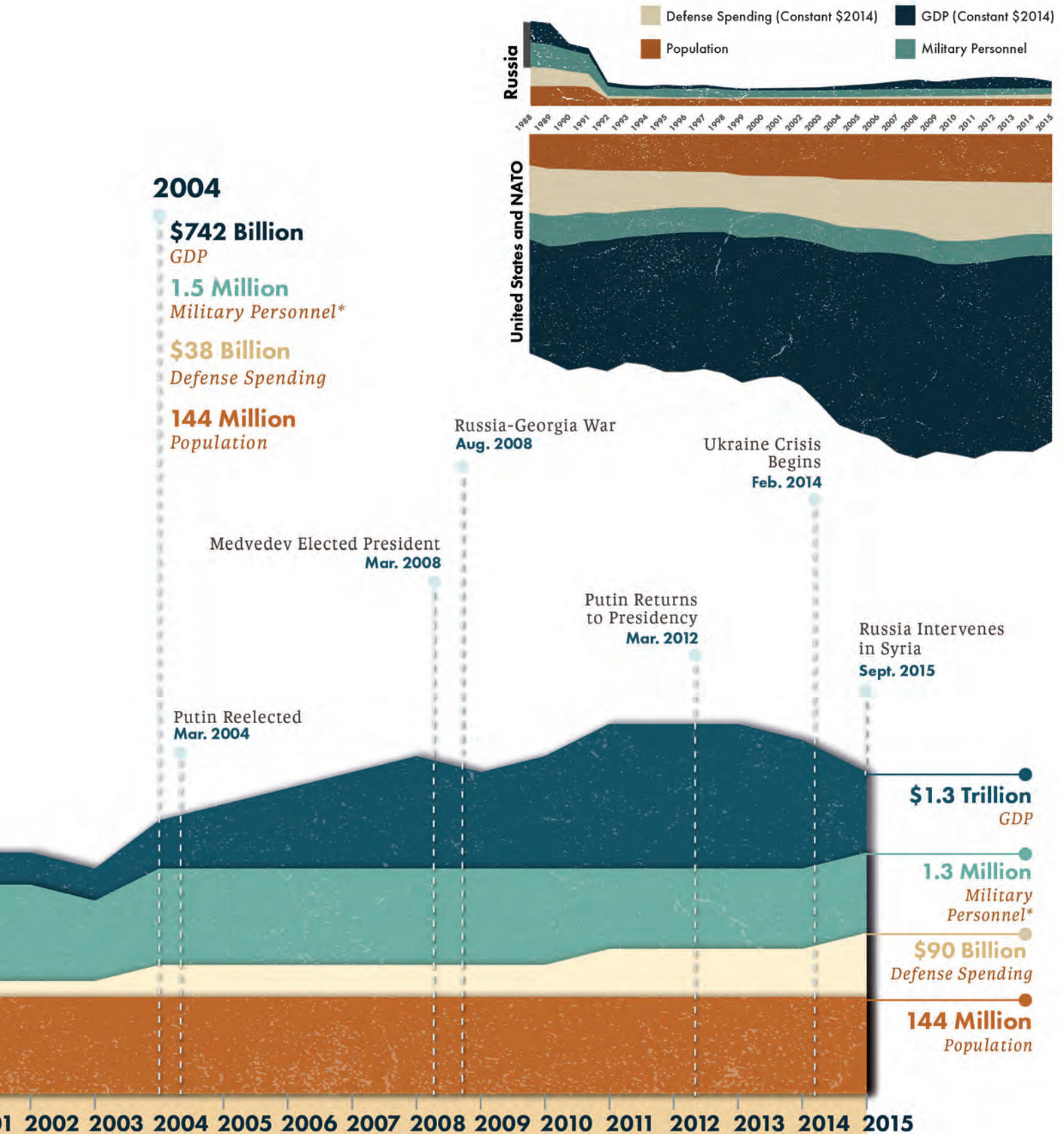
Soviet Union

Russia



EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN POWER

1988-2015



*Includes paramilitary

cost of much of its traditional influence over Ukraine. Moreover, economic isolation has given Russia an external scapegoat for its economic troubles, far more attributable to low oil prices and its failure to implement structural reforms when the Russian economy was booming.

Russia's combination of a low bar for the use of military force and the ability to deploy it comparatively judiciously also supports its capacity to punch above its weight, shifting the balance in Syria and creating a festering wound in Ukraine that will not soon be resolved. Russia has given the impression of increased conventional military capability on the cheap by upgrading older weapons, designing new weapons off of older models, and deploying wholly new weapons in boutique numbers. Its creative use of new technologies, including with cyber campaigns, is also notable. Finally, Moscow's apparent success in affecting the debate around the U.S. elections indicates that Moscow's machinations can hit at the heart of America and other liberal democracies, at comparatively little cost.

With the return of an assertive Russia that seemingly poses a threat to the existing European security order, discussions of containment and deterrence are once again in the air. Plenty of scholars and analysts have called for a return to containment strategy that played a central role in the defeat (or collapse) of the Soviet threat.²¹ While most of these calls for a return to containment in Europe invoke Kennan, some, echoing Nitze, seek a substantially militarized and global effort to deter an expansion of Russian power.²²

Of course, much has changed since the Cold War, and support for a return to containment in any form is far from universal in the West. Critics note that a new containment strategy would only empower the most nationalistic, autarkic elements in the Russian political establishment, deepening the confrontation between Moscow and the West at a time when the United States and its allies must confront a number of pressing global challenges.²³ Others question whether a containment strategy would even work given Russia's integration into the global economy.²⁴ That today's Russia is not a globe-besriding colossus constrains the kind of unifying motivation that a containment strategy might require in the face of individual states' commercial and other competing interests. Indeed, U.S. attention to the Russia challenge must be balanced against a focus on other threats, including those of a rising China, a disintegrating Middle East, continuing refugee flows to Europe, the rise of populism, the threat of terrorism, and others. Mobilizing support for a containment strategy even within the West will be difficult as long as the United States and its allies do not agree on the nature and extent of the Russian threat and its importance relative to other challenges. It will be made more difficult still given the growth of pro-Russian political parties and the prospect that one or more of them will come to power in key European countries.

For the United States and its allies, the immediate challenge lies in maintaining political cohesion and containing and deterring Russian efforts to upend

the status quo in Europe. The longer-term challenge is more complex—establishing a new basis for relations with Russia that protects transatlantic values and interests while giving Moscow a stake in maintaining peace and stability. Establishing a more productive relationship with Russia over the longer term will require, however, first defeating Moscow's efforts to overturn the status quo and reengaging Russia from a position of transatlantic strength and unity.



CHAPTER

02

Case Studies on Russia's Use of Force

This chapter seeks to shed light on the question: why and when does Russia resort to the use of force? The CSIS study team examined six instances over the past two decades when Moscow confronted a security challenge and faced the choice of whether to use military force. These cases include the 1999 Kosovo conflict, NATO enlargement, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the 2008 war with Georgia, the 2014 intervention in Ukraine, and the 2015 intervention in Syria. The case study analysis considers factors at the systemic level (e.g., Russia's role in the international system, its military capabilities), the state level (e.g., the domestic political situation, prevailing economic conditions, public opinion), and the leadership level.

The Kosovo War, 1999

The Kosovo crisis in the late 1990s greatly affected Russian thinking about security policy. In Moscow's view, the crisis was a breakdown in the European order—to the perceived detriment of Russia's interests—that led to a change of state borders without the consent of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (a federation of Serbia and Montenegro) or the approval of the UN Security Council. From Moscow's perspective, the failure of Russian

diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis and the ensuing NATO air campaign against Yugoslavia was a setback not only in its bilateral relations with the United States, but also to its hopes that Washington would accept and defer to Russian interests in its neighborhood. This “original sin” in the Russian view sent a clear message that the United States and its allies would act in their interests within a new unipolar structure, notwithstanding contradictions with the liberal international order it had formally preached.²⁵

Conditions in 1999

In the eight years prior to NATO's involvement in Kosovo, Russia was struggling. The collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a period of political and economic chaos. To bolster its economy, Russian officials and legislators alike strove to maintain and enhance relations with leading international financial partners. The United States and its allies attempted to support fast-paced economic reforms in Russia, believing economic liberalization to be the best mechanism to align the Russian people with Western



geostrategic goals.²⁶ This approach appeared to be justified by the growth rates experienced between 1991 and 1999 by former socialist economies such as Poland (+98 percent), the Czech Republic (+119 percent), and Hungary (+44 percent).²⁷ Russia's economic troubles only mounted. Despite the Clinton administration encouraging the International Monetary Fund to provide Russia with a \$17 billion bailout in 1998, Moscow still effectively defaulted on its short-term debt later that year.²⁸ Meanwhile, the Russian military was engaged in a widely unpopular war in Chechnya that led to increased international and domestic criticism of President Yeltsin. The

turmoil brought former Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov into power as the prime minister in an attempted compromise between President Yeltsin and the Communist-dominated Duma.

The Russian Federation's economic difficulties were only part of the crisis the country faced in the late 1990s, characterized by growing divisions between President Yeltsin's administration and opposition political parties within the Duma. In the spring of 1999, the Duma was dominated by Communists who unsuccessfully sought to impeach Yeltsin and a nationalist faction that supported Yeltsin, but scathingly criticized the disorder of the state and spurned

the president's foreign policy as weak and failing to defend Russia's interests.²⁹ Yeltsin was able to rule by cobbling together support from nationalists, pro-government legislators, economic liberals, and regional interests. The internal struggle between the executive and legislative branches in the Russian government would continue to provide challenges for Russia to produce a cohesive political and military strategy for the Balkans. Within the Duma, Communist Party members and nationalists led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia vehemently opposed Western intervention in the region as a violation of Yugoslavia's sovereignty. Parliament Speaker Gennady Seleznev (Communist Party) reflected this view: "We are against the Americans taking up arms and again sending their troops to restore order. First of all, Yugoslavia itself should restore order."³⁰ The Russian Federation thus faced an internal political challenge, as Yeltsin supported a diplomatic approach to the crisis in Kosovo, while many in the Duma and military pressed the importance of preventing a U.S. and European intervention in Yugoslavia.³¹

Russia's faltering economy and its reliance on foreign credits heavily crippled its ability to modernize its military following the First Chechen War from 1994–1996. Russia undertook defense reforms during the late 1990s, including a cut in military personnel (from 420,000 to 350,000 troops) and the restructuring of the military to save money on personnel and help restore combat capability.³² The Russian military remained partially conscripted, despite President Yeltsin's goal of a ful-

ly professional, combat-ready force. Organizational and modernization problems left Russian forces poorly prepared to address increasing conflicts with militants in Chechnya and other areas of the North Caucasus region. While Russia's military was undergoing modernization, the country remained influential as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and one of two major nuclear powers.

Russia's Policy Shift toward Kosovo

President Milošević of Yugoslavia, who had risen to power in the 1980s by pledging to roll back the autonomy of the ethnic Albanian majority in the Serbian province of Kosovo, increasingly lost control of the region in the late 1990s as ethnic violence and a movement for an independent Kosovar Republic gained strength. The United States, recognizing the potential for the Kosovo problem to lead to conflict between Serbs and ethnic Albanians, had warned Milošević as early as 1992 that a crackdown in Kosovo could lead to international military intervention. By the spring of 1998, Milošević's use of force against the pro-independence movement had set the country on a path to conflict.³³

Western leaders contemplated how to apply diplomatic and military tools to the situation in Kosovo, while Russia sought to avoid U.S. or NATO intervention in the affairs of Yugoslavia, its close partner, and in the Balkans, its traditional sphere of influence. Russia pursued a diplomatic approach to the crisis and insisted that there could be no intervention without the

consent of the UN Security Council. Russian conventional military capabilities, however, were in no condition to support Yugoslavia or prevent U.S. and NATO forces from taking action. Russia's previous acquiescence to UN Security Council Resolutions establishing arms embargoes on Yugoslavia made bolstering Milošević with indirect military support difficult. Multilateral diplomacy was Russia's best option to influence the outcome of the Kosovo conflict.³⁴ Russia previously pursued a similar course and participated in the international Contact Group and Dayton Accords, which ended the Bosnian War in 1995.³⁵

Russia maintained an important but complicated historic relationship with Yugoslavia. Yeltsin hoped to use this relationship, in addition to Russia's veto in the Security Council, to achieve a diplomatic resolution and prevent NATO's direct military involvement in the region. Milošević's intransigence, however, made him a difficult partner for Russia (Primakov also saw relations with Milošević in zero-sum terms, interpreting U.S. direct contact with Milošević as weakening Russia's position).³⁶ Russia supported Milošević in general but there were limits to how far the Kremlin was prepared to go to defend him. For example, Moscow did not use its veto in the Security Council in advance of the conflict, but rather abstained on the Security Council resolutions demanding Yugoslavia permit Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO observers to verify its compliance with a cease-fire in Kosovo.

During the first half of 1998, the United States and the European Union implemented sanctions against key individuals and institutions in Yugoslavia in an effort to force Belgrade to end violence and engage meaningfully in negotiations. Russian leadership, however, did not support broader economic sanctions as a diplomatic tool to prevent a further escalation in violence, which prevented Security Council action to implement more universal economic pressure on Milošević.³⁷ This position had support across the political spectrum in Russia; the Duma passed a resolution calling for a peaceful—and only a peaceful—solution to the Kosovo crisis and Prime Minister Primakov threatened to break Russia's relations with NATO if the alliance intervened against Serbia.³⁸ There was a mainstream consensus in Russia for respecting the UN arms embargo, which was passed in 1991 during the earlier violent dissolution of parts of Yugoslavia. More extreme voices, however, such as nationalist leader Zhirinovskiy, called for Russia to supply anti-aircraft systems to Yugoslavia in order to defend the country against possible NATO airstrikes.

As the conflict deepened and violence increased during the latter half of 1998, Russia remained focused on diplomatic efforts, such as the Contact Group, to prevent a NATO intervention, but grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of results.³⁹ From Russia's perspective, it faced not only the prospect of losing a traditional ally and economic partner in Yugoslavia, but also the possibility of spreading separatism and instability closer to its neighborhood and perhaps within Russia itself.

FROM RUSSIA'S PERSPECTIVE, IT FACED NOT ONLY THE PROSPECT OF LOSING A TRADITIONAL ALLY AND ECONOMIC PARTNER IN YUGOSLAVIA, BUT ALSO THE POSSIBILITY OF SPREADING SEPARATISM AND INSTABILITY CLOSER TO ITS NEIGHBORHOOD AND PERHAPS WITHIN RUSSIA ITSELF.

In Contact Group and bilateral meetings, Russian officials pressed a four-part agenda: (1) no NATO military operation in Serbia; (2) no independent Kosovo; (3) no escalation of sanctions against Yugoslavia; and (4) reestablishment of Kosovo's autonomy (the latter condition putting Moscow at odds with Belgrade).⁴⁰ By March 1999, negotiations within the Contact Group had failed to resolve the tension and violence in the region, but the Russian government stuck to its position. As the tide began to change and it appeared more likely that NATO would intervene, Primakov attempted to raise the political pressure on the United States by threatening future cooperation between Russia and NATO, as well as the Russia-U.S. bilateral START II treaty.⁴¹

By March 1999, previous cease-fire arrangements were unravel-

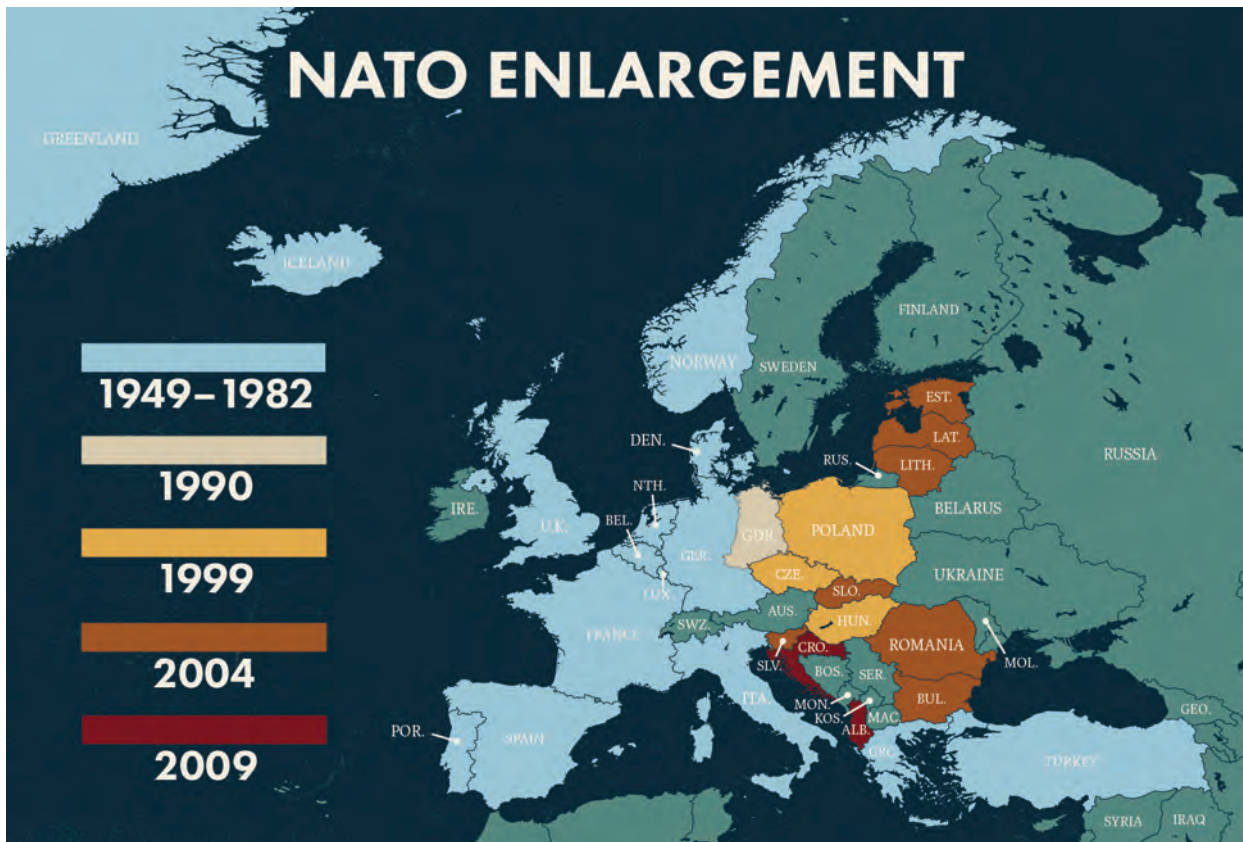
ing and NATO had confirmation that Yugoslav forces were conducting a systematic campaign to ethnically cleanse Kosovo. It decided intervention was necessary.⁴² In a last-ditch effort for a diplomatic solution, Primakov took off for the United States for high-level talks. During the same time period, the United States sent Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke to Belgrade to meet with Milošević. When talks collapsed and President Clinton announced the NATO air campaign against Yugoslavia, Primakov ordered his aircraft to turn around in mid-flight and returned home. The Duma unanimously condemned the NATO air campaign against Serbian forces and postponed its vote on the ratification of the START II Treaty.⁴³

NATO's 78-day bombing campaign ended in June 1999, when

Milošević finally agreed to withdraw Serbian forces from Kosovo and permit peacekeepers into the disputed region to enforce a cease-fire. The United States and NATO sought ways to include Russia in the follow-on peacekeeping mission, but were unwilling to cede to Russia the leading role Moscow desired. As NATO prepared to deploy ground forces into Kosovo to serve as peacekeepers, Yeltsin ordered 200 Russian troops stationed in Bosnia to rush into Kosovo and occupy Priština International Airport ahead of the alliance.⁴⁴ This move did not change the overall picture, but it was an attempt by Russia to gain a tactical advantage amidst a strategic failure to prevent NATO's use of force in Yugoslavia. This act demonstrated a willingness to showcase its military strength and readiness, albeit at low risk, salvaging some respect from the West and emphasizing its role in the international military presence in Kosovo. Though Russia seized headlines briefly, the occupation of Priština International Airport did not erase the deep sense of frustration within Russia about its inability to prevent the NATO air campaign, as well as the West's readiness to use force and redraw borders without authorization from the UN Security Council.

Conclusions

Russia's decision to not use force to counter NATO's air campaign in Yugoslavia was a conscious decision based on two main factors: the country's economic dependency on the West and the conventional inferiority of Russia's military compared to that of its Western counterparts. Russian leadership sought to



maintain a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship with the United States, as Western investment and internationally backed loans heavily contributed to the economic stabilization of Russia. The visit of IMF Managing Director Camdessus to Moscow just as the NATO campaign started illustrates this conundrum for Russia.⁴⁵ As Vladimir Lukin, then-chairman of the foreign relations committee of the lower house of parliament, noted, “when we make emotional outbursts on the Balkans issue, we must not forget these other interests.”⁴⁶

Russia’s conventional forces were incapable of either interceding on Yugoslavia’s behalf to prevent NATO’s intervention or halt it once it began. Russian leaders threatened vast but often nonspecific repercussions for the use of force in the region.

Meeting with regional leaders in Russia after the bombing campaign began, Yeltsin directed a warning to the West: “Don’t push us toward military action; otherwise, there will be a European war for sure and possibly world war. Russia will not get involved if the Americans do not push us.”⁴⁷ Russia’s leadership was reduced to symbolic gestures such as the operation at the Priština airport to salvage the country’s prestige.⁴⁸

NATO Enlargement, 1990–2004

The fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of Soviet dominance in Central and Eastern Europe meant nations in that region were free to pursue independent foreign pol-

icies and relationships with the West. The goal of U.S. policy was to build a post-Cold War Europe that is “whole, free, and at peace.” Opening NATO’s door to new members, as outlined in Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, was thought to advance that goal. As enlargement discussions intensified through the 1990s, the West sought to persuade Russia that its interests aligned with this idea of new pan-European security order. Some Russian leaders even speculated (however fleetingly) about the possibility of Russia, itself, joining the alliance.

In the early post-Cold War period, the then-16 members of NATO were cautious about bringing in new members, but consensus eventually emerged and enlargement, combined with specific efforts to elevate NATO’s relationship with Russia, ultimately came to define

the West's approach to European security. The alliance admitted the Visegrád Group (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) in 1999, and the Vilnius Group (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) in 2004. Russia was generally opposed in principle to NATO enlargement, viewing it as a security challenge, but reluctantly acquiescent in practice, with official statements at times expressing understanding for the desire of aspirants to join NATO. As the successor state to the Soviet Union, Russia had also agreed—under the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 and the Charter of Paris in 1990—that states have the right to freely choose their political associations.⁴⁹

There are several factors that dissuaded Russia from using stronger means or force to thwart NATO enlargement or punish aspirants. These include: the political aspirations of individual Russian leaders; the contemporaneous policy imperative to establish Russia's international role in a changed international environment; domestic turmoil that made security and foreign policy second-tier priorities; and the fact that Russia was a nascent democracy that in its first decade also faced severe economic troubles, which made Russia dependent on Western support.

German Unification: 1990

German unification was the first post-Cold War expansion of NATO's geographical bound-

aries, and the united Germany's membership in NATO was accepted by the four victors of World War II, including Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Much has been written about the negotiations, particularly Soviet and American positions on Germany's remaining a NATO member. Former U.S. of-

RUSSIA WAS GENERALLY OPPOSED IN PRINCIPLE TO NATO ENLARGEMENT, VIEWING IT AS A SECURITY CHALLENGE, BUT RELUCTANTLY ACQUIESCENT IN PRACTICE...

officials and most analysts reject Russian allegations that Washington made (and reneged on) commitments to limit future NATO enlargement, but that view remains a centerpiece of Russia's narrative and is a fundamental point of tension.⁵⁰

Controversy over a unified Germany's future membership in NATO centers on an exchange between Secretary of State James Baker and Gorbachev during a meeting in Moscow in February 1990. In discussions about the presence of NATO forces in a unified Germany once the former East Germany was incorporated, Baker told Gorbachev that "there would be no extension of... [the] forces of NATO one inch to the east." This commitment was reflected in the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany in September 1990.⁵¹ Gorbachev subsequently confirmed that those discussions and commitments related only to Germany,

that they had been scrupulously carried out, and that there had been no discussion of other former Warsaw Pact countries joining NATO.⁵² Only years later did Russian commentators and officials begin trying to portray the Baker-Gorbachev discussion as a U.S. promise that NATO would not enlarge, and this largely

forms the official Russian characterization. However, the Soviet, U.S., and other declassified official records of those negotiations, and the final treaty, do not support this interpretation.⁵³

NATO Welcomes the Visegrád Group: 1997–1999

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a new energy among former Warsaw Pact states to secure their independence but uncertainty about how to do so while the Warsaw Pact remained in existence and Soviet forces remained in Central Europe. The "Visegrád Group," led by Lech Wałęsa in Poland, Václav Havel of Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic after the 1993 "Velvet Divorce"), and József Antall in Hungary, propelled consideration of NATO enlargement. In May 1992, the prime ministers of the Visegrád countries met and expressed their common de-

sire to join NATO, and followed up collectively and in bilateral channels with the United States and NATO allies.

In Russia, President Boris Yeltsin initially conceded to the growing momentum of enlargement. During a press conference in August 1993, alongside Polish president Wałęsa, Yeltsin stated that Moscow did not object to Poland's joining NATO. The meeting's communiqué even stated, "In the long term, such a decision taken by a sovereign Poland in the interests of overall European integration does not go against the interests of other states, including the interests of Russia."⁵⁴ This came as a shock to many in Russia, including within Yeltsin's own cabinet, as two days earlier Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev had publicly rejected the idea.⁵⁵ Yeltsin continued his acquiescent tone toward the newly established Czech Republic following follow-on statements.

After Yeltsin's October 1993 clash with hardline parliamentary leaders, his sensitivity to the issue of NATO enlargement increased. At the same time, Washington was ambivalent about enlargement. It was more concerned about maintaining unity and consensus within the alliance in its current configuration, the need for reforms in countries that aspired to membership, and the unpredictable effect the issue might have inside Russia. The Clinton administration developed the idea of NATO's Partnership for Peace in part to forestall rapid accession of new members and reduce the

immediate problem for Yeltsin, while keeping open the possibility of enlargement further in the future.⁵⁶ In January 1994, a NATO summit meeting in Brussels agreed that enlargement would happen, that it would be "evolutionary," but established no criteria for new members, leaving the impression that enlargement had been put on the

NATO ENLARGEMENT CAME TO BE VIEWED AS A SOURCE OF HUMILIATION BY THE RUSSIAN PUBLIC

back burner.⁵⁷ Yeltsin became more and more unhappy with the clear, albeit slow-moving, trend toward NATO enlargement, and at the December 1994 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Summit in Budapest, he warned that Europe risked a "cold peace" and said that NATO enlargement was creating new divisions in Europe instead of promoting unity.⁵⁸

Yeltsin's now firmly established opposition to NATO enlargement was evident during a U.S.-Russia summit held in March 1997 in Helsinki, following a December 1996 NATO decision that the alliance would invite new members to join in the coming year. Yeltsin expressed his concern that enlargement would lead to a threatening buildup of combat forces near Russian borders. While

Clinton stressed this was not the case, the two agreed to work together to promote cooperation between NATO and Russia as an important element of European security.⁵⁹ This newfound cooperation was cemented in the May 1997 "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between the Russian Federation and NATO,"

more commonly referred to as the NATO-Russia Founding Act.⁶⁰ The agreement established the Russia-NATO Permanent Joint Council (PJC), and reiterated both sides' commitment to pursue arms control and other steps to increase Euro-Atlantic security.⁶¹ The Founding Act indicated that NATO did not intend to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new member states, nor did it intend to permanently station "substantial combat forces" in the current and foreseeable security environment.

In July 1997, at its Madrid Summit, NATO officially invited Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic to join the alliance. Yevgeny Primakov, then the Russian foreign minister, voiced firm opposition, but emphasized Russia's willingness to "minimize the complications that may arise if expansion goes ahead."⁶² As domestic pressure rose and NATO enlargement came to be viewed as a source of humiliation by the Russian public, Yeltsin and Primakov continued to voice their open and strong opposition to NATO enlargement until the end of Yeltsin's term in 1999, the same year that the new members formally joined the alliance enlargement and the alliance's contemporaneous intervention

in Kosovo raised the profile of NATO issues at a time of transition to new Russian leadership.⁶³

Yeltsin, despite behavior that at times appeared erratic, remained the principal decisionmaker on Russia's policy and actions toward NATO. Yeltsin faced multiple internal and external pressures: Russia's public position varied throughout this period as those pressures rose and fell, but Russia did not at any time undertake steps that threatened NATO aspirants with consequences for joining the alliance. One driving factor behind Yeltsin's accommodating approach was his legacy as the Russian leader who dismantled the Soviet Union and represented a break with Russia's past. Yeltsin wanted credit for bringing Russia into a new era of closer political and economic relations with the West and realizing the goal of an undivided Europe with Russia playing a leading role. Closer ties with the United States were a component of this transition, and as a result, Yeltsin looked for mutually beneficial solutions. However, Yeltsin was also constrained by domestic opposition, notably from the legislature (first the Supreme Soviet, and then the Duma that took its place in 1993).

While domestic pressure from the Duma showed a growing anti-West sentiment, those with the political power to alter Yeltsin's stance toward NATO enlargement resided principally in his own cabinet. In November 1993, Foreign Intelligence Service head Yevgeny Primakov (later Yeltsin's foreign minister and prime minister) published a study opposing NATO enlargement, suggesting significant opposition within the government,

notwithstanding Yeltsin's positive statements to Wałęsa and Havel.⁶⁴ On numerous occasions, subordinates presented a harder line than Yeltsin, forcing him to backtrack on commitments or statements made in public. The lack of clarity on exactly what Russia would and would not accept placed members of the alliance in the position of trying to interpret where Russia stood on the question of NATO expansion.

Russia was also experiencing a series of domestic challenges, in particular a struggling economy, which reached crisis level in 1998. In the years leading up to 1998, gross domestic product significantly declined as well as production from key sectors including industrial output, agricultural output, and freight transport. Unemployment was also on the rise and many dropped out of the workforce.⁶⁵ Moscow's cash reserves dropped to \$14 billion in the summer of 1998, the Russian stock market crashed, and the ruble was devalued.⁶⁶ The IMF eventually stepped in with a \$22.6 billion bailout package requiring reforms to create long-term stability.⁶⁷ This crisis increased Russia's dependence on international support and further constrained its ability and willingness to push back against NATO enlargement.

The Vilnius Group, 2004

The George W. Bush administration entered office having promised to press NATO enlargement forward, a point of continuity with the outgoing Clinton administration. At the 2002 NATO summit in Prague, the then-19 allied leaders extended membership

invitations to seven countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, as well as three former Soviet republics—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. After completing the accession protocols, including ratification by all allied governments/parliaments, the countries were formally admitted into the alliance at the June 2004 NATO Summit in Istanbul. Russia was openly against the expansion, arguing that it was addressing a threat that no longer existed. President Putin asserted, "This purely mechanical expansion does not let us face the current threat... and cannot allow us to prevent such things as the terrorist attacks in Madrid or restore stability in Afghanistan."⁶⁸

The accession of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia to NATO was especially unpalatable for Moscow due to its tumultuous past with the three Baltic States and tense relations since the fall of the Soviet Union. Since regaining their independence, the Baltic States had sought to keep Russia at arm's length and integrate rapidly into Western institutions. While recognizing their independence, Russia simultaneously sought to retain political and economic influence across the region.

Putin realized that he would not be able to block NATO's enlargement, acknowledging that "each country has the right to choose the form of security it considers most effective."⁶⁹ While Russia was publicly against the move, domestic turmoil and economic imperatives constrained Russia from taking other actions. The reasons for this will be explored in more detail in the following case study. Suffice it to say that, in the early 2000s, Russia's military was fully occupied fighting

a war in Chechnya, leaving few resources to intimidate NATO aspirants (or those shifting to a pro-Western orientation, as was the case in Ukraine)—a tactic that Russia has since used to defend its interests along its borders. First and foremost, Putin's priority was to restore domestic stability and internal order. Putin was also focused on carrying out his promises of reviving a struggling economy that was beginning to see modest growth following the 1998 collapse. This required cooperative economic relations with the West, particularly European investment, which encouraged a more conciliatory response from Russia on NATO enlargement.

An additional factor that hampered a harsher response from Russia was an improving relationship with the West in the form of the new NATO-Russia Council, established in May 2002. This initiative replaced the Permanent Joint Council and brought Russia an expanded dialogue with NATO on issues like terrorism, crisis management, nonproliferation, and theater missile defense. Russia also supported the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan and used the NATO-Russia Council to facilitate increased security cooperation. As momentum for a more cooperative relationship grew, there was also a greater push to integrate Russia into Western international institutions beyond NATO. In 2006, Russia hosted the G-8 summit in Saint Petersburg.⁷⁰ Bush also wanted to speed up Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Bush and Putin also agreed to a new multilateral framework for the Middle East peace process, known as the "roadmap for

peace," which symbolically put the United States and Russia on equal footing with the United Nations and EU.⁷¹ For the West, appeasing Putin's desire for international prestige on the world stage supported its agenda to expand NATO and support democratic transition in Russia.

Conclusions

Despite U.S. and NATO efforts to balance enlargement with improved relations with Russia, the Russian popular narrative continues to portray enlargement as encirclement that challenges Russia's security and as proof that the West, and the United States in particular, did not seek a genuine partnership with Russia. The December 2015 Russian national security concept reflects this new thinking. It states, "The buildup of the military potential of NATO and the endowment of it with global function pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security."⁷²

Whereas past domestic concerns, including political opposition, a struggling economy, and depleted military capabilities, prevented stronger Russian opposition to NATO enlargement, these factors no longer constrain Russian behavior toward NATO. Having failed to prevent NATO's past enlargement through diplomatic means, Russia today is more inclined to consider military intervention and saber-rattling as options to advance Moscow's aims. Russia's 2008 war with Georgia and its 2014 inter-

vention in Ukraine are two examples of Russia using military force to, among other objectives, derail any potential for NATO enlargement along its borders.

Ukraine's Orange Revolution, 2004

The 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine that ushered in a pro-Western government was a significant setback for Russia given its interest in maintaining significant influence over its close neighbor. The presidential election pitted the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko against Moscow's chosen candidate, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich. Leading up to the election, the Kremlin offered substantial financial and political support for Yanukovich, with Putin even traveling to Kyiv to campaign for him.⁷³ While Yanukovich was initially declared the winner, the vote was widely viewed as rigged and hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in Kyiv to protest the result. The massive demonstrations triggered a weeks-long political crisis that eventually led to the judicial annulment of Yanukovich's victory and the holding of a fresh election in which Yushchenko emerged victorious. Despite the humiliation of its preferred candidate's defeat and the high stakes for Russia's security and economic interests, the Kremlin did not use or threaten force. The Kremlin accepted the election result and the emergence of a pro-Western government in Ukraine, though continued to undermine Yushchenko as much as possible.

Russia's response to the Orange Revolution in 2004 stands in stark contrast with its actions in the aftermath of the 2014 Maidan Revolution in Ukraine and is therefore worth further exploration. After briefly touching upon the motivations behind Russia's support for Yanukovich, this case study will focus on Russia's response to the events in Ukraine from the campaign and presidential election in mid- to late 2004 to the inauguration of Yushchenko in January 2005. It will not attempt to narrate the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations, nor will it detail all Russian actions in the lead-up to the first and second rounds of voting in October and November 2004.⁷⁴

Conditions in 2004

In 2004, Russia continued to experience strong economic growth and repay the external debt it had accumulated in the 1998 economic collapse. While many of the factors contributing to its GDP growth of over 7 percent in 2003 and 2004 were external—including high oil prices and a surge in industrial exports because of the devaluation of the ruble—increased levels of investment and internal political stability also played an important role.⁷⁵ In March, President Putin handily won reelection with 72 percent of the vote, far outstripping his first-term election results and solidifying his domestic authority. The September 2004 massacre at a school in Beslan by Chechen separatists led to administrative changes that gave Putin greater authority over Russia's regional governance.⁷⁶

Despite substantial reductions in size during the 1990s, by the early 2000s the Russian mili-

tary had changed little in its creaky Soviet-era structures and remained geared toward ensuring its ability to mobilize a mass conscript force for warfare against a major power.⁷⁷ Upon coming into office, Putin had sought to overhaul the military and create a smaller, more professional force with high readiness and modern equipment that could be deployed for local conflicts and regional wars. Creating more deployable forces was a key component of Putin's military reform efforts, but progress was slow. Despite modest increases in defense spending, however, Putin had not been able to make substantial progress in overhauling a stubborn military establishment.⁷⁸ Russia did retain a small core of elite units within the armed forces and intelligence services that were more reliable than its general-purpose forces. By September 2004, however, Russian security forces were immersed in domestic operations in the North Caucasus after a devastating series of terrorist attacks over the summer had culminated with the Beslan school massacre mentioned above.⁷⁹ Having prematurely declared victory in the Chechen conflict earlier that year, Putin's priority for the military in late 2004 was restoring internal security.⁸⁰

In 2004, Russia's policy toward the West was generally aimed at improving economic cooperation. As described in the previous case study, NATO's second and largest post-Cold

PUTIN HAD SOUGHT TO OVERHAUL THE MILITARY AND CREATE A SMALLER, MORE PROFESSIONAL FORCE... THAT COULD BE DEPLOYED FOR LOCAL CONFLICTS AND REGIONAL WARS.

War enlargement was finalized that year, pushing the borders of the Western alliance hundreds of miles eastwards. While Russia's opposition to NATO's enlargement was unsuccessful, Moscow's relations with the European Union were considerably more positive and the Kremlin took pains to emphasize its willingness to work with the expanded European Union. Even as President Putin and Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov declared that Russia might need to orient its military capabilities to defend itself against an expanding NATO in the winter and spring of 2004, Putin declared the enlargement of the European Union to be of no concern.⁸¹

Russia stood to gain significantly from the European Union's incorporation of 10 new countries including seven former eastern bloc states and three

former Soviet republics, which brought Russia the promise of significantly improved economic ties with the West. While the European Union was already Russia's largest trading partner, the bloc's eastward enlargement prompted a review of EU trade policies, often to Russia's benefit. Many of the new EU eastern members—long wary of closer ties to Moscow—were forced to adopt the European Union's economic policies toward Russia.⁸² For example, in April 2004, it was announced that the new EU member states' tariffs on Russian-origin goods would be cut by over half.⁸³ Moreover,

Yanukovych and his allies emphasized the economic growth Ukraine was experiencing in the fall of 2004, helped along by Russian policies, and argued that, if elected, his presidency would further the upward trend.⁸⁶ Weeks before the election, Yanukovych added to his platform a promise to elevate Russian as a second state language and, most importantly, a promise to eschew NATO membership—promises that earned him even more favor in the Kremlin.

The Kremlin threw considerable political and economic support behind Yanukovych's candidacy through both overt and hidden

Moscow.⁸⁹ Visa restrictions on Ukrainians visiting Russia were loosened and there was promise of a resolution to the problem of ethnic Russians abroad seeking Russian citizenship.⁹⁰ Putin traveled to Ukraine twice during the campaign, essentially to stump for Yanukovych. Several weeks before the first round vote, Putin, Kuchma, and Yanukovych met and publicly discussed the positive benefits of the Ukrainian-Russian relationship—celebrating Ukraine's economic growth and discussing the progress of Russia's recent pro-Ukraine initiatives (e.g., the waiver on taxes for Ukraine's oil imports).

Only days before the first round of voting scheduled for October 31, Putin conducted a live television interview on Ukraine's three largest channels in which he lauded the benefits of Ukraine's close ties to Russia and praised the economic growth under Yanukovych.⁹¹

Behind the scenes, Moscow undertook a variety of coercive actions meant to influence the outcome of the election. The Kremlin reportedly poured millions of dollars into Yanukovych's campaign coffers.⁹² Moreover, Russian "political technologists," or fixers with close ties to the Kremlin, worked on Yanukovych's behalf to help run smear campaigns and manipulate voting. There was also an assassination attempt made on Yushchenko during the campaign with a near-fatal dioxin poisoning. Though the case has never been resolved, there are allegations of involvement by the Ukrainian government, potentially with assistance from Moscow.⁹³

BEHIND THE SCENES, MOSCOW UNDERTOOK A VARIETY OF COERCIVE ACTIONS MEANT TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION.

EU-Russia ties in general were improving and, in May, Russia and the European Union concluded an agreement on further expanding market access.⁸⁴

Russia's Policy toward the Ukrainian Presidential Election

Putin enjoyed positive relations with Ukraine under President Leonid Kuchma and Prime Minister Yanukovych. Russian-Ukrainian trade reached a record level in 2004, though it still lagged considerably behind Russia's trade with the European Union.⁸⁵ Prime Minister

means. The decision to provide Yanukovych with full support was made by Putin himself, who spoke openly of Russia's support for Yanukovych, and said later he did so at the recommendation of outgoing President Kuchma of Ukraine.⁸⁷ Putin claimed that Russia was "not indifferent to what will happen" and his support was forceful.⁸⁸ Publicly, the Kremlin essentially endorsed Yanukovych as its preferred candidate and adopted favorable economic policies aimed at helping Yanukovych, such as waiving the taxes on Russian oil sales to Ukraine, despite the lost revenue for

Protesters rally in support of
Viktor Yushchenko on Kyiv's
Independence Square ("Maidan")
during the Orange Revolution.

Kyiv, Ukraine, 2014

Credit: Sergey Supinski/AFP/Getty Images



The first round of the election on October 31 was split among 24 candidates.⁹⁴ Yanukovich and Yushchenko emerged virtually tied from the first round as the leading candidates but neither won a majority, setting the stage for a second-round election scheduled for November 21.

Having secured a near-tie in the first round, Russia began a far more concentrated effort to produce its desired outcome in the second round. Where the results of the first-round vote took over a week to announce, Ukrainian election officials almost immediately declared that Yanukovich had prevailed with 49.5 percent of the vote to Yushchenko's 46.6 percent. Observers including the OSCE reported significant fraud in the second round of voting.⁹⁵ Senator Richard Lugar, an envoy of President Bush in Ukraine to observe the second-round vote, declared on November 22, "It is now apparent that a concerted and forceful program of election day fraud and abuse was enacted with either the leadership or cooperation of governmental authorities."⁹⁶

Moscow immediately recognized Yanukovich as the winner. In Ukraine and elsewhere, however, the reaction was far less celebratory. Protesters challenging the election's fairness began gathering in massive numbers in Kyiv's Independence Square ("Maidan") shortly after voting closed. Russian officials quickly condemned the protests as an attempt by the "radical opposition forces of Ukraine" to ignore the will of the Ukrainian people.⁹⁷ The United States and the European Union declared they would not accept the election's outcome due to the overwhelming evidence of fraud.⁹⁸

Whether the protests could remain peaceful was uncertain as the crowds continued to mass in Maidan, blockading and threatening to storm government buildings. On November 23 Yushchenko declared before Parliament that "Ukraine stands today on the brink of a civil conflict."⁹⁹ Russian parliamentary speaker Boris Gрызлов warned that "the situation [in Ukraine] is heading toward a split or toward bloodshed."¹⁰⁰

Russia, both presidential campaigns, and President Kuchma called for lawfulness in the immediate aftermath of the vote. The Security Service of Ukraine called for "peaceful" resolution to the conflict "within the Constitution."¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, as tensions increased throughout the first week, violent conflict became a real possibility. On November 28, even as President Kuchma met with his National Security and Defense Council and publicly pledged not to use force against the protesters, one of his military commanders ordered troops to mobilize.¹⁰² Kuchma, however, never gave the order to deploy them. It was clear that Ukraine's internal security forces and the military were divided and could not be counted upon to suppress the protests if so ordered.¹⁰³ Though the Russian liberal newspaper *Kommersant* later reported that Russian special forces had been in Ukraine since the immediate aftermath of the election, and Yushchenko ally Yulia Tymoshenko repeatedly raised the issue of their presence in subsequent rallying speeches, the presence

of Russian military personnel in Ukraine has never been satisfactorily confirmed.¹⁰⁴ Even if present, the forces were reportedly only in Kyiv to evacuate files of the president, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), and the chief of intelligence. There is no indication that the Russian special forces were deployed to conduct any other military activities against the protesters.

In the weeks that followed, Russia was increasingly isolated in its calls to honor the original election results, with both candidates, President Kuchma, the European Union, and the United States all supporting a proposed revote. The two candidates and President Kuchma began negotiations on how to proceed, with guidance from international mediators from Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and the European Union.¹⁰⁵ After the first roundtable hosted by the international mediators, President Kuchma publicly announced that all sides had agreed to refrain from using force.¹⁰⁶ On December 3, the Supreme Court declared the results of the second round invalid and ordered a revote between Yushchenko and Yanukovich. Putin kept up public pressure, expressing his “surprise” at the desire for a revote in a press conference with Kuchma, noting that “another re-vote may also not give any results. Then this means that it will have to be held for a third or fourth time, or for a 25th time, until one of the sides receives the necessary result.”¹⁰⁷ The revote went ahead—deemed by OSCE observers as a significant improvement on the earlier rounds—and Yushchenko was declared the victor.¹⁰⁸

There are several possible explanations for the lack of more forceful Russian intervention during the Ukrainian protests that ultimately led to the December revote.¹⁰⁹ According to one scholar, Moscow was fundamentally “shocked into passivity.”¹¹⁰ The Kremlin also had few viable avenues to intervene given that its allies in Ukraine opposed any use of force on their own behalf. An overt Russian intervention would likely have undermined Russia’s political interests by stirring a Ukrainian nationalist backlash against the Kremlin and its partners in Kyiv. Moreover, though the outcome of the first vote in October indicated that the Russian “political technologists” might not have been as effective as believed, there was still a general confidence in the Kremlin that Yanukovich would eventually emerge the victor.¹¹¹ President Putin had an approval rating of more than 60 percent in Ukraine and the VAT waivers, pension increases, and new visa guidelines were designed to make a close relationship with Moscow seem indispensable.¹¹²

Conclusions

The Kremlin was undoubtedly aware of the international attention that the election—and its results—were receiving. Even as it strengthened its relations with the expanded EU, Russia was actively working toward World Trade Organization membership, and obtained several declarations of support from member states, including the European Union, in 2004; discussions with the United States were still underway at the time of the Ukrainian elections.¹¹³ With prospects of WTO

membership looming and a desire to retain at least productive relations with the West, uncertain military intervention in a foreign country’s election would have been a dangerous gamble. Even during the throes of the crisis in Ukraine on November 26, in a press conference following the previously scheduled Russia-EU summit at The Hague, President Putin “confirmed [Russia’s] strategic choice in favor of a united Europe—a stable and prosperous Europe without dividing lines” and declared himself to be “confident that the strategic partnership of Russia and the European Union will continue to serve the interests of European development, will work for the benefit of our peoples.”¹¹⁴

Russia’s involvement in Ukraine a decade later offered a stark illustration of the Western response to affronts to Ukraine’s territorial integrity, but there were indications in 2004 that any further involvement by Russia would be ill-regarded. The United States and Germany sent clear signals toward Russia that there would be consequences for continued interference and that Moscow needed to accept the outcome.¹¹⁵

By the time of the revote, Russia had, in fact, all but given up in its attempt to influence the election outcome—withdrawing its past financial support to the Yanukovich campaign and ending its use of “political technology.”¹¹⁶ With global attention on Kyiv, uncertain prospects of military action if it did occur, and Russia increasingly isolated in its commitment to the results of the run-off, the costs of military intervention may have appeared

too great—certainly far greater than the costs of deploying money and influence for its allies in Ukraine. Though Moscow was concerned about Ukraine’s tilt westward, there were several clear economic incentives for Russia to remain in good relations with the West, and the Kremlin may have concluded its avenues for successful intervention in the presidential transition had closed.

Russian’s Intervention in Georgia, 2008

Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008 marked a significant turning point in its approach toward the use of force. Although the conflict lasted for only five days, the implications of Russia’s actions were profound. For the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia conducted a major military offensive against a neighboring state and forcibly redrew its borders. From Moscow’s point of view, the use of force allowed it to shift the dynamics decisively in a long-running dispute with Georgia, whose Euro-Atlantic aspirations were seen as destabilizing for Russia. The Russo-Georgian War not only signaled Russia’s intent to defend its immediate interests and prestige when challenged, particularly by a weaker neighbor, but also its newfound will to take corrective and aggressive action to address its declining influence over the post-Soviet neighborhood and to push back against what it saw as unwanted encroachment by outside powers. This case study will examine why Russian policy toward Georgia shifted from seeking to maintain the tense status

quo in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to open warfare in 2008.

Conditions in 2008

At the beginning of 2008, President Vladimir Putin was nearing the end of his second term in office. Within Russia, his presidency was widely considered a success that had steered the state away from the brink of political and economic collapse and into a decade of tremendous economic growth.¹¹⁷ Putin’s United Russia party had gained a supermajority in the Duma in the December 2007 elections and Putin was preparing to transfer the presidency to his hand-picked successor, Prime Minister Dimity Medvedev, who was all but guaranteed to win in the upcoming presidential election in March.¹¹⁸ Putin swapped roles with Medvedev, becoming prime minister, but continued to manage the state over Medvedev’s shoulder, leading to muddled perceptions among the Russian public and in foreign capitals as to who was in charge.¹¹⁹

Putin handed Medvedev an economy that had averaged about 7.5 percent GDP growth annually between 2003 and August 2008.¹²⁰ Much of this growth was fueled by rising global oil prices, which reached a peak of \$147.30 per barrel in July 2008.¹²¹ This drove a boom in other sectors of the economy, from construction to services, and led to substantial improvements in the lives of many Russians. Revenues from oil and gas exports, accompanied by a major fiscal overhaul, allowed for series of budget surpluses through the early 2000s that were used to pay down foreign debt and build a significant stabilization fund.¹²²

Throughout the boom years, Russia’s military budget nearly doubled, largely in line with GDP growth. Russia’s defense spending stayed relatively stable at about 3.5 percent of GDP. Despite this increase in defense spending, the military itself changed little as reforms were greeted with resistance by the conservative-minded officer corps and stymied by systemic corruption.¹²³ Almost 30 percent of the Ministry of Defense’s budget was lost as a result of corruption, according to internal Russian estimates.¹²⁴ It would take the military’s embarrassing showing in the Georgia War to provide the Kremlin the impetus to push through real change.

Russian policy toward Georgia had been mired in territorial disputes in the South Caucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia sparked conflicts under Georgia’s first democratically elected president, Zviad Gamsakhurdina, a Soviet dissident and Georgian nationalist. Russia then helped Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister, consolidate power in Georgia. Shevardnadze, however, did not prove to be as cooperative a leader as the Kremlin had expected. Russia accused him of supporting Chechen separatists as he accused Russia of supporting Abkhazian separatists.¹²⁵ Georgia fought conflicts against separatists in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but both ended without resolution and settled into frozen conflicts in which the breakaway regions had *de facto* autonomy from Tbilisi. While Russia did not confer diplomatic recog-

nition on the two breakaway republics, it extended political and economic support, including the widespread dissemination of Russian passports and solidarity against Georgian efforts to reassert control.¹²⁶ When Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in the Rose Revolution of 2003, Georgia's pivot away from the Kremlin was solidified. Saakashvili openly pursued Western ties and sought NATO membership for Georgia. He also ramped up military spending, reasserted Tbilisi's authority in the autonomous republic of Adjara, and negotiated the closure of Russia's remaining Soviet-era military bases in Georgia proper.¹²⁷

Despite closing its last military base in nonseparatist Georgian territory in 2007, Russia retained a significant military presence in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the form of peacekeeping forces. In South Ossetia, Russian troops were deployed as peacekeepers alongside Georgian and Ossetian forces as part of the Joint Cooperation Council (JCC) established by the ceasefire that ended the 1991–1992 South Ossetian War. In Abkhazia, Russian forces were deployed as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping forces to act as a buffer between Abkhaz and Georgian forces, a remnant of the 1992–1993 War in Abkhazia.¹²⁸ Across the border in the Russian federal republic of North Ossetia, Russia maintained a significant military presence in the city of Vladikavkaz.¹²⁹ Although skirmishes between Georgian and separatist forces had become common occurrences by 2008, the Russian military presence discouraged any real attempt by

Georgia to retake control of the regions by force. Still, Russian analysts consistently expressed concern about the situation in Georgia, and often noted it as the most likely proximate cause of conflict that could involve Russian forces.

Russia's Policy toward Georgia in Early 2008

In early 2008, Russian policy toward Georgia was aimed at maintaining the status quo in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and continuing to push back against Saakashvili's attempts to resolve the conflicts and assert greater control over the regions. The Kremlin also sought to undercut Tbilisi's bid to join NATO as the alliance debated whether to extend an invitation of membership to Georgia and Ukraine later that year.¹³⁰

Russia was already experiencing a setback after Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in February, which quickly gained recognition by the United States and much of Europe. Harshly criticizing the move, Putin remarked, "They have not thought through the results of what they are doing. At the end of the day it is a two-ended stick and the second end will come back and hit them in the face."¹³¹ Russian officials had long threatened that Western recognition of Kosovo's independence would prompt Moscow to consider a change in its policy of nonrecognition of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence.¹³² The West largely disregarded Russia's opposition to Kosovo's independence.

As calls multiplied within the Duma for the Kremlin to more forcibly assert its influence, Tbilisi pressed forward with its

efforts to alter the status quo in the breakaway regions. On March 5, Georgia withdrew from the four-party negotiations on South Ossetia and proposed a format that would elevate the European Union and OSCE as full parties to the negotiations alongside Georgia, Russia, and the Ossetians.¹³³ Russia rejected the proposal that would invite greater Western influence into the conflict on the side of Georgia. Four days later, on March 6, Russia withdrew from the CIS sanctions on Abkhazia, prompting concerns that Russia would extend greater political, economic, and military support to Abkhaz separatists.¹³⁴

The NATO Bucharest Summit in April 2008 marked a turning point in Russia and Georgia's approaches toward each other and the breakaway regions. The United States and many Central and Eastern European allies strongly supported Georgia's progress toward NATO membership, while other allies, led by Germany and France, remained wary of antagonizing Moscow and lacked confidence in the Georgian government. In March 2008, the month before the NATO summit, German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a speech stating that any state involved in a frozen conflict would be ineligible for NATO membership—an action interpreted by many as a German veto of Georgia's membership.¹³⁵ The uncertainty surrounding the future of the Georgian relationship with NATO, combined with Kosovo's declaration of independence, led the Duma to pass a resolution on March 21 that called for Russia to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states if Georgia joined NATO, while also calling for increased Russian eco-

IN EARLY 2008, RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD GEORGIA WAS AIMED AT MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO IN SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA...

conomic and political support to both regions.¹³⁶

The Bucharest Summit ended in a compromise: the alliance agreed that Georgia, along with Ukraine, “will become members of NATO” eventually, but declined to take the next step in that process: to offer Georgia and Ukraine formal Membership Action Plans.¹³⁷ As NATO attempted to balance the need to avoid antagonizing Moscow while also reassuring Georgia, the outcome ended up satisfying neither.

Escalation

Although Georgian membership in NATO was effectively stalled, the alliance’s promise of eventual membership for Georgia (as well as for Ukraine) was viewed by Moscow as yet another instance of Russia’s preferences being disregarded and its sphere of influence violated. In response, Russia sought to cement the obstacles to Georgia’s NATO membership by strengthening its ties to the breakaway regions.¹³⁸ Putin signed a decree shortly after the Bucharest Summit on April 16 that established “special relationships” with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, stopping just short of full diplomatic recognition (despite calls from some Russian politicians) and promising greater economic support for both regions.¹³⁹ For Saakashvili, the failure to secure NATO membership marked a major political defeat and furthered his motivation to resolve the conflicts in Georgia’s favor.¹⁴⁰

Russia’s more assertive support for the breakaway regions and provocations toward Tbilisi coupled with Georgia’s in-

creasingly desperate efforts to resolve the conflict and stave off Russian recognition led to several months of escalating military tensions in the South Caucasus. On April 20, a Russian fighter jet shot down an unarmed Georgian drone over Abkhazia. Several days later, Russia increased its peacekeeping force in Abkhazia from 2,000 to 3,000 troops.¹⁴¹ While skirmishes between Georgia and the separatists had become commonplace in recent years, the breakaway regions were rocked over the summer by an escalating series of bombings, assassination attempts, and artillery exchanges.¹⁴² In mid-July, Russian forces conducted the Kavkaz-2008 military exercise involving units stationed in the North Caucasus and elite airborne units from elsewhere in Russia, paralleling military exercises across the border between Georgian and U.S. forces. While the Georgia-U.S. exercise was significantly smaller, numbering roughly 1,600 soldiers and focused on NATO interoperability, the roughly 8,000 Russian soldiers rehearsed a potential military incursion into Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁴³ After the exercise ended on August 2, Russian forces in the North Caucasus remained in a heightened state of readiness.¹⁴⁴

The Russo-Georgia War

The exact circumstances surrounding the initiation of the Russia-Georgia War remain

deeply contested, with both sides accusing the other of responsibility for the conflict. Some analysts have interpreted Russia’s troop buildup shortly before the outbreak of the conflict, as well as other provocations, as indications that Moscow’s use of force against Georgia was premeditated. Some Russian observers have argued that Saakashvili’s increasing willingness to risk a confrontation with Russia was driven by a misplaced hope that the United States and NATO would restrain Russia or come to Georgia’s assistance.¹⁴⁵ Still others believe Saakashvili, politically embattled at home and having left Bucharest empty handed, feared Russia’s provocations were a prelude to recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and was willing to take a risk toward resolving the conflicts.¹⁴⁶

What we know for sure is that tensions were high in July and August 2008, with flare-ups in violence around the conflict zone in South Ossetia. Most analysts assess that it was Georgia that escalated the violence into active conflict.¹⁴⁷ On August 7, Saakashvili took an enormous gamble and ordered his military to reassert control over South Ossetia from the separatist authorities. Georgia’s subsequent attack on the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali triggered a Russian military response.

Russia entered the war with the expressed purpose of protecting the separatist regions from



being reincorporated into a unified Georgia. After the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali, Russian troops fired artillery over the border and began mobilizing for the march southward. Yet the Russian military high command was unprepared for the conflict and was not entirely ready to enter South Ossetia in force.¹⁴⁸ Medvedev, Putin, and much of the Defense Ministry and General Staff leadership were on holiday and dispersed across Russia (Putin was in Beijing for the Olympics and flew home immediately).¹⁴⁹ Commanders were apparently confused as to who could authorize the use of force across the border and were hesitant to intervene on Medvedev's word absent Putin's blessing (whether Medvedev sought Putin's approval before dispatching troops over the border has since

become a public point of contention between them).¹⁵⁰ Russian aircraft began bombing Georgian military targets in South Ossetia and Georgia proper while naval vessels from the Black Sea Fleet steamed toward the Georgian coastline. Owing to the woeful state of the Russian ground forces, even following the recent exercises in the North Caucasus, the first Russian troops over the South Ossetian border on August 8 were elite airborne forces flown into the region from Pskov (just south of St. Petersburg) rather than the 58th Army stationed just across the border in North Ossetia.¹⁵¹

The Kremlin used multiple justifications to defend its military intervention to its domestic audience and to the international community. Denying it had

made any provocations, Russia claimed it was acting to defend its peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia and to protect Russian citizens in the breakaway regions from Georgian aggression. Moscow also described its intervention as one of humanitarian assistance, with Putin accusing the Georgians of committing acts of genocide against the Ossetians.¹⁵² When Medvedev addressed the nation on August 8, he asserted that Georgia's aggression was a "gross violation of international law" and promised that the "perpetrators will receive the punishment they deserve."¹⁵³ This punishment entailed the destruction of the Georgian military.

Within two days, Russian forces had pushed Georgian troops out of South Ossetia (although not

without difficulty). Russia then expanded its aims, attacking into the Georgian interior with ground forces and expanding the war to Abkhazia. Russian reinforcements arrived via the Black Sea and launched across the Abkhaz border. Russian warships also imposed a naval blockade of the Georgian port city of Poti. The advance of Russian forces outside of the breakaway regions raised serious concerns in the West that Moscow was aiming to march on Tbilisi and remove the Saakashvili government.¹⁵⁴ Medvedev finally ordered a halt to Russia's operations on August 12 and agreed to a cease-fire with Georgia brokered by French president Nicolas Sarkozy.

Despite holding a significant military advantage, Moscow showed restraint and chose to end the fighting in the face of a significant outcry from the West. The

DESPITE HOLDING A SIGNIFICANT MILITARY ADVANTAGE, MOSCOW SHOWED RESTRAINT AND CHOSE TO END THE FIGHTING IN THE FACE OF A SIGNIFICANT OUTCRY FROM THE WEST.

terms of the cease-fire placed the war blame firmly on Saakashvili and most importantly made no mention of Georgian territorial sovereignty over the breakaway regions.¹⁵⁵ When Medvedev was asked during a press conference why Russia had spurned Georgian cease-fire overtures for two

days, he stated that the reason was to carry out an operation “to enforce peace on the Georgian leadership.”¹⁵⁶ Russian forces were slow to withdraw after the cease-fire, taking their time to destroy Georgia's military capabilities and carving buffer zones out of Georgian territory to separate Tbilisi's forces from the separatist territories in the future.¹⁵⁷

After the end of hostilities, Russian and separatist troops dominated parts of the breakaway regions that were previously held by the Georgian government.¹⁵⁸ The Kremlin also extended formal diplomatic recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states in late August.¹⁵⁹ Only three other countries (Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Nauru) have joined in the recognition. From Russia's perspective, official recognition of the breakaway

regions solidified its military gains and resolved the outstanding sovereignty questions that had lingered since 1991. Moreover, recognizing the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia provided Russia a firmer basis to try to prevent future Georgian actions.

Conclusions

Russia's paramount goals in its war with Georgia in 2008 were to solidify Western objections to Georgia's NATO ambitions while resolving the Abkhazian and South Ossetian issues in its favor. It seems to have been successful on both fronts. Russia was able to change the facts on the ground in ways that made Abkhazia and South Ossetia protectorates of Moscow and in doing so put NATO membership for Georgia essentially out of reach.

There are lessons to be gleaned from Moscow's calculations on the use of force from the Russo-Georgian War. With the Georgian military disintegrating and Russian troops marching toward Tbilisi, Moscow did not press its advantages to attempt a total occupation of Georgia. Growing Western opposition, its own military's disappointing performance, and the costs of imposing and sustaining a settlement probably contributed to the Kremlin's decision to halt the invasion and agree to a cease-fire. Moreover, Russia chose not to annex either South Ossetia or Abkhazia but recognized them as independent states, overtly referencing the Kosovo precedent.

One of the greatest implications of the war for Russia was that it served as a wake-up call to the Kremlin over the dire state of its military and its effectiveness as an instrument of national power. While Russia's leaders were aware their reform efforts had failed to overhaul the stubborn and calcified military, the depth of the military's problems in Georgia finally exposed the rot to daylight.¹⁶⁰ Russia was able to overcome its

deficiencies in command and control and outdated equipment through sheer numbers and even greater chaos on the Georgian side. Nevertheless, the fact that Russia struggled to the extent it did against Georgia's forces was an embarrassment for the Russian armed forces, and ushered in a period of intense introspection that resulted in the greatest overhaul of the Russian military since the end of the Cold War.¹⁶¹

Russia's war with Georgia prompted many Western policymakers and experts to reassess the implications of Russia's economic modernization and recovery since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also sparked a debate over how the West could on one hand demonstrate respect for Russia's national interests in the post-Soviet space while on the other hand not yield the neighborhood to Moscow's self-proclaimed sphere of influence over sovereign states. Lastly, the conflict prompted soul-searching about the enlargement of Western institutions like NATO and the unanticipated—but in hindsight somewhat predictable—risks of their expansion to Russia's doorstep.

The Ukraine Crisis, 2013–2015

Russia's seizure and annexation of Crimea and its intervention in support of separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine in 2014 signified for many in the West a new era of Russian international assertiveness and military aggression. Between January 2013 and December 2015, Moscow's policy toward Ukraine underwent

dramatic changes, from seeking closer cooperation with Kyiv to near-open war during its annexation of Crimea, and then to actual war followed by a simmering confrontation as Russia tried to stabilize aspects of its relationship with Kyiv while supporting and periodically intervening directly on behalf of separatists in eastern Ukraine through 2015. To the extent possible, this case study will examine the motives behind Russia's policy evolution. Given the ongoing nature of the crisis, much of the Kremlin's decisionmaking calculus remains unreported or otherwise poorly understood. This case study, therefore, is constrained in offering a full explanation of the fast-moving and often chaotic events surrounding Russia's intervention in Ukraine over the 2013 to 2015 period.

Conditions in 2013

In the year prior to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, Russia, under the leadership of President Putin, faced a number of difficult political, economic, and security challenges at home. In January 2013, Putin was seven months into his stage-managed return to a third presidential term, but the political circumstances surrounding his regime and the tenor of his governing coalition clearly had undergone significant changes since his previous turn as president. Putin was elected with close to 64 percent of the vote, an impressive figure by Western standards, but the narrowest margin of victory that either he or Dmitry Medvedev had experienced since 2000.¹⁶² Putin's reelection was accompanied by several large (by Russian standards) protests in Moscow and

other cities, which were quickly quashed. Putin summarily initiated a crackdown against the regime's liberal opposition and civil society, blaming the United States and Europe for stirring up the unrest.¹⁶³

In early 2013, the Russian economy was experiencing a downturn as growth rates slowed to their lowest levels since the global economic crisis in 2009.¹⁶⁴ Despite attempts under Medvedev to diversify the economy, Russia remained deeply dependent upon energy and commodity exports that were hobbled by a slump in oil and gas prices and weak demand from Europe as it struggled with the Eurozone debt crisis. As Putin navigated the unfavorable economic conditions and a widening budget deficit, Russia was also adjusting to its accession the previous year to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Only several months into an adjustment period estimated to last three to five years, several areas of the economy were already feeling the repercussions, which was stirring a small domestic backlash.¹⁶⁵ Putin acknowledged that his support for trade liberalization presented a greater political risk than he had calculated, but pressed forward with plans to open new markets with Russia's post-Soviet neighbors, including Ukraine.¹⁶⁶ The mechanism that Russia would use to pursue integration was the Customs Union of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, a regional trade bloc that the Kremlin was seeking to expand into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).¹⁶⁷ Putin planned to use the EEU to strengthen Russian influence over former Soviet states and counter expanding European integration.



Russia had made significant progress on the military reforms and modernization efforts begun after the disappointing performance of its military forces during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. In addition to increasing defense spending to modernize the military's equipment and professionalize its largely conscript force, the Kremlin oversaw a sweeping reorganization of the military's structure. The Kremlin had streamlined the military's organization, invested in new capabilities, and promoted senior leaders who embraced modern methods of warfighting. A broader discussion of the Russian military's transformation is included in Chapter 3. For the purposes of this case study, it is sufficient to note

that by 2013, the Kremlin had made the Russian military a more viable and potent instrument of national power.

Russian Policy toward Ukraine in Early 2013

In early 2013, Russia enjoyed a relatively receptive but difficult partner in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich and his ruling Party of Regions. Yanukovich, whose first presidential run had resulted in the 2004 Orange Revolution, was still generally viewed as pro-Russian in the West and was certainly more pliant to the Kremlin's will than his predecessor, Viktor Yushchenko. Shortly after Yanukovich came to power in 2010, the Kremlin had succeeded in persuading him to aban-

don Ukraine's stalled pursuit of NATO membership. In June 2010, the Ukrainian parliament approved a law submitted by Yanukovich declaring Ukraine a nonaligned state and preventing it from joining NATO or any other military alliance.¹⁶⁸ Thus, in 2013, the issue of Ukrainian NATO membership was not on the table. Yanukovich had also agreed to extend Russia's leases on bases in Crimea for the Russian Black Sea Fleet until 2042 in return for a significant discount on Russian natural gas.¹⁶⁹

Yet Yanukovich was hardly a Kremlin puppet. Much like his predecessors, Yanukovich learned to leverage Ukraine's position between Russia and the West to play the two off of each other in search of the best

deal. His support for the Kremlin's preferences on any particular issue was never guaranteed and the Kremlin often found his support to be neither easy nor cheap.¹⁷⁰ For example, Putin balked at the cost of keeping the Black Sea Fleet bases, estimated to be \$40–45 billion over 10 years. Above all, Russia's frequent disputes with Ukraine over its outstanding energy bills continued to be a source of constant friction.¹⁷¹

The main objective of Russian policy toward Ukraine at the start of 2013 was to attain greater economic cooperation with Kyiv, albeit on the Kremlin's terms.¹⁷² Putin sought to expand Russia's bilateral linkages to Ukraine and minimize the potential trade risks to Russia by incorporating Ukraine into the regional trade bloc he was piecing together. Concurrently, Moscow was staunchly opposing Ukrainian and EU efforts to achieve greater economic integration. Kyiv and Brussels had concluded negotiations the previous year for the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement, a treaty that would establish a broad range of cooperative measures, including a free trade area between Ukraine and the European Single Market. Putin and his advisers, already managing the political fallout of a slowing economy, believed the agreement would have harmful second-order effects on the Russian economy. Putin described

the association agreement as a “backdoor entry into [the Russian] market.”¹⁷³ He also saw the agreement as being in direct competition with Russia's bid to get Ukraine to join Russia's own trade bloc, and as pulling Russia's most important neigh-

sia and incense his domestic opponents, but that Ukraine's best prospects for economic growth lay in closer ties to Europe rather than Russia.¹⁷⁶

Russian policy toward Ukraine became increasingly antagonistic as it became clear that Yanukovich was resolved to sign the Association Agreement.¹⁷⁷ Fearing the potential economic and political impacts, Putin and senior Russian officials ratcheted up their opposition and began threatening Ukraine with economic retaliation if it pressed forward. Putin declared that Ukraine's favorable trading status with Russia would be jeopardized and Rus-

sia could raise the price Kyiv paid for natural gas. In August, Putin remarked, “If our neighbors opt to significantly liberalize customs rules with the European Union... then, member states of the Customs Union will have to think about protective measures. Such a possibility exists.”¹⁷⁸ To strengthen the credibility of its threats and to increase the domestic pressure within Ukraine on Yanukovich, in mid-August the Kremlin implemented extensive customs checks on Ukrainian imports at border crossings, effectively halting trade for several days.¹⁷⁹ Yanukovich, however, held firm on his commitment to signing the Association Agreement, despite a worsening economic crisis that required a \$10 to \$15 billion cash infusion to keep the economy afloat.¹⁸⁰

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD UKRAINE AT THE START OF 2013 WAS TO ATTAIN GREATER ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH KYIV, ALBEIT ON THE KREMLIN'S TERMS.

bor closer to the West. While the Russian government of the 1990s had generally viewed the European Union as promoting economic growth and trade, the Russian government of the 2000s was increasingly viewing the European Union as a threat to vital Russian economic and strategic interests.¹⁷⁴

Beginning of the Maidan Revolution

Throughout 2013, Russian policy toward Ukraine remained largely focused on securing greater economic cooperation, and cautioning Kyiv against moving forward on its now-stalled Association Agreement with the European Union.¹⁷⁵ Yanukovich, however, believed formal membership for Ukraine in Russia's Customs Union would not only increase his reliance upon Rus-

**Protesters and police clash
during the Maidan Revolution.**

Kyiv, Ukraine, February 12, 2014

Credit: Sergei Supinsky/AFP/Getty Images



As autumn passed, Russia honed in on the underlying weaknesses of Ukraine's economy and its growing need for a bailout, attempting to raise doubts in Ukraine about Europe's willingness to give Ukraine the economic support it desperately needed.¹⁸¹ Russian media outlets in Ukraine propagated anti-EU narratives while emphasizing a greater "Russian world" based in shared Slavic history and Orthodox faith. Between late October and early November, Russia explicitly laid out the economic consequences to Kyiv for its defiance.¹⁸² Putin met with Yanukovich at least three times, reportedly offering Yanukovich the loans he needed and further cuts in natural gas prices in exchange for not signing the Association Agreement.¹⁸³ Yanukovich's advisers began simultaneously negotiating with the IMF for a loan rescue package, but their efforts were complicated by Ukraine's previous failures to adhere to the IMF's conditions.¹⁸⁴ As the EU Summit approached, Russia emerged as the lender of last resort due in part to its own deft

maneuvering, and in part to a series of decisions made in Kyiv and Brussels.

Desperate to forestall an economic implosion, Yanukovich caved to the pressure from Moscow. On November 21, 2013, Yanukovich announced that he would suspend plans to sign the Association Agreement. Instead, he called for trilateral talks with Russia and the European Union to discuss economic cooperation.¹⁸⁵ The announcement was met with fierce criticism from EU officials, Ukraine's business sector and civil society, and the political opposition. In response, large antigovernment protests erupted in Kyiv's Independence Square [*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*] and gained steam as Ukrainians increasingly came to view Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Association Agreement (and later his violent response to the protests) as representative of more fundamental frustrations related to Russian influence, Ukraine's future geopolitical orientation (West versus East), endemic government corruption, and the suppression of civil liberties, including the right to peacefully protest.

Putin was reported to have been surprised at Yanukovich's sudden about-face, but he nevertheless seized the opportunity to torpedo Ukraine's move toward the European Union.¹⁸⁶ On December 17, Putin and Yanukovich signed an agreement in which Russia extended to Ukraine a \$15 billion economic lifeline and further reduced natural gas prices.¹⁸⁷ Although the bailout was relatively costly given Russia's economic position and means (it was financed by borrowing from Russia's National Welfare Fund), Putin viewed the deal as a means of securing Ukraine within Russia's orbit.¹⁸⁸ For Putin, the deal marked a new high point in Russia's position in Ukraine. Over a two-month span, he had not only managed to avoid a costly trade war with Ukraine, but he appeared to have reversed the tide of the two-decades-long tug-of-war between Moscow and the West over Ukraine's geopolitical orientation.

The key task for the Kremlin became to consolidate its newfound position in Ukraine by buttressing Yanukovich against the domestic demonstrations

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and to stem Western pressure on his government. As the tensions in Kyiv reached a boiling point in January 2014, the Kremlin extended steadfast political support to Yanukovich and delivered on the first \$3 billion tranche of economic aid. Moscow also reportedly dispatched intelligence and security personnel to advise Yanukovich's security forces on how to quell the protests.¹⁸⁹ As the clashes between protestors and security forces in Kyiv became increasingly violent in early February, with dozens of deaths, Ukraine appeared to be unraveling at the seams. Pro-government demonstrations and threats of separatism were brewing in eastern and southern Ukraine, where support for Yanukovich remained strong, while antigovernment protests continued in Kyiv and in western Ukraine.

The outbreak of violence in Kyiv led Russian and Western officials to express serious concerns about Ukraine's stability. Putin dispatched a special envoy to join talks between Yanukovich and opposition leaders being brokered by Germany, France, Poland, and the European Union. On the evening of February 20–21, Putin personally pressed Yanukovich to accept a deal to be guaranteed by the Europeans

that called for major concessions to the opposition including the formation of a unity government and early presidential elections.¹⁹⁰ Yanukovich reluctantly signed the agreement and Putin urged him to remain in Kyiv. Yet Yanukovich, reportedly fearing for his life after his security forces withdrew from parts of the city, fled Kyiv and eventually found his way to Russia.¹⁹¹ The following day, February 22, Yanukovich was removed from power by a vote of the Ukrainian parliament and replaced on an acting basis by Oleksandr Turchynov.¹⁹² Yanukovich's Party of Regions collapsed shortly thereafter as deputies defected to the opposition, fragmented into new entities, or simply lost credibility in their eastern strongholds.¹⁹³

Ukraine's newly empowered interim leaders held strong pro-Western outlooks and were riled by the Kremlin's support for Yanukovich's crackdown and its interference in Ukraine's relations with the West. The Kremlin denounced Yanukovich's removal as illegal and demanded the opposition and the West abide by the agreement brokered on February 21. On February 25, Russia withdrew its ambassador to Kyiv (but did not break diplomatic relations) and issued a series of economic

threats against Ukraine.¹⁹⁴ Yet it was soon clear that Yanukovich would not be restored to power.

Gamble in Crimea

Russia's use of force in Crimea

in late February 2014 is best understood from the frame of the sudden and painful defeat that Yanukovich's fall from power inflicted on Russia. The gains that Putin had notched in Ukraine over the preceding months were not only erased, but Russian influence was significantly rolled back. Putin's policy toward Russia's most strategically important neighbor had failed spectacularly (and not for the first time). In the immediate aftermath of the Maidan Revolution, Ukraine was slipping further from Russia's orbit than at any time since the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁵

A number of factors may have influenced Russia's decision to use force in Crimea. First, longstanding political channels that Russia had used to protect and advance its interests within Ukraine were shattered or thrown into disarray. Yanukovich's abrupt removal and the collapse of Party of Regions in the Rada, which had a cascading effect across its eastern and southeastern strongholds, left the Kremlin's favored political bulwarks in tatters with early elections to be held within several months.¹⁹⁶

Second, Putin and other Russian leaders may have feared that the new leadership in Kyiv would seek to reduce security ties with Russia by closing its military

bases and rekindling Ukraine's pursuit of NATO membership.¹⁹⁷ From Russia's perspective, many of Ukraine's newly empowered leaders like Turchynov were tied to political blocs that had a history of supporting security policies that Moscow saw as counter to its vital interests. Russia's fears, however, were largely speculative at that point in time. Changes to Ukraine's relationship with NATO or the future of the Black Sea Fleet's bases were neither imminent nor inevitable. Moscow, however, may have seen only a small window of opportunity to take action to ensure neither came to fruition and avoid potentially more painful choices down the road.

Third, Russia's economic leverage was being undercut now that the United States and the European Union were galvanized behind Kyiv. Ukraine's new leaders pledged to quickly resuscitate and sign the Association Agreement with the European Union despite Russia's continuing objections. A position for Ukraine in Russia's Customs Union/EEU was no longer in the cards.¹⁹⁸ The United States and the European Union hastily arranged for \$27 billion in financial assistance that nearly doubled Russia's bailout, which Putin had strung together by tapping into his country's national welfare fund.¹⁹⁹

The final dynamic to consider is how the events in Ukraine reverberated within Russia's domestic political sphere. Putin's personal role and subsequent failure in managing the Ukraine situation was not only a point of humiliation, but could have created political repercussions absent a strong

response that changed the narrative from failure to success, especially because certain Russian politicians since the collapse of the Soviet Union had stoked a desire to return Crimea to Russia. Many Russians viewed their nation's influence in their junior neighbor as a point of pride.²⁰⁰ While the Kremlin propaganda machine was hard at work casting blame on Western intelligence agencies and Ukrainian radicals for the revolution, there was little Putin could do to gloss over the painful new reality facing Russia. Prior to the invasion of Crimea, Putin's public approval rating was hovering near its all-time low of 61 percent.²⁰¹ Putin's

to stem his losses and recast the defeat to both his political allies and the public.

Crimea offered a compelling and comparatively low-risk opportunity for Russia to take action. Russian military installations and forces were already on the peninsula. Locals sympathetic to Moscow and hawks at home were clamoring for action. The interim authorities in Kyiv were desperately disorganized and the Ukrainian military rudderless. According to subsequent interviews with Putin, he ordered his administration to begin planning to secure Crimea on the morning of February 21, shortly after Yanukovich fled.²⁰³ Some reports

RUSSIA'S USE OF FORCE IN CRIMEA IN LATE FEBRUARY 2014 IS BEST UNDERSTOOD FROM THE FRAME OF THE SUDDEN AND PAINFUL DEFEAT THAT YANUKOVYCH'S FALL FROM POWER INFLICTED ON RUSSIA.

anxiety over the potential for public dissatisfaction at the loss was likely amplified by memories of the 2011–2012 protests in Russia and concerns that the successful revolution in Ukraine could stir similar forces within Russia.²⁰² Given Ukraine's elevated importance relative to other post-Soviet states and its unique ties to Russia, it was important for Putin to take action

indicate that Putin's advisers were split over whether to act in Crimea, with the intelligence services favoring an intervention while the military expressed caution.²⁰⁴ On February 26, shortly after the Sochi Olympics concluded, Russia commenced a massive unannounced military exercise involving 150,000 troops along Ukraine's eastern border that provided a smoke-



In Crimea, Russia employed its special forces as deniable “little green men,” who wore uniforms without insignia and masqueraded as local militia members.

Crimea, Ukraine, March 13, 2014

Credit: Filippo Monteforte/
AFP/Getty Images

screen for the deployment of several thousand special operations forces and airborne troops into Crimea.²⁰⁵ This marked the beginning of a buildup of Russian forces along Ukraine’s borders that would continue for the next two months, aimed at coercing Kyiv with the threat of a wider military intervention.

As the military operation in Crimea began, the Kremlin took measures to shroud its involvement and went to significant lengths to portray the events in Crimea at home and abroad as a region seeking self-determination and protection from radical forces in Kyiv. Since December 2013, Crimea’s large ethnic Russian population had protested against Kyiv. These protests swelled after Yanukovich’s fall and increased further in response to the Ukrainian parliament’s repealing of a law allowing the Russian language to be used in government settings. Beginning on February

27, well-armed soldiers wearing masks and military uniforms without insignia secured the Crimean parliament in Simferopol. As Putin and other Kremlin officials publicly denied any involvement, Russian troops expanded their control over Crimea in late February and gradually surrounded Ukrainian military bases, resulting in tense but bloodless standoffs.²⁰⁶ The subterfuge employed by Russian special operations forces startled Ukraine and the West. Russia’s tactics were not only effective on the ground, but they allowed Russia’s political leadership a wide degree of latitude to quickly adjust. As Russia entered uncharted waters by seizing Crimea, so-called hybrid tactics and deniable forces provided Putin a means to reduce risk and maintain strategic flexibility given the uncertainty of how Kyiv, the Ukrainian forces on the peninsula, and the West would react.²⁰⁷

As Russian forces seized control of Crimea, the United States and several European countries discouraged Kyiv from actively fighting Russian forces. Washington, in particular, feared that Russia would use any resistance as a pretext for a wider intervention into Ukraine, much as it had done in Georgia in 2008.²⁰⁸ The Kremlin, however, did not initially appear to have a clear strategy about what to do with the newly gained territory and several days passed before Russia’s political strategy would catch up to its military moves.²⁰⁹ The Crimean parliament had declared on February 27 that a referendum would be held in May to decide on greater autonomy, but then began shifting the date earlier. Once the peninsula was secured, Russian and Crimean leaders demurred over the political status of the region and whether to demand greater autonomy from Kyiv, craft an independent Crimean state, or annex the region into Russia.

Annexation was perhaps the riskiest option and represented a dramatic break with Russia's past policies, including its approach to Abkhazia and South Ossetia six years earlier. Since 1991, Russia had repeatedly guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity and forsworn any claims to Crimea. Russian assurances were enshrined in numerous treaties and agreements between Moscow and Kyiv, as well as in the multilateral 1994 Budapest Memorandum.

By March 4, Putin decided that annexation was the most strategically beneficial and politically viable solution regardless of the risks. Two days later, the Crimean parliament amended the purpose of the referendum to ask whether or not the region should join Russia. The United States and the European Union denounced the referendum as a violation of the Ukrainian constitution and of international law; Washington imposed the first round of targeted sanctions on ousted Ukrainian officials and Crimean politicians.²¹⁰ Crimea declared independence from Ukraine after the referendum on March 16 and immediately sought union with Russia.²¹¹ On March 18, Putin laid out a sweeping justification for the annexation of Crimea in a landmark address to both chambers of the Federal Council, listing Russia's perceived grievances against the new Ukrainian authorities and the West and reviving Russia's longstanding historical claims to Crimea.²¹² By late March, Russia's annexation of Crimea was complete and the remaining Ukrainian forces on the peninsula surrendered. Only six countries (Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Syria,

Afghanistan, and North Korea) have recognized the annexation of Crimea.²¹³

The Donbas Erupts

In April 2014, following the annexation of Crimea, Russia's intervention in Ukraine expanded into the eastern Donbas region. The rapid success of the Crimea operation—which stunned policymakers in Kyiv and the West—and the spiraling unrest in eastern Ukraine likely prompted Moscow to explore what gains it could make elsewhere. Moreover, with Russia having made the decision to annex Crimea, the peninsula could no longer serve as a useful bargaining chip for Russia to pursue its interests with the authorities in Kyiv.²¹⁴ Russia now sought to fracture Ukraine in order to weaken Kyiv's political power, ensure Russian influence, and impede Ukraine's integration into Western organizations like the European Union or, if Ukrainian policy changed, NATO.

The manner in which Russia would use force in eastern Ukraine, however, was markedly different than Crimea. Russia's initial policy toward the separatist protesters in the east, particularly in Donetsk and Luhansk, was more risk-averse and Moscow was less willing to secure gains with direct military force.²¹⁵ For months, Russia withheld direct military support for the separatists, only intervening when they faced the prospect of an outright defeat by Ukrainian forces and never actually acknowledged the intervention. Additionally, Russia has neither recognized the independence of the territories nor expressed a strong desire to annex the

Donbas. This initial relative restraint—if it can be called that—may have reflected a change in Putin's willingness to gamble following his success in Crimea. It may also have reflected the considerably different conditions on the ground in the east. Russia's use of force in Crimea was enabled by a confluence of factors that may have simply been unique. This included the existing Russian military presence that could facilitate rapid troop deployments; the population's close ethnolinguistic and political disposition toward Russia; Crimea's unique autonomous political status within the Ukrainian state; Crimea's previous status as part of Russia; and the surprise timing of Russia's operation, which caught Kyiv (and the West) flatfooted. These conditions did not exist in eastern Ukraine.²¹⁶

By mid-April 2014, Russia's policy toward eastern Ukraine and its willingness to use force became more evident. Separatist movements in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and other regions petered out. In Odesa, separatists pulled back and overall efforts to spread the unrest further ended after a fire resulted in numerous deaths. In Donetsk and Luhansk, however, the violence escalated into armed movements backed by indirect Russian military, political, and financial support.²¹⁷ Politically, Russian objectives emerged as a desire to impose a federalist system in Ukraine in which the eastern regions would gain significant autonomy from Kyiv, essentially preserving some Russian interests and creating a veto measure to foil the country's full tilt toward the West.²¹⁸ Militarily, however, Russia eschewed a full-scale military in-

tervention and opted to support the separatists with indirect military aid—including shipments of arms, and sending advisers, “volunteers,” and special forces lacking insignia (“little green men”) to bolster the separatists’ ranks. Still, Russia’s probes into eastern Ukraine were far from representing a well-laid plan.²¹⁹

The first sign of Russian activity emerged in mid-April after a band of irregular fighters from Crimea with close ties to Russia’s intelligence services took control of the eastern town of Sloviansk. On April 13, Kyiv launched an offensive using its internal security forces to restore government control over Sloviansk and other eastern pockets controlled by the emerging separatist forces, leading to the first major outbreak of fighting in the

to which Moscow exercised political and military control over the separatists during the early stages of the conflict remains uncertain, the Kremlin often benefited from the separatists’ defiance, using episodes of disharmony between itself and the separatists as a point of leverage in negotiations with the European Union and Kyiv.

As the fighting in the Donbas intensified over the spring, Putin warned Ukraine not to mobilize its armed forces to quell the rebels, but refused to rule out sending Russian troops into Ukraine. Meanwhile, U.S. and EU leaders continued to threaten Russia with greater sanctions unless the violence subsided. By early May, Putin demanded that Ukraine halt its offensive in the Donbas while also calling upon the sep-

Kyiv to accept a federal solution for the east.²²⁴ Kyiv, however, refused to recognize the rebel governments as legitimate and rejected direct talks.²²⁵

Moscow’s strategy of providing indirect support for the rebels eventually began to reach its limitations over the summer as Kyiv mobilized its armed forces and pressed its offensive. By June, conflict-resolution efforts had taken shape under the framework of the Normandy Contact Group, or “Normandy Format,” which included Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France. Dissatisfied with its weak bargaining position, Russia was forced to start more openly shipping heavy weaponry to the separatists including tanks, antiaircraft systems, and heavy artillery to such an extent that the disparate separatist formations probably could not be absorb or effectively employ all of the equipment.²²⁶ Moreover, small bands of Russian soldiers were increasingly being captured, killed, or spotted on the frontlines, with Moscow claiming they were merely volunteers acting on their own accord. Eventually, Russia began providing the separatists with indirect fire support using artillery positions on Russian territory. Russia

and the separatists drew worldwide condemnation on July 17 after a Moscow-provided, separatist-fired antiaircraft missile system mistakenly shot down a commercial airliner, Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, over eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 civilian passengers and crew aboard.²²⁷ While Moscow and the separatists denied any responsibility, the tragedy put a spotlight on the consequences of Russian’s

THIS INITIAL RELATIVE RESTRAINT—IF IT CAN BE CALLED THAT—MAY HAVE REFLECTED A CHANGE IN PUTIN’S WILLINGNESS TO GAMBLE FOLLOWING HIS SUCCESS IN CRIMEA.

east.²²⁰ Amid threats of stronger Western sanctions, Russia, Ukraine, the United States, and the European Union signed the Geneva agreement on April 18 that called for the disbandment of all illegal armed groups in Ukraine and the return of government buildings held by the separatists.²²¹ The deal, however, quickly faltered after the separatists refused to adhere to the agreement.²²² While the extent

of the separatists’ plans to delay their plans to hold independence referendums in Donetsk and Luhansk.²²³ Putin’s calls went unheeded by both sides. The Donbas separatists held sham referendums and declared the independence of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR). Moscow withheld diplomatic recognition of both entities but used the threat of their secession to pressure

uninhibited military support to the rebels. The West responded by imposing additional economic sanctions, alongside its ongoing measures to militarily reinforce NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe and provide nonlethal support and advice to Ukraine's military.

By August, Ukrainian forces appeared to be closing in on a major victory as they encircled the separatist enclaves and threatened to cut off their supply lines to Russia. Russia appeared to have underestimated Ukraine's military capabilities and its political resolve and Putin was unwilling to allow the separatists to be defeated outright. To salvage the situation, Putin shifted toward a direct but limited military intervention into Ukraine. Although Russian special operations forces, military advisers, and "volunteers" had been involved in the fighting in the east for several months, they had done so in a piecemeal fashion. In mid-August, several Russian battalion tactical groups numbering about 6,500 troops crossed into Ukraine.²²⁸ Russia refused to acknowledge that its forces were involved on the ground and its troops operated without insignias. The sudden injection of Russian military forces, however, was sufficient to turn the tables on Kyiv. Russian and separatist forces inflicted a crushing defeat on Ukrainian forces around the city of Ilovaisk and Kyiv's military gains were rolled back. Russia's brazen intervention was heavily criticized by the United States and the European Union, which again leveled additional sanctions on Moscow.

Russia's direct military intervention forced Kyiv back to the negotiating table. In early

September 2014, Ukraine, Russia, and representatives from the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) signed the Minsk Protocol, but the cease-fire agreement collapsed within weeks.²²⁹ Russia withdrew most of its conventional forces across the border, but over the coming months would periodically dispatch them to shore up the separatists' positions. After another flare-up of fighting in January 2015, in which Russian combat formations reentered Ukraine en masse, leaders of the Normandy format, along with the OSCE, met in Minsk and agreed to a series of measures aimed at resolving the Ukraine conflict. These measures included an immediate cease-fire and removal of heavy weapons from the conflict zone to be monitored by the OSCE; local elections and greater autonomy in the Donbas, including through constitutional reforms that confer special status to Donetsk and Luhansk; and restoration of Ukraine's control of its border with Russia. Ukraine, Russia, the separatists, and the OSCE signed the Minsk II protocols in late February 2015. Fulfillment of the Minsk protocols continues to represent the West's condition for the removal of Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia.

Since Minsk II, the Ukraine crisis has settled into a medium-intensity conflict. The frontlines in eastern Ukraine, once constantly shifting with battles, have become static. The fighting has devolved into trench warfare and artillery duels reminiscent of the First World War. A high level of violence has persisted into 2017, and OSCE monitors are frequently denied access to

or otherwise unable to reach key areas.²³⁰ Despite the constant skirmishing, there have been few major exchanges of territory over the past two years. The long-term outcome of the conflict is still to be decided. None of the major political instruments of Minsk II, signed almost two years ago, have been implemented by either Russia, the separatists, or Ukraine. For Western policymakers, Ukraine has transformed from the major international crisis of the day to one of several issues competing for attention, with no clear resolution to the conflict.

Conclusions

Russia's military intervention in Ukraine marked the start of a new period of confrontation with its neighbor, the United States, and Europe.²³¹ By forcibly annexing territory, Russia reintroduced a degree of instability and uncertainty into the European security environment that had been absent for decades. It is clear that an important driving force behind Russia's initial use of force in Crimea was the strategic loss it suffered as a result of the fall of Yanukovich and a lack of confidence in the efficacy of the political and economic tools at Moscow's disposal. Meanwhile, Russia's military modernization efforts meant that it had a more potent military instrument than it had available in the past, perhaps making the use of force in Crimea a more attractive and effective option. Russia's use of force in eastern Ukraine, however, was far messier and more indecisive.

At the strategic level, Russia underestimated Ukraine's political resolve and its ability to generate military power with

minimal external support. At the same time, Russia overestimated the capabilities of the separatists and its own ability to achieve its political goals using indirect support. While Putin purportedly claimed he could have marched on Kyiv and taken it within weeks, it appears he did not want to or was not willing to pay the costs to establish and maintain control over all of Ukraine. Like in Georgia, Russia seemed satisfied with pieces of Ukraine that afforded continuing pressure points on Kyiv.

While the Ukraine crisis has provided Russia with an opportunity to test and hone its coercive capabilities, the crisis has also revealed the failings of Russia's contemporary soft power, which did not prove very persuasive. This dynamic repeated itself time and again in the case of Ukraine. Yanukovich, a pro-Kremlin leader by most measures, when pressed to choose between closer economic integration with the European Union or a similar offer from Russia, was deeply ambivalent. Russia was only able to thwart the Association Agreement due to Ukraine's dire economic circumstances combined with a lack of will by the European Union to bail out Kyiv. Even after pulling Ukraine back toward Moscow's corner, however, pro-Russian forces in Kyiv could not withstand the public backlash generated by such an abrupt turn away from Western integration. When faced with calls from compatriots to pressure Kyiv to reshape Ukraine's political system, Russia had to resort to force to impose its will on Kyiv, and its success even at achieving this end remains debatable.

The pattern of Russian policy failures and successes in Ukraine between 2013 and 2015 is troubling. What Russia appears to see as its core national interests, such as its supremacy over the West in the post-Soviet states, is in tension with Russia's atrophying capacity to secure these interests through means short of coercion and direct military force. Russia lacks magnetism and positive appeal; it is all sticks and very few carrots. Certainly, for Ukraine's leaders, the opportunities provided through cooperation with the West were far more attractive than what Moscow could offer. The Kremlin's waning ability to secure its interests short of coercion and military force is a troubling and dangerous development that has elevated the risk of further confrontations.

Russia's Intervention in Syria, 2015

Russia's decision to significantly step up its military intervention in Syria in September 2015 came as a surprise to many, if not most, Western observers. Although Moscow had longstanding political and military ties to Syria dating back to the 1950s, had long supported Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and his father before him (including with military advisers and facilities in the country), and had expressed frustration with U.S. backing of opposition forces, few expected direct Russian military action to prop up Assad's government against the rebel forces fighting to overthrow him. Understanding what led Russia to the decision to send in sizable forces, what it believed it could

accomplish with its military involvement, and what it may be learning from this experience is therefore critical to understanding how Russia views the use of force today.

This case study will examine Russian policy changes toward Syria from 2012 to 2016 as Moscow moved from largely diplomatic efforts in Syria to overt military involvement. It will not explore in depth the tactics, operations, or equipment used by the warring parties, or concern itself with the day-to-day account of all airstrikes and ground fighting that has occurred throughout the conflict. It will also not include a comprehensive review of U.S. and EU policy toward Syria.

Russia's Strategic Calculus

Diplomatic ties between the Soviet Union and Syria were established in 1944, when Syrian independence remained unrecognized by the international community.²³² Over the course of the Cold War, Syria came to be the Soviet Union's closest ally in the Middle East. To an extent, Russia inherited that relationship. While over the course of the last two decades Russia has been less active in the Middle East than was the Soviet Union before it, Syria remains its most important foothold: Moscow forgave \$10 billion of the \$13 billion in Syrian debt inherited from the Soviet Union, continued to sell weapons to Damascus, and maintained a naval facility in Tartus.²³³ During the mid-2000s, Russia signed arms contracts with Syria the aggregate value of which is estimated in the billions and includes the provision of military aircraft,

mobile air-defense systems, coastal defense systems, and antiship missiles. Not all of the equipment covered under these contracts has yet been delivered (notably including an estimated 12 MiG-29M fighter aircraft that are expected to be delivered in 2017), but arms sales did take place both before and after the beginning of the Syria conflict and prior to Russia's direct military intervention.

The Kremlin viewed the uprising that began in Syria in the spring of 2011 with unease. In addition to its longstanding relationship with Assad, popular uprisings against extant regimes struck a bit too close to home for the Kremlin. Moscow viewed the Arab Spring uprisings in part through the prism of the "color revolutions" that shook the post-Soviet region during the previous decade, and which Moscow asserted were engineered by the West. It also pointed to the chaos following the overthrow of Iraq's Saddam Hussein and, later, that of Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi, to argue that a collapse of the Assad regime in Syria would fuel a cycle of extremism and instability.²³⁴ Russian analysts and officials pointed to past U.S. and NATO military action in Iraq and Libya as having made instability and extremism worse rather than better: Russian president Vladimir Putin stated that "We have been actively opposing everything that took place... in Iraq, Libya and some other countries." Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov put it bluntly when he stated that the instability and violence rampant in Iraq in 2014 were "an illustration of a complete failure of the venture started by the U.S. and the UK that allowed it to spiral out of control completely."²³⁵

International involvement in the Syrian conflict began in earnest in 2012, at first in strictly diplomatic, nonmilitary capacities. In March 2012, following Russia and China's veto of a UN Security Council Resolution on intervention in Syria, the Security Council finally issued an official statement approving a nonbinding, six-point peace proposal that called for a cease-fire, the granting of access to humanitarian aid providers, and the withdrawal of heavy weaponry from residential areas. To gain Russia's support, the statement issued no condemnation of Syria and did not provide a timeline for Assad's compliance.²³⁶

While the West secured Russia's and China's endorsement of the statement, the international community remained at odds: later in 2012, the United States and other Western states recognized the opposition National Coalition as the Syrian people's "legitimate representative."²³⁷

Moscow, for its part, continued to view Assad as the legitimate ruler of Syria and the only hope for stability, and argued that only the Syrian people, not the international community, had the right to determine who would rule them. Russian diplomatic efforts played a key role in preventing U.S. and allied airstrikes against the Assad regime in response to Assad's use of chemical weapons in 2013, convincing Assad to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and to cooperate with the United States

and the international community on the removal of Syria's declared chemical weapons stockpiles.²³⁸ In September 2014, the United States began conducting airstrikes against the so-called Islamic State (ISIS, or Da'esh) in Syria.²³⁹ As of January 2015, the

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Syrian National Council (SNC)—one of the largest blocs within the National Coalition—had received \$6 million from the United States in addition to military training and equipment.²⁴⁰

Russia also views the Syrian conflict in a global context. Much of Russian foreign policy in recent years has been geared to establishing itself as a great power and a global player. According to the official Russian National Security Strategy for 2015, "A solid basis has been created at this time for further increasing the Russian Federation's economic, political, military, and spiritual potentials and for enhancing its role in shaping a polycentric world."²⁴¹ The 2015 Strategy expanded upon similar language in the previous 2009 strategy, which cited the formation of "preconditions [that] have developed for the... dynamic

development of Russia into one of the world leaders with regards to... influence over global affairs."²⁴² A role in the Middle East is important to achieving that goal. Since 2014, as tension with the United States and most European countries over the crisis in Ukraine reached new heights, Moscow was left on the one hand more isolated than it had been in decades and, on the other, taken more seriously by Washington than it had been in years.²⁴³ Russia's intervention, of course, was not driven solely by the desire to be seen as a critical global player. However, intervention to protect its significant interests in Syria guaranteed that in both Syria and the wider region, Russia would play a key role moving forward alongside or in opposition to the United States and that its interests would have to be taken into consideration in any diplomatic process.

The Syrian civil war was also seen by Russia as a threat to domestic security. Reports indicated that substantial numbers of Russian citizens were going to Syria to fight against the Assad regime. As of September 2014, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) estimated that 500 Russians, primarily from Chechnya and Dagestan, had joined ISIL in Syria and Russia remained concerned about the potential for fighters to return to Russia.²⁴⁴ There were even some reports that local Russian government officials were making it easier for fighters to head to Syria, ostensibly in the belief that they would never return.²⁴⁵ All of these factors constitute the background and starting conditions that influenced policy changes regarding Russian intervention in the recent conflict in Syria.

Russian Involvement in Syria

In September 2015, Russia carried out its first round of officially confirmed airstrikes in Syria.²⁴⁶ They came just after Assad had personally submitted a request to Putin urging Russia's intervention in the conflict, providing Russia with a basis under international law for its intervention.²⁴⁷ However, at least some groundwork for Russian military intervention had been laid somewhat earlier. On August 26, 2015, Syria signed an agreement that governed the status of Russian forces in Syria, according to which: Moscow would deploy a contingent of its air force on Syrian territory at Damascus's request; Syria would provide Russia with the free use of the Khmeimim airbase for an indefinite period; and Syria and Russia would acknowledge the need to defend one another's territorial sovereignty.²⁴⁸ This guaranteed Russia's unimpeded military access to Syria.

Why did Russia switch to a military strategy at that point in time? In retrospect, several mutually reinforcing factors appear responsible. The most obvious is the military situation on the ground. The Army of Conquest rebel group headed by Jabhat al-Nusra had made major gains in the strategic Idlib region in the north of Syria and had begun advancing southward toward Hama, Homs, and Assad's home base of Latakia, posing a real threat to Assad's control.²⁴⁹ In the south, the Southern Front, a former faction of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), led a push north toward Damascus.²⁵⁰ In a precarious alliance with Jaish al-Fatah—an Islamist coalition

that includes Jaish al-Islam and a southern faction of al-Nusra Front—the FSA mounted an offensive on Daraa, 56 miles south of Damascus.²⁵¹ Syria accused Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey of financing and supplying the rebels—the three states were reportedly vying for power over Sunni opposition forces in Syria.²⁵² The Syrian military was losing ground, unable to mount an effective offense, and losing the capacity to defend its few strongholds in the south and on the coastline against attack.²⁵³

While Russia's commitment to Assad himself was and remains uncertain, by mid-2015, the possibility that he would be driven from power by force threatened multiple Russian interests in Syria, including the Russian military presence and the maintenance of a friendly regime. In addition to worrying about chaos in Syria and beyond, the Kremlin also viewed the conflict in Syria partly through the lens of strategic competition with Washington, and was thus eager to stand by its allies with military force even in the face of the opposition of the United States.

The experience of Crimea also appeared to show that a small amount of military power, applied judiciously, could rapidly and effectively change facts on the ground. That operation had surely been even more successful than Russia had expected, although likely due far more to the lack of Ukrainian resistance in Crimea than to Russian capabilities. In addition, some analysts argued that the Crimea operation's popularity with the Russian public spoke to the benefits of military action for maintaining domestic political support.²⁵⁴

THE EXPERIENCE OF CRIMEA ALSO APPEARED TO SHOW THAT A SMALL AMOUNT OF MILITARY POWER, APPLIED JUDICIOUSLY, COULD RAPIDLY AND EFFECTIVELY CHANGE FACTS ON THE GROUND.

While this is debatable, and while most Russians were opposed to military action in Syria prior to Russia's decision to use force, the operation was quite popular once undertaken, and allowed the Kremlin to maintain the patriotic mobilization that started with the Ukraine conflict.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, domestic politics was not the primary driver of Russian intervention in Syria.

Russia also argued that as it, too, was fighting ISIL, then the United States and its allies had no ground for complaint over Russian military intervention—particularly as their own operations were continuing. Indeed, Russia seemingly perceived an opportunity to compel the United States and its European allies into joining a counterterrorist coalition. Russian officials hoped that such a coalition would lead the United States and Europeans to pull back their demands for Assad to leave power, and for the Europeans to back off their support for Ukraine-related sanctions. Forging a new coalition with the United States and its allies would also ensure that Russia would be at the table for any negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria. For many in Europe, the allure of a counterterrorism coalition with Russia grew even stronger in the aftermath of ISIL-inspired terrorist attacks in

Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere in Europe. After the November 2015 attack in Paris, French president François Hollande personally called on Russia and America to “unite our forces” in a coalition to defeat ISIL.²⁵⁶ Russia continued to describe its military action as being anti-ISIL, despite consistent reports that Russian airstrikes were targeting other components of the anti-Assad coalition, particularly those that posed the most immediate threat to Assad's forces in northwestern Syria, and civilians. This did not sit well with the Western coalition and has created lasting tensions and mistrust in the diplomatic engagement surrounding the conflict.

Still, it was not a simple decision. If other Russian interventions, such as in Crimea, had proven to achieve rapid operational gains at relatively low cost, there was no guarantee that Syria would follow a similar pattern. Military intervention that would cross purposes with the efforts of multiple actors—some seeking to destroy ISIL, others seeking to remove Assad—made the prospects of an international counterterrorism coalition uncertain at best. The decision to intervene also risked conflict with other powers with interests in Syria, such as in the case of the Turkish downing of a Rus-

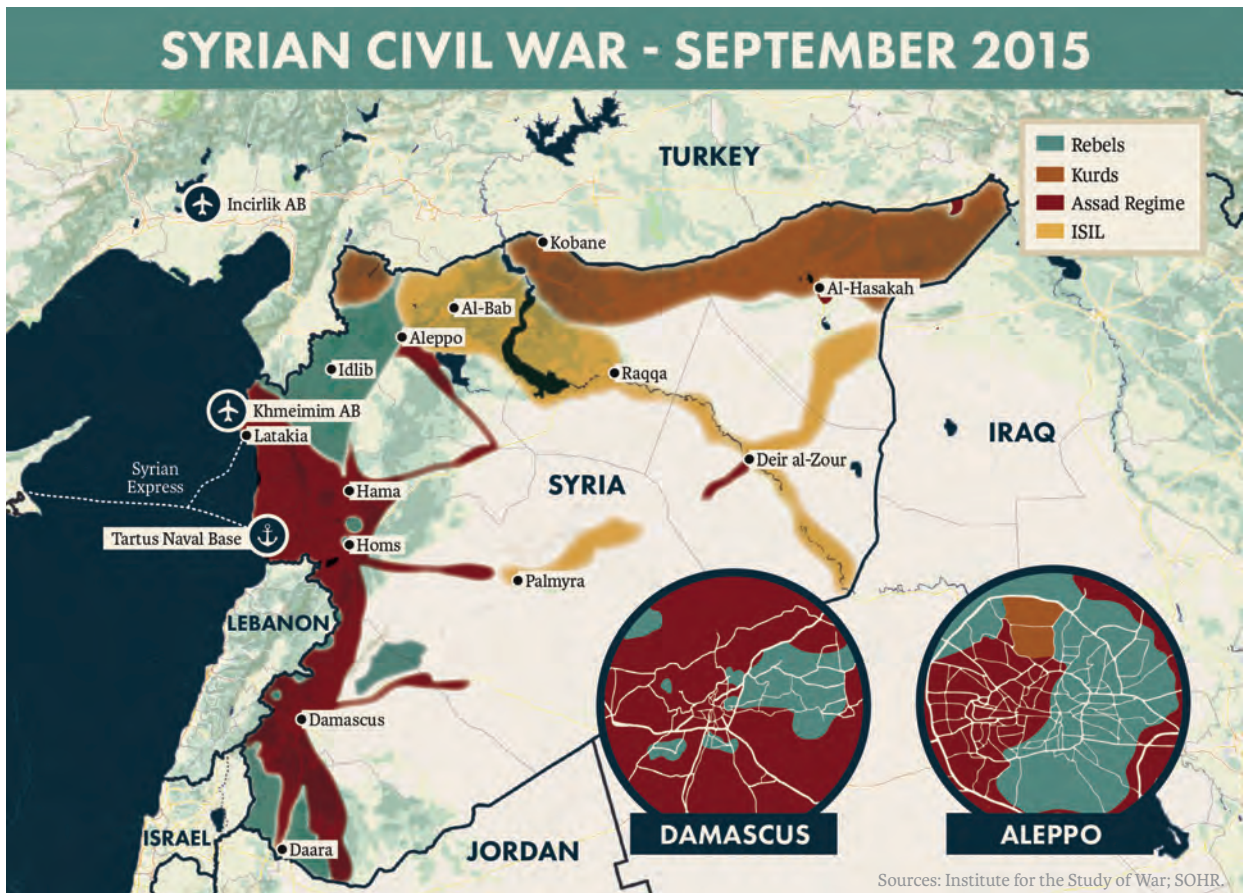
sian jet in November 2015.²⁵⁷ And even with limited objectives and an emphasis on air power and special forces, the specter of mission creep remained real. Finally, Russia

could not ignore the possibility that attacks on Sunni forces in Syria could spark a backlash from Russia's own Muslim population or prompt terrorist attacks against Russian interests in the Middle East, a danger reinforced by the bombing of a Russian airliner over the Sinai in October 2015.

Russia ultimately judged that small-scale intervention would demonstrate its resolve, bolster Assad enough to keep him at the negotiating table, guarantee Russia a key role, and, potentially, help prevent the chaos that it continued to fear would result from the overthrow of Assad's regime.

The circumstances under which Russia chose to pursue a diplomatic resolution during the course of its intervention is part and parcel of the broader Russian strategy in Syria. Russia has played a key role in efforts to negotiate a cessation of hostilities, engaging in negotiations throughout the conflict. However, Russia appears to view this diplomatic process as purely a means through which to lock in the military gains made by Assad (with Russian assistance), rather than as a desired end state in and of itself.

In February 2016, a partial ceasefire was negotiated between ma-



jor rebel groups (excluding ISIL and Al-Nusra) and the Syrian government, with the United States and Russia serving as mediators.²⁵⁸ On March 14, Putin declared a partial withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria.²⁵⁹ Yet in practice, Russia maintained and even expanded its military presence in Syria following the announced “withdrawal,” and Russian air support remained firmly in place as Syrian government troops fought to retake the historic city of Palmyra.²⁶⁰ Later, after the Syrian armed forces continued to advance both prior to and following the collapse of the cease-fire in the summer, Russia also provided air support during their months-long siege of Aleppo, Syria’s largest city before the start of the conflict.²⁶¹ Some analysts have even suggested that the February 2016

cease-fire was viewed from both the Syrian and Russian perspective as purely an opportunity for the Syrian military to further its position on the ground in advance of renewed hostilities.²⁶²

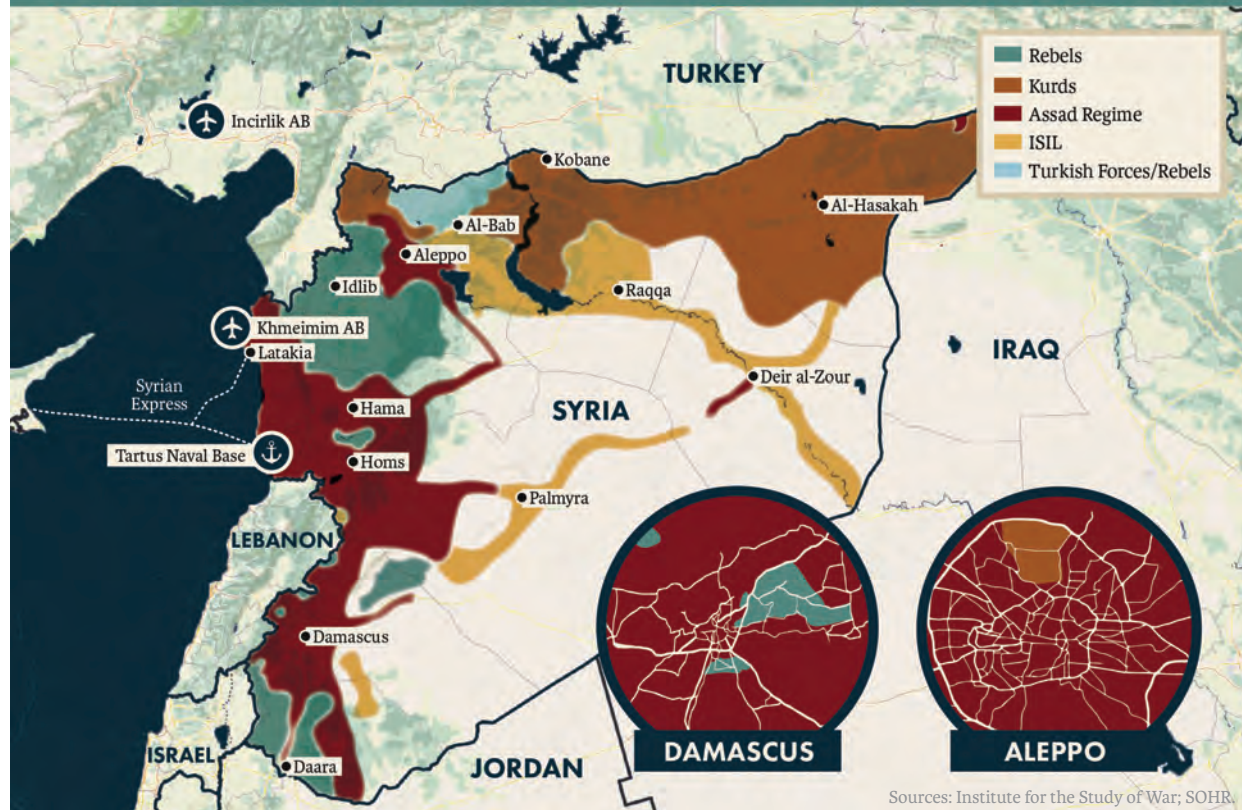
On December 29, 2016, Russia announced another nationwide cease-fire, this time negotiated with Iran and Turkey without the involvement of the United States.²⁶³ It remains unclear whether or not the cease-fire will hold or if the pattern of the February 2016 cease-fire will repeat. Once again, following the announcement, Russia announced a second withdrawal of military forces, though it remains likely that Russia will maintain a sizable military presence in Syria and continue to support the Assad government militarily.²⁶⁴ It should be noted that, per the

Russian-Syrian status-of-forces agreement, the Russian military is allowed to use the Khmeimim Air Base for an indefinite period; the Russian presence in Syria is in that sense open-ended. Russia’s continued involvement and presence in Syria will allow it to cement its status as a power-broker in the Middle East for the foreseeable future.

Conclusions

Early Russian efforts in the Syrian conflict involved diplomatic negotiations and support to the Assad regime in a nonmilitary capacity; however, the imminent defeat of a Russian ally in the Middle East threatened Russia’s presence and regional influence and was perceived as a dangerous loss of a partner that would threaten several Russian inter-

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ests. The West had imposed limits on its own use of force, focused on countering ISIL instead of the Syrian government and trying to ensure regional allies' efforts did not strengthen violence extremist movements in Syria and Iraq. Under these circumstances, Russia eventually decided to use force openly in Syria. Military intervention was aimed at preventing the collapse of the Assad regime, securing Russia's military foothold in the eastern Mediterranean, establishing a stake in any new regional order that might follow in the Middle East, countering terrorism, and deflecting attention from its intervention in Ukraine with the aim of reducing its diplomatic isolation and possibly creating eventual leverage against U.S. and European sanctions.

Russia's Use of Force: Case Study Conclusions

These cases highlight six key factors that we assess likely influenced Russia's decisionmaking and acted either as a constraint or an inducement on the Kremlin's consideration of using force: (1) Russia's degree of dependence on Western economic support (particularly loans and assistance); (2) the existence of more-pressing domestic economic and internal political objectives; (3) the effectiveness of Russian diplomatic, economic, and soft-power tools to accomplish its goals; (4) the Russian leadership's level of confidence in the effectiveness of its mil-

itary instruments; (5) the constraints on Russian military forces, including other missions, military access, and logistical feasibility; and (6) the existence of an international framework for addressing the crisis. The relative weight of some factors naturally has changed with time, as Russia's economy has recovered from the decline of the 1990s and its military forces have been restructured and rebuilt.

Russia's propensity to use force has risen in recent years. Notable factors that have chipped away at Russia's internal barriers for initiating a military intervention include the following:

- *Minimal economic dependence:* The Kremlin, despite low international hydrocarbon prices, does not have a short-term dependency on foreign credits or

face crucial international and economic milestones (such as whether it will be admitted to

ment establishment disagreed with some of his positions (such as on NATO enlargement).

This does not mean that military force has or necessarily will become Russia's first resort in every

WHETHER OR NOT RUSSIA'S NATIONAL SENSE OF INDIGNITY TURNS INTO HUBRIS AFTER A SERIES OF SUCCESSFUL MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS WILL SIGNIFICANTLY SHAPE THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD MORE BROADLY.

crisis. History shows that Russia places an emphasis on diplomatic approaches and, in some cases, highly values the international legal justification of its position: Yugoslavia's territorial integrity in 1999, and the consent of the Assad regime to intervene in 2015 stand out, though Russia blatantly disregarded Ukraine's sovereignty and its international commitments in 2014. Moscow nevertheless attempted to give its actions in Crimea legal cover through a referendum. Russia is also willing to appeal to other justifications—sometimes imagined—to support its

actions. This includes protecting so-called compatriots from violence—this was part of its justification in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, as well as in Georgia. It also seeks to leverage its economic influence and is assertive in exercising political pressure, though in most instances unsuccessfully (the shaping of Syria options is the outlier). The above factors likely do mean, however, that Moscow's alternatives to force are increasingly less effective and the disincentives to using force have diminished. In the three most recent case studies (Georgia, Ukraine 2014, and Syria), Russia opted for force (though arguably the war with Georgia stands out because Georgian forces' attack into South Ossetia provided justification for a Russian military response).

Once Russia decides to intervene, its method may be described as the ruthless pursuit of relatively modest military ob-

the WTO), as was the case in the 1990s and early 2000s. While international sanctions levied on Russia since 2014 have had an impact on its economy, they are not the main driver of Russia's economic troubles and their effect politically has been to consolidate the Russian public behind its government.

- *Minimal domestic political constraints:* Public opinion matters to Russia's leadership, and outward indications suggest the public continues to strongly support President Putin. In late 2016, Russians, by a small but positive margin, believed their country was on the right track.²⁶⁵ The consolidation of political authority under Putin has essentially made Russia a unitary actor in the foreign policy realm. By contrast, Yeltsin faced strong opposition (and narrowly averted impeachment) from communist and nationalist forces, and the govern-

- *Ineffectiveness of economic and diplomatic power alone:* Russia has consistently failed in recent crises to achieve its objectives through economic, diplomatic, and soft power. The decline in Russia's influence on Ukraine between 2004 and 2014 shows a striking change in the Ukrainian public's desire for economic integration with Russia, for example. As recent events highlight, however, Russia is investing in political warfare tools that may compensate for weakened traditional economic and diplomatic carrots and sticks.

- *High confidence in military:* The decade-long military modernization effort has borne fruit, with Russian forces better armed and increasingly more effective on the battlefield. This has made the achievement of limited military objectives increasingly more realistic—and attractive.

jectives. Having overwhelmed Georgian forces and destroyed large amounts of Georgian equipment and infrastructure, Russia ended the conflict quickly, did not attempt to remove the Saakashvili government, and did not occupy territory outside South Ossetia and Abkhazia (where it had forces prior to the conflict). In Ukraine, Russia has stoked the conflict in the Donbas and applied significant force when necessary to ensure the separatists' survival, but it has not tried to extend the separatists' area of control since early in the crisis or provoke an all-out conflict with Ukrainian forces by threatening population centers outside the Donbas. In Syria, Russia's airstrikes have been devastating and indiscriminate, but Moscow has limited its personnel and capability commitment. While settling for modest objectives, however, Russia has also structured its interventions in a manner that provide it with options to escalate if necessary.

This suggests that Russia is cautious about which goals it seeks to achieve through military force and which goals it seeks to attain by other means, and perhaps that it has concerns about the sustainability of multiple military operations. But one must not overlook the possibility that the successes Russia has enjoyed may encourage more ambitious adventurism. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which Vladimir Putin famously called the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century, Russian security policy has been suffused by a sense that Russia was not accorded sufficient respect and importance as a great power by the United States and the West.²⁶⁶

Whether or not Russia's national sense of indignity turns into hubris after a series of successful military engagements will significantly shape the security environment in Europe and the world more broadly.



CHAPTER

03



Russian Instruments of Power

Perceptions of Russian military and political power have shifted dramatically since early 2014. Prior to the annexation of Crimea, many observers, Western and Russian, doubted the capability of Russia's military and denigrated its soft-power goals. But Russia's success in Crimea, its continuing involvement in eastern Ukraine, and its military campaign in Syria have forced a substantial reconsideration of the Russian military and spurred fears of further Russian aggression. Meanwhile, as political parties sympathetic to Russia gain traction in Europe, concern that Russian propaganda, coercive tools, and direct interference pose a real threat to democratic institutions has also grown.

As the discussion below shows, Russia's military has indeed become more capable over the last few years, particularly as a result of the New Look reforms first announced in 2008. It has demonstrated improved capacity in limited conflicts and built new capabilities targeted at key NATO vulnerabilities. This is not to say that Russia is an equal match for, say, the armed forces of the United States—Russia's military remains hampered by artifacts of its past, including old equipment, inefficient industry, and incomplete professionalization. But Russia com-

bines niche capabilities and a low bar for the use of force to ably do more with less. Similarly, the efficacy of Russian informational, political, and economic tools remains an issue of debate—even in Russia, where officials continue to experiment with how to best match tools to goals. The real threat that Russia poses is, of course, that it can combine these different tools to great effect. Russia's savvy blending of its military capabilities, information operations, political tools, economic levers, and advantageous geography has created a much bigger prob-

lem for NATO than any one tool would pose in isolation.

Russia's propensity to rely on a range of tools reflects its threat perception. Russian writings indicate a continued fear that adversaries may and do deploy a variety of approaches to do it harm.²⁶⁷ Russia's latest military doctrine makes it clear that Russia sees the world as a dangerous place—and that it sees both military and nonmilitary threats to its interests around the world.²⁶⁸ These and other Russian writings make clear that the Kremlin's military and civilian leaders continue to view popular unrest as a form of foreign-backed sub-

version; that they equate opposition with violent extremism; and that they make little distinction between threats to governing authorities and threats to the nation. It is therefore not surprising if Russia is looking to rely on a tool set it views as similar to that of its adversaries—and perhaps to seek ways of preventing their use by an adversary, whether by using them first or by effectively defending itself.

This chapter begins with a discussion of Russian political and economic influence and nonkinetic capabilities, including information operations. The chapter then explores Russia's nuclear arsenal followed by its conventional military capabilities and reform efforts. It then discusses what we can learn about Russia's military capabilities by observing the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. It closes with some thoughts on how Russia may deploy this toolkit in the future.

Political and Economic Tools

Over the last 25 years, the Kremlin has repeatedly sought to transform economic relationships with foreign governments into political influence. Success has historically been limited. Years of efforts to use energy ties to blackmail Ukraine and other former Soviet states, for example, failed time and again.²⁶⁹ Russia also leverages the ties of Russian businesses and the pro-Russian sentiments of certain political parties in Europe to increase Russian influence.²⁷⁰ But while there exist

pro-Russian politicians throughout Europe who also have ties to Russian business, the direction of causality is difficult to establish. For example, Jobbik, Hungary's second-largest opposition party, is both pro-Russian and ultranationalist. Party member Béla Kovács is now under investigation as an alleged Russian spy. Kovács financed Jobbik as it was

RUSSIA COMBINES NICHE CAPABILITIES AND A LOW BAR FOR THE USE OF FORCE TO ABLY DO MORE WITH LESS.

starting out, and there is speculation that some funding may have come from Russian channels.²⁷¹ Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán has been a "Euroskeptic" since 2010, and has favored closer ties with Russia. Under Orbán, Hungary has given Russia's Rosatom a multibillion-dollar contract to build two nuclear facilities and Hungary's parliament has allowed firms to defy EU regulations to help build Gazprom's South Stream pipeline, a project that has since been canceled.²⁷² In this and similar cases, it is clear that Russia has supporters, and that some of those supporters have business interests that they seek to advance by political means, but it is not clear whether Russia has cultivated the business interests specifically to make this possible.

In Western Europe and the United States, there are signs of a variety of ties between the Russian government and both far-right and

far-left groups in Europe and the United States. While the links can be difficult to define, much has been made of loans from Moscow-based First Czech Russian Bank to France's far-right National Front Party in 2014 and 2016. France's Republican Party also supports closer relations with Russia because it represents business interests within the defense, energy, luxury goods, transportation, and banking industries, which would like to do business with Russia.²⁷³ There are also business relationships between Germany and Russia, as well as parties that favor closer relations with Russia represented in the German Bundestag (including the Social Democrats,

currently the junior partner in Angela Merkel's government).²⁷⁴ Most recently, in December 2016 Russia's United Russia Party signed a cooperation agreement with the Austrian far-right Freedom Party.²⁷⁵ While there is no evidence to suggest Russia actively fostered these relationships purely for political influence, Russia has surely recognized the potential benefits these lobbies may hold.

The Information Space: Cyber Operations, Information Operations, and Electronic Warfare

While Western parlance tends to separate out the different components, Russian military person-

nel and analysts tend to use the terminology “Information Warfare” to encompass many things, to include cyber campaigns,

capabilities, which are often referred to as computer network exploitation (CNE), computer network attack (CNA), or offen-

formation campaign or to steal valuable technical secrets about an adversary’s latest capabilities to exploit and/or copy.

RUSSIA IS CLEARLY WILLING TO DEVOTE THE POLITICAL CAPITAL AND TAKE THE REQUIRED RISKS TO EFFECTIVELY LEVERAGE OFFENSIVE CYBERSPACE CAPABILITIES TO ACHIEVE ITS NATIONAL OBJECTIVES.

propaganda, and electronic warfare, among others. In an article published in July 2014, retired Russian major general Charis Saifetdinov wrote that “information warfare needs to be continuously conducted in peacetime” using “all available forces and as a way to act against the information objects of the opposing side and to defend one’s own from similar action.”²⁷⁶ Of course, information operations of various sorts were important components of both the Soviet and U.S. toolkits during the Cold War.²⁷⁷ And all of the terminology is used inconsistently throughout the world. However, recent Russian operations are notable for their integration of these nonkinetic capabilities with kinetic, or real-world, operations, particularly in Ukraine.

Cyber Attacks

Cyber has become a catchall term with a nebulous meaning that shifts depending on context. This section focuses on Russia’s offensive cyberspace

sive cyber. Russia’s defensive cyberspace capabilities will not be considered. Offensive cyberspace capabilities capture a wide range of techniques ranging from relatively unsophisticated denial of service (DoS) attacks aimed at disrupting commercial websites to highly tailored software packages that rely on multiple zero-day exploits in order to gain access to highly protected systems.²⁷⁸ This can be thought of as the difference between an aging dumb bomb and the most advanced long-range precision-guided weapon.

The end goal of offensive cyberspace capabilities also varies. Some cyberattacks are meant to disrupt an adversary’s military operations. Others may target the civilian aspects of an adversary’s government or cripple critical infrastructure such as water, power, and internet services. Additionally, offensive cyberspace operations may resemble espionage. In this use, they gather information for later dissemination as part of an in-

The very nature of cyberspace can make it difficult to attribute cyberattacks to any particular person, group, or even nation. States with sophisticated cyberspace capabilities are at an advantage when it comes to attribution as they can bring considerable forensic resources to bear.²⁷⁹ Attackers must ensure that their operational security is ironclad; even the smallest lapse can permit attribution. The recent report released by the U.S. intelligence community and other independent analysis of the 2016 Democratic National Committee (DNC) hack has demonstrated this fact. It is important to caution that states may be able to retain some degree of deniability if they employ nonstate or quasi-state actors to conduct offensive cyberspace operations. While attribution is often possible, discerning intent will remain an ongoing challenge. As with most intelligence problems, “the quality of attribution is a function of available resources... available time... [and] adversary’s sophistication.”²⁸⁰

Despite these limitations, Russia has made considerable investments in cyberspace capabilities dating to the waning days of the Cold War. These investments are driven, in part, by an acknowledgement that cyber (and electronic warfare) capabilities can undermine the U.S. and NATO military advantage. Russia is clearly willing to devote the political capital and take the required risks to effectively leverage offensive cyberspace capabilities to achieve its nation-

al objectives. This difference in risk calculus is especially stark when compared with the United States, which seems far less willing to use its considerable cyberspace capabilities or engage in overt or even veiled messaging.

The first confirmed Russian state hacks against the United States occurred in the late 1990s with the Moonlight Maze attacks against DoD computer networks, but the series of cyberattacks executed against Estonia in 2007 is often pointed to as the first instance of the “modern” use of offensive cyberspace capabilities by Russia.²⁸¹ In the latter case, Estonia’s digital infrastructure—including its government ministries, political parties, major newspapers, and private companies such as banks and communications firms—were subject to repeated distributed denial of service attacks (DDoS) amidst increased tensions between the two countries.²⁸² Some sites were subject to “digital vandalism” with their homepages replaced with Russian propaganda.²⁸³

Similar attacks were conducted against Georgian targets prior to the start of the August 2008 war.²⁸⁴ Various sources attributed the attacks both to government-sponsored groups and to “patriotic hackers,” who may have felt empowered by the Kremlin, but acted on their own.²⁸⁵ After fighting commenced, cyberattacks appeared to support an overarching information campaign to shape public opinion through the creation of fake websites pushing a pro-Russian narrative.²⁸⁶

The following year, Kyrgyzstan faced DDoS attacks from Russia (or, at least, Russia-based computers) against its two major

internet service providers, shutting down many websites and email. While this may have hurt Kyrgyz opposition forces more than its government, some speculated that the attack was retribution for allowing the United States to use Manas Airbase.²⁸⁷

In December 2015, both U.S. and Ukrainian officials blamed Russia for a cyberattack that disabled a portion of Ukraine’s power grid, leaving several hundred thousand people without power for several hours.²⁸⁸ The attack used an exploit to access the network’s control systems and used a denial of service attack targeting the telephone infrastructure to prevent electricity customers from reporting the outage to the company.²⁸⁹

Today, Russian cyberespionage efforts against U.S. government and private networks have become somewhat commonplace. Russia’s cyber tools are generally configured toward extensive cyberespionage of government and private networks and broad-based cyberattacks. The aforementioned Russian cyber espionage and information campaign directed against the 2016 U.S. presidential election represents the first large-scale combination of Russian cyberspace and information warfare capabilities to influence political debate and public opinion. Influence operations are nothing new for Moscow. As the January 2017 DNI report on Russian activities during the election noted, “Moscow’s use of disclosures during the U.S. election was unprecedented, but its influence campaign otherwise followed a longstanding Russian messaging strategy that blends covert intelligence operations—such as cyber ac-

tivity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or ‘trolls.’”²⁹⁰

The DNC hacks demonstrate technical skill and operational sophistication as Russian actors attempted to conceal their actions using fake personas such as Guccifer2.0 and DC Leaks, and by co-opting others, notably WikiLeaks. While Russian actors also targeted the servers of the Republican National Committee, most of their focus was on the DNC and other Democratic party-aligned groups and figures.²⁹¹ Independent cybersecurity analysts have identified the signatures of two separate Russian state hacking teams: APT-28 and APT-29, colloquially Fancy Bear and Cozy Bear.²⁹² Fancy Bear, attributed to Russian military intelligence agency GRU, breached the DNC network in April 2016. Cozy Bear, reportedly linked to Russian foreign intelligence service SVR, is believed to be behind attacks on U.S. government unclassified email networks, to which they gained access in Summer 2015.²⁹³ The presence of two different groups suggests specialization among Russian cyberspace actors, with Cozy Bear involved in persistent surveillance efforts and Fancy Bear undertaking more-targeted operations. Alternatively, it is possible that Russian intelligence agencies failed to adequately coordinate their operations with one another.

There are numerous other Russian state hacking groups that have been identified by security researchers and traced by distinct operational patterns

and capabilities. It is likely that Russia keeps its most capable offensive cyber capabilities under extreme secrecy, in much the same way the United States attempts to veil the National Security Agency's (NSA) most powerful systems. The appearance in Summer 2016 of a previously unheard-of group, the Shadow Brokers, claiming to possess a set of highly sophisticated NSA exploits may be Russia signaling the extent of its cyber capabilities as a warning to the United States.²⁹⁴ It is also possible that some of these groups may be unrelated, false-flag operations, or something else.

Despite Russia's skillful use of cyberespionage in its influence operations, there remains little evidence of Russia conducting fully integrated offensive cyberattacks within its military operations. Instead, Russia's cyberwarfare attacks have been described as "relatively unsophisticated types of attacks... carried out in a very sophisticated manner."²⁹⁵ Russia has certainly leveraged cyberattacks as part of its coercive efforts, as noted in the cases of Estonia, Georgia, Ukraine, and others. Most of these attacks, however, were broad-based DDoS attacks and other malicious activities with the intent to cause widespread but temporary disruptions to government and public websites and communications. They generally caused no physical damage and their effects were temporary.²⁹⁶ Moreover, none of Russia's actions in cyberspace specifically targeted military systems or capabilities.

This does not necessarily mean that Russia lacks more-tailored cyberwarfare capabilities. It may simply mean that it has not yet

applied its capabilities in combat (or has done so in an undetected manner). Regardless, U.S. and allied policymakers should take no comfort in the lack of sophistication in Russia's demonstrated cyberwarfare capabilities. If anything, Russia has shown that even simple cyberattacks can be employed to immense effect and that Moscow has the skills to successfully employ its cyber capabilities in pursuit of its broader political objectives.

Information Operations

Information operations are the dissemination of various media (propaganda, news, disinformation) by a variety of means to attain political and military ends. Such campaigns can include spreading false or subtly altered information to create confusion or revealing damaging confidential information. Russia learned important lessons about information operations from its various conflicts in Chechnya and its war with Georgia in 2008. In both cases, Russia's adversaries were far more successful, at least in the early stages of both conflicts, in creating a persuasive narrative of Russian aggression. This prevented the spread of a pro-Russian explanation for their actions. Later in the Chechnya War, Chechen separatists lost a good bit of this goodwill due to a series of attacks on journalists and large-scale terrorist attacks against Russian civilians.²⁹⁷

In Georgia, both parties worked hard to influence public opinion, accusing one another of war crimes while claiming innocence on their own part.²⁹⁸ Initially, Moscow felt Tbilisi had been more successful on this front, despite Russia having won the military conflict. Later, af-

ter more press reporting of the Georgian role in initiating the conflict, both Russia and Georgia may have felt dissatisfied with efforts to sway global opinion.²⁹⁹ During the Second Chechen War, Russo-Georgian War, and operations in Syria, Russia has allowed embedded reporters access to its military personnel to help create a pro-Russia narrative for both domestic and international consumption.

Russia has developed a large-scale and generally successful effort to control its domestic information environment. This includes a domestic press corps that generally follows the established government line and the near absence of political opposition.³⁰⁰ Russia is increasingly developing a Russia-specific internet in the same way that China has created a "closed" national internet. The creation of a closed internet allows the state to maintain close control of information and the overriding media narrative. To date, however, Russia remains firmly connected to the global internet, although the Russian language means that it has its own equivalents of some popular international sites. For example, Vkontakte is the primary Russian social network and Yandex is the Russian equivalent of Google. In addition, Russian internet users are closely monitored by a relatively sophisticated monitoring tool, SORM, which records all internet activity and is a powerful tool for rooting out dissent.³⁰¹

The challenge abroad is far more complex. Russian information campaigns for foreign consumption rely on a combination of government-sponsored media, such as RT and Sputnik,

official and unofficial social media, and orchestrated statements by Russian officials. Russia's propaganda abroad has not created unequivocal support for Russian positions, but rather it has sowed doubt and uncertainty about narratives pushed by other nations and independent news agencies. For example, the Russian government's consistent and ongoing denials that Russian troops are operating in Ukrainian territory made some foreign governments and foreign media wary of suggesting that they were, despite the evidence.³⁰² Russia was thought to be behind at least some of the many efforts to discredit both Western and Ukrainian leaders by demonstrating links between them by leaking recordings of telephone conversations and email exchanges.³⁰³

Indeed, state-owned and controlled Russian media sought to affect the situation in Ukraine from the start. Prior to the Maidan revolution, Russian controlled or influenced reporting focused on discrediting the European Union (and thus association with it), in the eyes of Ukraine's largely conservative population. One example of this information campaign was the emphasis of EU stances on LGBT rights. After the Maidan, Russia pushed a narrative wherein ousted Ukrainian president Yanukovich was removed by a coalition of "fascists" and Western governments who backed the "radicals."³⁰⁴ The new Ukrainian government attempted to curtail the effects of Russian propaganda by limiting air time for Russian media and films, but with limited success, as many Russian speakers sought out

Russian television and information on the internet.³⁰⁵

Russian propaganda has expanded rapidly into new media forms, especially social media. Investigators have been able to catalogue numerous Russian linked "troll" accounts, used to amplify both the Russian narrative and create active disinformation campaigns. Troll accounts can be run by both humans and machines. These accounts post and share commentary on social media to undermine Western narratives and increase the penetration of Russia's messages.³⁰⁶ Some reporting has indicated the presence of "troll farms"—locations from which a relatively large number of people coordinate troll accounts.³⁰⁷ These accounts masquerade as people from across the demographic spectrum and with a wide range of interest groups. They will realistically interact with existing groups and commenters to spread their message and disguise the true nature of the account. For example, Twitter accounts disseminating disinformation may use names just a few letters off from legitimate news websites or famous persons to increase their believability.³⁰⁸

In many ways, Russian information operations take advantage of the ability to, quite simply, lie.³⁰⁹ Because Russia and its agents, intentional and otherwise, promulgate a range of demonstrably false but plentiful and sometimes even plausible narratives, it is difficult to

counter these activities simply by providing the truth, whatever it may be. It is a question of volume. This quantity-over-quality approach is evident in the sheer scale of Russian oper-

IN MANY WAYS, RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ABILITY TO, QUITE SIMPLY, LIE.

ations and the numerous groups directly employed by or aligned with the Russian government. The breadth and depth of the actors Russia is able to marshal in the information and cyber domains represents their comparative advantage.

Electronic Warfare

Russia has renewed its investments in EW capabilities and has demonstrated systems with relevance at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. These systems can undermine an opponent's command and control, communications, intelligence, and precision fires capabilities. Russia is aware that these systems form NATO's competitive advantage and are deploying systems that remove the key pillars upon which this advantage rests.

As with many aspects of the current NATO-Russia dynamic, the competition in the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) can trace its lineage to the Cold War. The United States and NATO relied upon advanced weapons sys-



Russian electronic warfare systems, such as the Krasukha-S4, can be used to target UAVs, aircraft radars, and low earth orbit satellites.

December 2014

Credit: Vitaly V. Kuzmin

tems that were, in turn, reliant upon the EMS to enable freedom of movement and deliver precision firepower that could offset the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact's numerical advantages in conventional forces. The Soviets, of course, sought to dominate and deny NATO's freedom within the EMS, leading to a proliferation of offensive and defense capabilities and tactics used by both sides. Today's U.S. and European militaries have become even more reliant upon uncontested access in the EMS as battlefield communications and combat platforms are now increasingly integrated across warfighting domains.

Russian EW capabilities have made significant strides in recent years. Russia has been investing specifically in EW since the 1990s, but increased its investment after the Russo-Georgian War.³¹⁰ Dominance of the electromagnetic realm is, therefore, once again a cornerstone of Russian military doctrine and is being tested and refined on the battlefields of eastern Ukraine and Syria.³¹¹ The Russian military maintains significant EW units

that are fully integrated into its force structure.³¹² This includes EW centers and EW brigades in each of its military districts.³¹³ In 2015, these units were manned about 55 percent by professional soldiers, but plans include a fully professional force.³¹⁴

EW capabilities are a component of Russia's overall anti-access/air denial (A2/AD) complex. The geography of NATO's eastern flank allows Russia to keep powerful EW and sensing capabilities relatively safe within their territory. These nonkinetic elements can be used to both degrade U.S. and allied intelligence gathering and protect key installations and equipment in a crisis. Given the general lack of U.S. and alliance ground-based EW systems, this provides Russia a distinct advantage.

New Russian EW systems are being fielded that specifically target NATO, particularly U.S., operational and strategic capabilities to include satellite-based navigation, unmanned systems, and satellite datalinks. Powerful jamming and electronic collection systems such as the Krasukha-20, Krasukha-S4, Mur-

mansk-BN, and Avtobaza are likely to be used to protect key Russian capabilities and degrade U.S. networks and precision navigation systems. In fact, the Avtobaza was rumored to be used by Iran to force down an advanced U.S. unmanned aircraft in late 2011.³¹⁵ Generally speaking, these capabilities are targeted at operational and strategic communications and reconnaissance capabilities.

In addition to these systems, Russian forces field a host of relevant EW capabilities at lower combat echelons including tactical jammers targeting small UAVs, cell phones, artillery radars, and artillery fuses—all used to great effect in eastern Ukraine. For example, the Infauna system is able to counter radio-controlled munitions and suppress tactical communications, and the mobile Borisoglebsk-2 can purportedly jam satellite-based navigation systems.³¹⁶ Russian systems such as the SPR-2, R330, and PR-377 L/LA have all been observed in eastern Ukraine. Russia has also used passive EW collection and di-

rection-finding systems in order to target artillery fires. Such operations have also included EW-enabled psychological operations wherein Ukrainian soldiers receive text messages following Russian artillery strikes asking about their well-being.

Nuclear Capabilities

In the 1990s, when the Russian military was weak and disorganized after the Soviet collapse, Russian military doctrine leaned heavily on its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent. Today, despite increased conventional military capability, Russia's nuclear deterrent remains a major component of its national power, albeit often wielded in a deliberately ambiguous manner. Russia's formal doctrine sets a high bar for nuclear use. The 2010 and 2014 versions of Russia's military doctrine authorize use of nuclear weapons only "in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies," and "in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy."³¹⁷ The 2014 doctrine makes clear that Russia is seeking to improve its conventional deterrence capabilities.³¹⁸ This high bar contrasts starkly with rhetorical nuclear sabre rattling. Russian officials have made comments about possible nuclear use that suggest a lower threshold, muddying the water.³¹⁹ Russia has also ramped up the frequency of its nuclear exercises and added more surprise inspections since March 2014.³²⁰

Short of full-scale conflict with the United States, Russia's non-strategic systems are of greatest concern. Recent analysis puts Russia's nonstrategic warhead count at between 1,000 and 2,000.³²¹ It is important to note that this includes a broad range of nuclear armed systems, including many that have fallen out of favor in Western arsenals, such as nuclear armed surface-to-air, antiship, and antisubmarine munitions. Russian rhetoric has recently emphasized the dual-use capacity of some of its most advanced conventional delivery systems, notably the Iskander and Kalibr, each of which can carry nuclear weapons. There is no evidence that either system has been deployed with a nuclear payload.

Russia is also continuing to modernize its strategic delivery systems. The current Russian arsenal is roughly split between new launchers and aging systems. The core of the Russian ICBM force is composed of the RS-12M Topol (SS-25 Sickle), RS-12M1/2 Topol-M (SS-27 Sickle-B), RS-24 Yars, and RS-20V (SS-18 Satan).³²² The RS-24 and RS-20V are both deployed with multiple independent reentry vehicles. Russia is continuing the deployment of the RS-24 and has plans to replace the RS-20V with a new large ICBM, the RS-28 Sarmat, in the coming years.³²³ Given the issues that often plague Russian military programs, the ICBM modernization efforts have been relatively issue-free. Conversely, the program to develop a new submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) has struggled. The RSM-56 Bulava (SS-N-32) has faced consistent setbacks during its development, and while now deployed on the op-

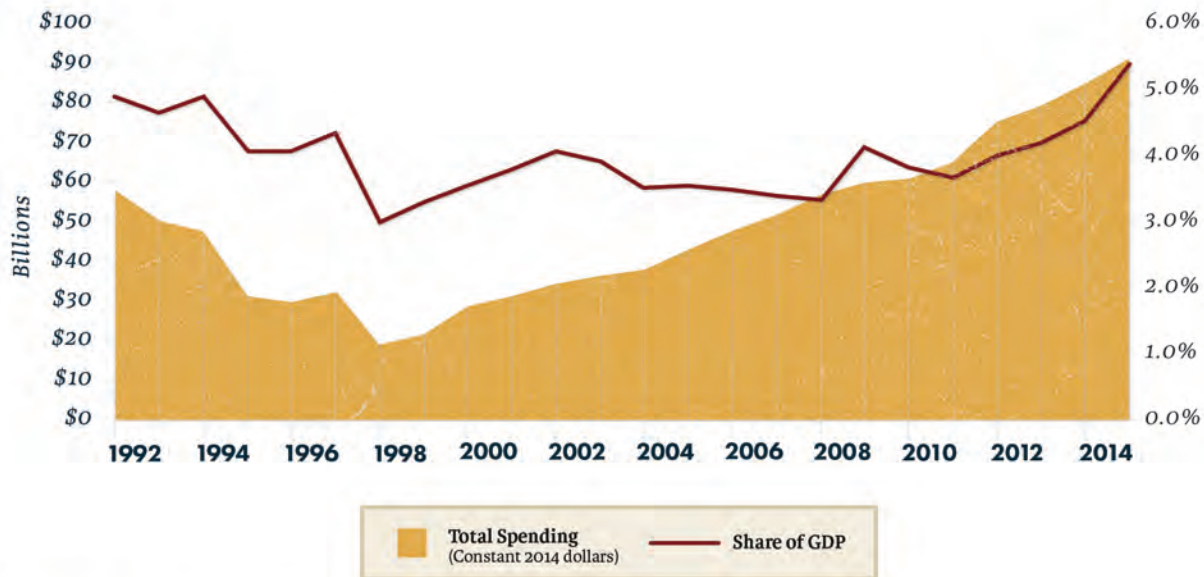
erational *Yuri Dolgoruky*-class ballistic missile submarines, it has continued to perform poorly in tests.³²⁴

While dramatically improving the capability of its ICBMs, Russia is currently meeting its commitments under the New START arms control treaty. This treaty limits Russia and the United States to 700 deployed (800 total) launchers and 1,550 warheads. The parties have until February 2018 to meet these goals and the treaty is binding until 2021 unless extended further. At present, Russia is believed to be in compliance with the launcher restrictions, but over the total number of deployed warheads.³²⁵ Given a changing geopolitical environment, it is unclear what the future holds for U.S./Russian arms control regimes. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 as a recommended area of continued cooperation between the United States and Russia.

Russia's Conventional Military Forces

Former defense minister Anatoly Serdiukov initiated the "New Look" reforms of the Russian military following the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Despite Russia's victory in that conflict, many Russians saw its performance as disappointing, fostering a commitment to reform that had been missing in decades past. Serdiukov's successor, Sergei Shoigu, has continued some aspects of these reforms and reversed others. The key components of these combined efforts include: consolidation of Russia's military districts into

RUSSIA'S DEFENSE SPENDING 1992–2015



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2016

joint strategic commands (Eastern, Western, Southern, and Central, and now supplemented by a new, Arctic-focused Northern command); shifting to a brigade-centric force structure from a division-based model with an increased focus on professional soldiers (*kontraktniki*) rather than conscripts; an increased pace and scale of military exercises; and improved material quality. While Russia's approach to military modernization has shifted at times, overall, Moscow has continued its efforts to improve the technology, professionalism, mobility, and readiness of its armed forces.³²⁶

Defense Spending and Plans

Russia regularly releases ambitious State Armaments Programs (SAP), outlining spending on new systems and modernization over the next 10 years, with

new plans released every five years. However, the release of the 2016 SAP was delayed, so the 2011 SAP remains in place. While the full program budget is classified, the total amount of money allocated is stated as 20.7 trillion rubles (about \$704 billion at 2011 exchange rates and \$345.7 billion at current exchange rates) although Western analysts believe that 19.04 trillion rubles is a more likely estimate. Much of the spending has been pushed into the future with 2020 spending projected as a tenfold increase over 2010. Nevertheless, implementation of the 2011 SAP is already behind schedule.³²⁷ This is not surprising since previous Russian armament programs have similarly deferred funding into the future, creating a bow wave of future funding requirements that oftentimes never materializes.³²⁸ The discussion of specific Russian military capa-

bilities in this chapter illustrates this phenomenon. Historically, Russia's armament programs are rarely fulfilled in their entirety. Despite the obvious need for modern equipment across the armed forces, Russia has struggled to afford the cost of deploying modern systems in the necessary quantities. Although it has made significant cuts to the force structure that it inherited from the Soviet Union, Russia still faces challenges when it comes to modernizing the equipment across the breadth of its forces. As a result, entirely new equipment is rare and either built slowly in boutique numbers or scrapped outright in favor of more economical upgrades to older equipment.

Funding constraints are the most obvious reason for this phenomenon. Russia's modernization plans rely on rising budget allocations that are often

threatened by economic downturns or fluctuations in energy prices (which make up the bulk of the government's revenue). Russia's military budget has been comparatively protected in the recent economic downturn, but the fiscal realities that Moscow faces are making it difficult to keep up defense increases in light of major budget shortfalls. In 2015, Russia cut the growth in its defense spending by 5 percent to just under 3.2 trillion rubles. Its 2015 budget, however, was still 25 percent higher than in 2014 and did little to dent the major growth in defense spending (in real terms and as a percent of GDP) since 2009–2010. The 2016 military budget was to remain the same as 2015, but another 5 percent cut was announced in March 2016, indicating the first real decline in Russia's defense spending since 2010.³²⁹ Despite Russia's rising defense spending in recent years, it is important to remember that its defense spending remains dwarfed by that of the United States. Although fluctuating exchange rates and different costs make comparisons problematic, Russia's official defense budget in 2015 was approximately \$91 billion (prior to the ruble collapse), while U.S. defense expenditure was over \$595 billion.³³⁰

The fact that overall defense funding has remained relatively high means that the slow pace of procurements is more than an issue of funding. The inefficiency and corruption in the Russian defense industry plays a substantial role. Never a speedy or effective producer, the Russian military-industrial complex has faced additional obstacles due to

the war in eastern Ukraine. Kyiv has cut off several key Soviet-era suppliers of Russian military equipment that remained in Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union.³³¹ Moreover, Western sanctions have prevented Russia from importing key components for its ships, aircraft, and other systems that were produced in other parts of Europe. Moreover, the weak ruble helps make some projects more affordable. Whatever its weaknesses, the Russian defense industry is still sophisticated enough to make it the second-largest arms exporter in the world (though still dwarfed by the United States).³³²

Drawing a straight line from Russian defense plans to its actual military capabilities has always led to overly optimistic assessments (from a Russian viewpoint). However, equating slow modernization with weakness would also be a mistake. Economic constraints are unlikely to cause issues in the near term for Russian military operations.³³³ Indeed, many of Russia's recent and ongoing military operations like eastern Ukraine have successfully relied on forces using cheaper and older weapons systems and light-footprint operations. Even if Russia faces long-term protracted conflicts, as long as its adversaries also remain users of older, lower-technology equipment, its problems may not be ones solved by modern weapons, as the United States learned in Iraq and Afghanistan.³³⁴ More-advanced adversaries would, of course, present a different dynamic.

ENTIRELY NEW EQUIPMENT IS RARE AND EITHER BUILT SLOWLY IN BOUTIQUE NUMBERS OR SCRAPPED OUTRIGHT IN FAVOR OF MORE ECONOMICAL UPGRADES TO OLDER EQUIPMENT.

Personnel, Manning, and Mobilization

Although the Russian armed forces have overall greatly improved recruitment and retention over the last few years, it still faces problems with low and uneven manning levels. In 2016, the Russian armed forces totaled approximately 798,000 personnel, which fell short of Putin's stated goal of a million-person force.³³⁵ Efforts to increase and retain personnel have increased manned rates from an estimated 80 percent between 2010 and 2012 to 90 percent in 2014 and 93 percent in 2016.³³⁶ The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has promised full manning by 2017.³³⁷ Despite these improvements, manning remains uneven across military districts and within various components of the overall force. For example, in 2012, units in the Southern Military District, then engaged in operations in the North Caucasus,

were manned at 90 to 95 percent, though the other districts were below the 80 percent average.³³⁸ Russia's tendency to mix and match units from different military districts for operations also leaves some forces in better shape than others.

Despite professionalization efforts in recent years, the Russian military continues to rely on conscripts to fill large portions of its ranks, creating an array of problems in terms of the readiness and skill of its personnel. In 2007, Russia shortened its conscription period from two years to one year, which likely improved compliance with conscription laws that had often been flouted in the past. The shortened service terms, however, have also resulted in conscripts who are less experienced given their high rate of turnover. Furthermore, Russian regulations prohibit sending conscripts into combat, creating controversy in the form of reports of conscripts being pressured or misled into signing contracts so that they can be sent into eastern Ukraine.³³⁹ Despite years of professionalization efforts, it was not until 2015 that professional soldiers outnumbered conscripts.³⁴⁰ Yet the drive to increase the number of professional soldiers in the ranks threatens to dilute the higher quality of these troops. In late 2016, the Russian Duma introduced an option of a much shorter, one-year contract (as opposed to the typical two- to five-year contract for professional troops) for those who want to sign on to fight in "counterterrorist" operations.³⁴¹ This suggests that Russia's reliance on conscripts continues to pose a challenge for its ability to em-

ploy its armed forces in a flexible and responsive manner.

Another concern is rapid force mobilization. Since the 2008 reforms, Russian doctrine has emphasized the ability to rapidly mobilize and position its armed forces. An analysis of the ground, air, naval, and logistics capabilities in each military district concluded that each Russian military district's Joint Strategic Command (JSC) can support a substantial initial capability from a cold start.³⁴² The exact composition of the ground, air, and naval assets that can be mobilized, however, varies from district to district.³⁴³ This analysis also concluded that Russia has the ability to conduct larger-scale operations, along the lines of the 150,000 forces, without considerable strain.³⁴⁴

But these larger mobilizations rely on being able to move forces quickly and effectively. Russian forces have demonstrated such capabilities during past exercises where they may deploy from bases over 200 miles away from the exercise location. However, these exercises are reliant upon civilian resources to support mobilization and logistics and, importantly, take place within Russian territory.³⁴⁵ If one is thinking about possible Russian

THE KH-101 IS CAPABLE OF REACHING A WIDE SWATH OF EUROPE AND, POTENTIALLY, EVERY U.S. MILITARY BASE IN BOTH EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST FROM LAUNCH PLATFORMS ORBITING THE SKIES OF MOSCOW.

use of force abroad, it is important to consider that, beyond Syria, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Belarus, Russia does not have major military infrastructure. Russia lacks the air and sea-lift capabilities it would need to support sustained major combat operations and project large military forces abroad. Even in Syria, where Russia had existing bases, the overall number of forces is relatively small. Russian combat power is most potent near its borders. It lacks the ability to decisively project large military forces abroad. Russia may seek new (or revived old) bases abroad, but progress to date has been limited.

RUSSIAN CONVENTIONAL MISSILES

Name	Class	Launch Platform	Maximum Range (Approx.)
Kh-555 (AS-15 Kent)	Air-launched cruise missile (ALCM)	Heavy bomber	2,100 miles ³⁴⁷
Kh-101	ALCM	Heavy bomber	1,700–3,100 miles ³⁴⁸
3M14 Kalibr (SS-N-30 Sizzler)	Multiplatform land attack cruise missile (LACM)	Surface vessels and submarines	900–1,500 miles ³⁴⁹
9K720 Iskander (SS-26 Stone)	Short-range ballistic missile	Road-mobile launcher	300 miles ³⁵⁰

Precision Strike

In recent years, Russia has made significant strides in its conventional precision-strike capabilities, as well as limited advances in supporting capabilities, such as command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR). The Russian military now fields a relatively advanced inventory of air- and sea-launched cruise missiles, air-delivered direct attack precision-guided munitions (PGMs), and short conventional ballistic missile systems.³⁴⁶

Russia's most robust and dangerous class of PGMs is its families of long-range cruise missiles. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union developed impressive cruise missile capabilities especially in the naval domain. The Kalibr, Kh-555, and Kh-101 weapon systems give Russian forces the ability to hold targets at risk while limiting the threat faced by their respective launch platforms. All of these missiles have

been used as part of Russia's military operations in Syria.³⁵¹

The Kalibr and Kh-101 are the most impressive of these weapons. The Kalibr is a multiplatform weapon that can be launched off of a wide array of naval vessels, including small diesel-powered submarines and small surface vessels. It may be produced in a lighter air-launched version with reduced range for tactical aircraft.³⁵² The Kh-101 is an evolution of the Kh-55 platform with improved guidance capabilities and a reduced radar cross-section. With an estimated range of 1,700 to 3,100 miles and improved mission planning and terminal guidance capabilities, the Kh-101 is capable of reaching a wide swath of Europe and, potentially, every U.S. military base in both Europe and the Middle East from launch platforms orbiting the skies of Moscow.³⁵³

Unlike NATO forces, which rely heavily upon direct-attack, gravity PGMs (e.g., the Joint Direct Attack Munition, JDAM), Russia

maintains a much smaller inventory of these weapons. Russia has also largely eschewed the development and deployment of munitions guided by its GLONASS navigation satellite system, the Russian equivalent of the U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS). Most Russian direct-attack PGMs instead rely upon laser or electro-optical guidance, which can be dramatically affected by adverse weather. The all-weather capabilities of NATO GPS-guided munitions is one reason for their ubiquity in Western arsenals. The primary Russian GLONASS-guided PGM, the KAB-500S, has been spotted on Su-34s operating in Syria. These munitions, however, have reportedly been procured in only limited numbers.³⁵⁴

Russia's precision-strike capabilities are buttressed by its short-range ballistic missile system, the Iskander, a road mobile system evolved from the Soviet-era Scud missile system. The Iskander can trace its roots to the 1990s and it

entered production in the mid-2000s. Russia plans to deploy up to 10 brigades with Iskander systems by 2020.³⁵⁵ Its maximum range is compliant with the 500 km limitation set in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.³⁵⁶ The Iskander is capable of firing missiles with conventional warheads and nuclear warheads. Its missile may have the ability to maneuver in flight to avoid missile defenses.³⁵⁷ While the Iskander's "nuclear capable" nature is often touted by Russian and Western media reports, the system itself began development as a purely conventional ballistic missile system. The Iskander's nuclear role has only been widely reported on since 2008, with the Russian press seemingly touting this feature since the renewal of ten-

escalatory step that allows Russia to hold a large number of vital NATO targets at risk. Specifically, the deployment of a cruise missile with a 1,500-mile range could allow Russia to strike European targets from launch sites deep within Russian territory.

Russia's long-range precision strike capabilities can effectively preclude any Russian adversaries from quickly and safely moving forces to flashpoints arounds Russia's periphery. As such, they are a key component of Russia's A2/AD complex. Long-range precision strike capabilities form the outer limits of this complex. In the European theater, precision cruise missiles fired at standoff distances could hit targets in Western and Central Europe vital to reinforcement operations, such as air and sea points of

sors needed to detect and defeat low-flying cruise missiles.

Despite these advantages, Russian's long-range precision strike capabilities have some serious limitations especially when compared with Western capabilities. Russia does not possess the ability to conduct real-time or near-real-time targeting with its standoff weapons. The capabilities that Russia does have to achieve this rely upon using electronic signatures to triangulate a target's location. Russia also lacks a high-altitude ground observation radar system. The result of this drawback is that while Russia can hold fixed targets at risk, it cannot effectively target mobile forces and may struggle to engage assets that can be randomly dispersed/repositioned on a regular basis.

IN 2016, NATO AIRCRAFT SCRAMBLED MORE THAN 600 TIMES TO MONITOR RUSSIAN AIRCRAFT FLYING NEAR NATO AIRSPACE OR TO RESPOND TO VIOLATIONS.

sions with the West.³⁵⁸ Russian deployments of Iskandar systems have since featured in numerous Western media reports in 2015 and 2016.

In addition to the Iskander, U.S. officials have indicated their belief that Russia has deployed a non-INF-compliant ground-based cruise missile.³⁵⁹ The deployment of a non-INF-compliant system should be considered an

disembarkation, command and control centers, logistics hubs, prepositioned equipment sites, and other critical infrastructure.³⁶⁰ Cruise missiles could undercut the alliance's ability to deter by punishment by placing adversary long-range strike capabilities, especially airfields, at risk. High-volume missile salvos may overwhelm the alliance's current missile defenses, which lack the aerial or elevated sen-

Air

Russia's air fleet also relies heavily on Soviet-era systems or their derivatives for both tactical and strategic aircraft.³⁶¹ The Russian tactical aircraft inventory comprises primarily variants of the Su-27 and MiG-29. Russia can likely field approximately 300 frontline tactical aircraft.³⁶² The most advanced Russian fighter aircraft, such as the Su-35, Su-30SM, and MiG-35, are highly maneuverable with excellent radars, long-range weapons, infrared search and track capabilities, and helmet-mounted cueing for short-range missiles. This combination of capabilities makes them formidable foes for every fighter in the NATO inventory. They may even pose a threat to the F-22 Raptor should they be able to close within short ranges.

Beyond these frontline aircraft, Russia maintains a number of non-upgraded MiG-29s, Su-27s, MiG-31s, even older Su-24s, and Su-25 ground attack aircraft. The biggest issue with Russian tactical airpower is the lack of airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft. This deficiency and reliance on ground-directed intercepts has long been the Achilles' heel of Russian airpower. In a large air campaign, Russian aircraft would be deadly in small numbers, but they would lack coordination and integration.

Since the late 1990s, Russia has been working to develop a fifth-generation aircraft to compete with the U.S. F-22 and F-35. The final result of several programs is the PAK FA, which first flew in 2010. This aircraft is a fifth-generation aircraft with Russian characteristics. It is likely not as stealthy as the F-22 or F-35 but possesses an advanced array of sensors and high maneuverability. It is slated to enter service in 2018; however, orders for the PAK FA have been cut due to its rising cost.³⁶³ For this reason, the bulk of the Russian tactical air fleet will lack the stealth capabilities and likely the more advanced networking features found in late fourth- and fifth-generation Western aircraft.³⁶⁴

Modern Russian aircraft carry a formidable collection of air-to-air weapons. It is believed that the most recent Russian aircraft, such as the Su-35, possess helmet-mounted cueing systems, which means the aircraft does not need to be pointed at its target in order to hit it. This makes them extraordinarily lethal in dogfights, especially

when paired with the excellent R-73 short-range, infrared homing missile.³⁶⁵ These aircraft also carry the R-77 medium- to long-range radar guided missile. This weapon is akin to NATO's AIM-120 advanced medium-range air-to-air missile (AMRAAM) in performance. Certain fighters may carry the R-37, an exceptionally long-ranged missile designed to target airborne early warning and control, intelligence, and aerial refueling aircraft thought to be operating in safe zones.

While unmanned aerial systems (UAS) appear to be a growing emphasis within the Russian armed forces, Russia still lacks a major indigenous UAS industry and has not demonstrated UAS suitable for strategic or theater-wide missions. Russian UAS are either man-portable tactical systems used for intelligence and artillery spotting or vehicle-transported tactical systems imported from Israel. Russia is largely reliant on imported models after a disappointing experience with Russian-made UAS in the 2008 Georgia War. Russia has concluded several deals with the Israelis for a range of systems including a \$400 million deal in 2010.³⁶⁶ While Russia's novel use of UAS in Ukraine was impressive, the lack of larger systems capable of conducting real-time surveillance and targeting for standoff precision weapons is a key capability gap for Russian forces in a high-end conflict.

While Russia is modernizing many of its aircraft, it faces continuing issues of material readiness. The current in-service rate of its aircraft is estimated at about 66 percent.³⁶⁷ Russia has also experienced some notable aircraft crashes in recent

years, partially as a result of its increased operational tempo. In July 2015, two Tu-95MS strategic bombers crashed in the Eastern Military District, likely due to engine failure. Following the crash, all Tu-95MS planes were grounded. Other crashes in June and July 2015 included a Tu-95 Bear bomber, a MiG-29 fighter jet, a new Su-34, and a Su-24.³⁶⁸ Two crashes occurred in November and December 2016—within weeks of one another—during attempted landings on Russia's sole aircraft carrier, currently deployed in the Mediterranean Sea. Most recently, on December 25, 2016, a Russian military Tu-154 transport aircraft carrying entertainers, journalists, and humanitarian workers from Russia to Syria crashed in the Black Sea. Russian officials attributed the crash to mechanical failure or pilot error. All of these incidents point to reasons to worry not only about Russian material readiness but also its training standards.

The Russian Air Force has significantly increased its flights around NATO's airspace in recent years, with airspace violations occurring at an alarming frequency across the eastern flank.³⁶⁹ In 2016, NATO aircraft scrambled more than 600 times to monitor Russian aircraft flying near NATO airspace or to respond to violations.³⁷⁰ The Russian motive behind its increased flights is often not as sinister as portrayed. In fact, much of the activity should be understood as a return to common Russian operating practices as their air force modernizes. Russian aerial provocations, such as those over the Baltic Sea, however, are cause for concern. In 2013, Russian Tu-22M3s conducted a high-speed dash toward Swedish



Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile systems deployed in Kaliningrad, Syria, and Crimea contribute to Russia's expansive A2/AD complex.

Latakia, Syria, December 16, 2015

Credit: Paul Gypteau/AFP/Getty Images

airspace in what is believed to be a mock attack on Swedish military targets.³⁷¹ Russia conducted a similar exercise in 2014 against Danish territory.³⁷² Probing activity by Russian aircraft is not limited to Europe, with violations occurring in recent years in U.S. airspace near Northern California and Alaska and Canadian airspace around the Arctic.³⁷³

Integrated Air and Missile Defense

Given U.S. and NATO advantages in airpower, Russia—like the Soviet Union before it—has long placed considerable importance on the strength and capabilities of its integrated air and missile defenses. Russian investments have produced systems with impressive capabilities that form the backbone of Russia's A2/AD complex. These systems do not form an impenetrable shield or entirely inhibit U.S. and NATO forces from operating in certain areas, but they do pose greater operational risks for forces operating within their ranges.

This section examines two broad categories of Russian air and

missile defense systems: those operated by the Russian Aerospace Forces and those operated by the Russian Ground Forces. The Aerospace Forces were created in 2015 and unified several services and components of the Russian Armed Forces, including the Russian Aerospace Defense Force, the Russian Air Force, and the aviation elements of the Russian Ground Forces.³⁷⁴ In terms of air and missile defense systems, the Aerospace Forces generally operate strategic air and missile systems such as the S-300 and S-400 that have theater and strategic responsibilities. The Russian Ground Forces, by contrast, operate more tactical air defense systems that are intended to move with maneuver forces and provide medium- to short-range air defense.

The Aerospace Forces operate both fixed and mobile systems to fulfill its strategic and theater responsibilities. These fixed systems include long-range early warning radars and the operational strategic ballistic missile defense system that protects Moscow. Russia's ballistic missile defense complex predates the 1973

Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and has been updated several times over the years. It may receive a new family of antiballistic missiles in the future, although the timelines for these upgrades are unclear.³⁷⁵ Additionally, Russia, like other states, has leveraged the technology of ballistic missile defense systems to develop ground-launched antisatellite missiles (ASAT) and is now testing an ASAT called the Nudol.³⁷⁶ The maturity of this weapon is unclear, but Russia has joined China and the United States in demonstrating an ASAT capability.

Russia is also in the process of standing up a new generation of long-range surveillance radars called the Container system. These are low-frequency, over-the-horizon (OTH) radars with a range in excess of 2,500 miles and are designed to track incoming ballistic missiles.³⁷⁷ OTH radars operating in these frequencies may also have the ability to track some aircraft, although these capabilities are more limited.³⁷⁸ Moreover, low-frequency radars will require using more interceptors due to lack of target discrimination.

Russia fields highly sophisticated mobile surface-to-air missile systems in the S-400, S-300PM2, and S-300V3/4. The excellence of these capabilities should not be surprising given the Russian

less clear. The large search and acquisition radars used by these systems are difficult to quickly reposition and it is easy to overestimate the ability of Russian forces to effectively network its

or S-400. The rumored S-500 system builds on the S-300V but adds a new interceptor and enhanced radars. It will likely include many S-400V3/4 capabilities for ballistic missiles and

may have the ability to defend against ICBMs. In this role, some analysts have speculated that a mobile S-500 may supplement the fixed ballistic missile defenses around Moscow.³⁸³

RUSSIA FIELDS HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED MOBILE SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILE SYSTEMS IN THE S-400, S-300PM2, AND S-300V3/4.

(and prior Soviet) fixation on the threat posed by NATO airpower, to include long-range cruise missiles.³⁷⁹ The S-300PM2 and its evolution the S-400 combine long-range missiles with multiple radar systems in order to simultaneously engage a large number of aerial targets including aircraft, cruise missiles, and unmanned aircraft out to a range of at least 150 miles.³⁸⁰ The S-400 adds two new missile families to the system, which offer improved capabilities at short range against highly maneuverable targets and exceptional range (250 miles) against larger jamming and airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft.³⁸¹

The S-300PM2 and S-400 are capable of operating as independent batteries but become considerably more lethal when operating together as a brigade as this adds dedicated acquisition radars. At the battery level, the S-300/400 system has the ability to rapidly reposition between engagements. However, the ability of these systems to conduct “shoot and scoot” operations in an environment where its communications are degraded is

various sensors and transmit data to its launchers. The integration of multiple separate radars into a unified air and missile defense system is akin to the complexities of the U.S. Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system, which is designed to intercept intermediate- and long-range ballistic missiles targeting the United States. Furthermore, these units may be able to integrate a new generation of low-frequency radars that offer enhanced detection properties against stealth aircraft.³⁸² Russia is extremely interested in developing the ability to track and kill stealth aircraft given NATO’s reliance on the assured precision strike provided by U.S. aircraft such as the B-2 and potentially the F-22 and F-35.

The S-300V family of SAMs is considerably different than the S-300P. It is based on a tracked family of vehicles with a different collection of radars and a completely different missile. The S-300V is primarily designed to defeat tactical ballistic missiles. Its capabilities against aircraft are not as robust as the S-300PM2

The Aerospace Forces are also developing a series of shorter-range systems to defend its strategic air defense systems. This multi-tiered approach includes the medium-ranged S-350, short-range Pantsyr-S1, and very short-ranged Morfeï. The Pantsyr-S1, a combination missile and gun system, is the only one of these systems currently deployed to defend key infrastructure such as S-400 sites and have appeared as part of the Russian forces deployed to Syria.³⁸⁴ These medium- to short-range systems have improved mobility compared to the larger systems and less reliance on multiple large radar systems.

Separate from the air defense capabilities operated by the Aerospace Forces, Russia also maintains a robust range of systems as part of its ground forces. Generally speaking, these platforms are not as complex and do not have the range of the S-300/400. Instead, they are highly mobile in order to provide direct support for advancing forces and protect them from low-flying cruise missiles, helicopters, and a wide range of aircraft.³⁸⁵ The best known of these SAMs is the

Buk, which gained international notoriety after it was used by separatists to shoot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine.³⁸⁶ The most upgraded versions of this system are the Buk-M2 and M3. These can operate either as independent launchers complete with their own radar systems or as part of an integrated battery with mo-

these platforms provides the Russian army with a tiered tactical air defense system. However, it is not as networked or capable as the Aerospace Forces' complex. In addition, it leans far more heavily on Soviet-era components. It is clear, then, that Russia has prioritized the development of advanced strategic systems over recapitalizing its tactical air defenses.

RUSSIA VIEWS U.S. AND EUROPEAN NAVAL CAPABILITIES AS A THREAT DUE TO THEIR ABILITY TO DELIVER AIR POWER AND PRECISION STRIKE CAPABILITIES ACROSS THE EXPANSE OF RUSSIAN TERRITORY, AS WELL AS THREATEN ITS BALLISTIC MISSILE SUBMARINE FORCE—A KEY PILLAR OF RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR DETERRENT.

bile radars. The Buk-M2 has a range slightly short of 30 miles, while the Buk-M3 can hit targets over 40 miles from the launcher.

The medium-range Buk is complemented by short-range mobile systems such as the Tor, a fully integrated short-range air defense system, and the Tunguska gun/missile system, the predecessor of the Aerospace Forces Pantsyr system. The combination of

Naval Forces and Maritime Capabilities

Putin and Russian leaders before him have viewed the Russian Navy as an element of national prestige. Nevertheless, the Russian Navy has historically been subordinate in importance to other elements of the Russian Armed Forces. This can be attributed in part to geographic realities. Russia lacks a major

warm-water port with clear access to the sea. Faced with overwhelming U.S. and NATO dominance of the open ocean, the Soviet Union smartly embarked on a strategy of sea denial, investing heavily in submarines and long-range anti-ship missiles. The strategy of sea denial continues to inform Russian investments and doctrine to this day. Russia's naval forces are geared toward protecting waters close to its shores rather than having a blue-water fleet able to project power long distances. In this role, the Russian Navy aims to prevent potential adversaries from using the seas near Russia as a base from which to launch strikes.³⁸⁷

In recent years, Russia has embarked on an ambitious effort to strengthen and modernize its naval forces. A major driver behind this effort is Moscow's recognition of the severe imbalance that had developed between its naval power relative to the United States and its allies, particularly the United Kingdom and France. Russia views U.S. and European naval capabilities as a threat due to their ability to deliver air power and precision strike capabilities across the expanse of Russian territory, as well as threaten its ballistic missile submarine force—a key pillar of Russia's nuclear deterrent. In any conflict, the United States and NATO would surely control the seas and bottle up Russia's geographically disparate fleets in their ports (apart from its submarines).

The maritime capability imbalance with the West has been magnified by the sheer age and poor condition of Russia's fleet. The Russian Navy was among the most neglected compo-

nents of the armed forces during the 1990s, when more than three-quarters of the Soviet fleet it inherited was scrapped and new investments were repeatedly delayed.³⁸⁸ This neglect is evidenced by the fact that in 2013 only 40 percent of the navy's equipment was deemed modern.³⁸⁹ In 2016, it was assessed that Russia had only 65 vessels (of approximately 190 total) available for combat operations.³⁹⁰

The MoD has pledged that by 2020, 70 percent of the Navy's equipment would be considered modern. To this end, Moscow intends to allocate 26 percent of its State Armament Program (SAP) to its Navy between 2011 and 2020.³⁹¹ However, it is unclear how much of this funding will actually reach the Navy due to corruption and other structural inefficiencies in the Russian industrial complex.

Russia's shipbuilding efforts have not been without problems. Ongoing projects have faced delays and longer-term programs for new large naval ships have been pushed back.³⁹² The Navy has encountered difficulties in many programs to include medium to large surface vessels and nuclear-powered submarines. These difficulties have created significant delays and, in some cases, led to the delivery of combat vessels without functioning combat weapon systems.³⁹³ In the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russia has also struggled to acquire key components like propulsion systems once made in Ukraine.³⁹⁴ Russia's ambitious naval modernization plans, including the construction of new large surface combatants and potentially an aircraft carrier, may prove impossible to achieve.

It is also unclear how Moscow plans to acquire the foreign technologies needed for certain vessels or if it can find substitutes. Moscow is attempting to resolve this problem through import substitution, though its degree of success is unclear.

The Russian Navy is divided into five components—the Northern, Pacific, Black Sea, and Baltic Fleets, and the Caspian Sea Flotilla.³⁹⁵ Most of this combat power is concentrated in the Northern and Pacific Fleets, though the Black Sea Fleet has grown in importance in recent years. With Russia's seizure of Crimea and its now-unfettered access to its longtime naval base in Sevastopol, the Black Sea Fleet may grow even further in the coming years.

On a per tonnage basis, Russian naval vessels carry more offensive weapons than their Western counterparts.³⁹⁶ Most of Russia's frontline combatants are scheduled to undergo modernization and its new small surface combatants, outfitted with cruise missiles, can punch far above their weight.³⁹⁷ However, Russian surface vessels lack an integrated combat weapon system akin to the United States' AEGIS system and, therefore, have limited air and missile defense capabilities. Russian attempts to remedy this shortcoming have included overhauling older vessels and designing a new frigate class with enhanced air defense capabilities. However, these frigates have encountered significant delays worsened by Ukrainian export bans and a combat weapons system that has proven unreliable at the best of times.³⁹⁸

The Russian Navy operates one aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*. Due to lack of main-

tenance and personnel highly trained in carrier operations, the Russian Navy has struggled to effectively use its sole carrier to project power. It uses a ski-jump for launching aircraft, making the vessel less capable than its U.S. or French counterparts. In addition, the *Kuznetsov* is not a "pure" aircraft carrier, reflecting the Soviet design preference for cruiser-aircraft carrier hybrids.³⁹⁹ The difficulties encountered during the carrier's first ever combat deployment to the Eastern Mediterranean in 2016 demonstrate that carrier aviation is a prestige mission for the Russian Navy more than a legitimate combat capability.

While much attention has focused on the fact that the Russian Navy's operating tempo has reached the highest levels of activity *since* the Cold War, it still falls significantly below that of the much-larger Soviet Navy *during* the Cold War.⁴⁰⁰ Some Russian actions perceived as provocative by the West are simply the result of a modernizing Russian Navy resuming standard operating practices—practices that NATO navies have not seen for many years due to the poor state of the Russian fleet. For example, Soviet aerial and surface patrols and undersea activities in the North Sea and the North Atlantic were common in the 1980s and early 1990s. The United States and its allies may need to recalibrate their sensitivities and expectations of Russian naval strength in order to prevent overestimating and misunderstanding the Russia challenge in the maritime domain.

The most dangerous component of the Russian Navy has historically been, and remains today,

its sizable submarine force. The Russian submarine fleet has declined dramatically from its Soviet zenith; however, the vessels it has retained and a small number of new boats form a lethal deterrent force. The Russian Navy has approximately 50 submarines homeported in its three European fleets (not including those in the Russian Pacific Fleet). This force looks significant on paper but many of these vessels are currently either in need of or undergoing major maintenance.⁴⁰¹ With that caveat in mind, the advanced diesel submarines of the Black Sea Fleet and the modernized *Akula*-class submarines of the Northern Fleet rival most allied submarines in the region. The new Russian nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN) class, the *Severodvinsk*-class, provides the Russian Navy with a vessel that begins to rival the latest SSNs produced by Western navies.⁴⁰² In addition, the *Severodvinsk* can carry a significant cruise missile payload in vertical launch tubes, a first for a Russian SSN.⁴⁰³ Russia's undersea capabilities add another layer to Russia's overarching A2/AD capabilities and have been a consistent pillar in their attempts to deny NATO unfettered control of the sea.

Land Forces

Much of Russia's military strength is concentrated around the Russian Ground Forces, which number around 350,000 troops.⁴⁰⁴ Russian land forces are primarily equipped with modernized versions of Soviet-era systems. In many cases, these platforms are excellent on paper but struggle due to lack of consistent maintenance, unreliable engines, and poor crew training. The most capable component of

Russia's ground capabilities is its extensive inventory of tube and rocket artillery. Russian combat doctrine dating to the Second World War has stressed the use of massed volumes of artillery fire in support of ground operations. However, while Russia has considerable stores of equipment, the quality varies considerably and only a small portion can be considered modern.

The core of Russia's ground combat power is its armored maneuver forces. These forces rely almost exclusively on modernized variants of the T-72 tank, first produced in 1971, including the T-72B3 and T-90. Generally speaking, these are reliable tanks with an excellent main armament. They do lack, however, some of the advanced gunnery systems of frontline Western tanks. The Russian design philosophy vis-à-vis tanks is much different than that of Germany, the United States, or the United Kingdom. NATO tanks are quite heavy and protected by substantial, integrated composite armor. The most resilient of these vehicles have proven almost indestructible but consume incredible quantities of fuel and are difficult to transport. Russian tanks are much lighter and instead rely on modular defensive measures to include explosive reactive armor (ERA), antitank guided-missile (ATGM) jammers, and hard-kill active protection systems (APS). The most advanced Russian ERA has been claimed to be able to defeat the primary antitank round used by NATO forces.⁴⁰⁵ The latest U.S. munition developed for the M1 Abrams was in part designed to counter Russian advances in ERA.⁴⁰⁶

The Russian tank fleet is estimated to include 2,700 active vehicles with over 15,000 in storage. While formidable in number, it is important to note a large amount of those in storage would provide very little capability against modern armored forces. Furthermore, only about a 1,000 of the 2,700 active tanks are the most advanced T-72B3s or T-90s. Russian modernization efforts are largely focused on upgrading its existing fleet or remanufacturing vehicles previously placed in storage.⁴⁰⁷ Russia has recently announced that it may upgrade and return as many as 3,000 previously mothballed T-80 tanks to service to bolster its ground combat power.

Financial constraints have been a consistent barrier to the development of new ground combat systems; however, Russia has recently unveiled a new family of ground combat vehicles, including the much-touted T-14 Armata. With a number of extremely advanced systems including a radar-based target system adapted from fighter aircraft, this vehicle has caused concern among some Western analysts.⁴⁰⁸ It is exceptionally expensive, though, costing an estimated 60 to 75 percent more than a U.S. M1 Abrams tank.⁴⁰⁹ This has led to the MoD substantially lowering its order and it is unclear if production will be further curtailed due to ongoing Western sanctions.⁴¹⁰ Further, Russia's decision to return a portion of the T-80 fleet to service does not indicate confidence in the T-14 program or timeline.

The Russian military has also seen limited results modernizing its infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), a prominent feature of fighting in Eastern Ukraine. The

Soviet-developed BMP-3 and its successor the BMP-3M have been reliable IFVs for the Russian military and are heavily armed compared with Western equivalents. These IFVs are complemented by older BMP-2s and a host of wheeled armored combat vehicles. Despite past success, the aging BMP-3 is growing obsolete and the Russian MoD rejected the option of buying additional ones in 2011 in favor of developing a completely new IFV, the Kurganets-25. This vehicle is based on the same platform as the T-14 tank. It faces similar delays due to budgetary limitations and is still in the testing phase.⁴¹¹

The Russian military also maintains a deadly arsenal of antiarmor missiles carried by attack helicopters, vehicles, and individual soldiers. Two of the most recent examples are the excellent 9M133 Kornet (AT-14 Spirig-gan) and 9M123 Khризantema (AT-15 Springer). The Kornet is man portable and has been used extensively in combat in the Middle East. Reports indicate that the Kornet has penetrated the armor of U.S. M1 Abrams sold to both Iraq and Saudi Arabia.⁴¹² Russia still relies on the tested RPG-7 as its primary individual antiarmor weapon. These rugged weapons are often equipped with enhanced warheads that offer greater penetration against modern armor. According to Russian media, the army has taken delivery of the new RPG-30 antiarmor weapon.⁴¹³ This innovative weapon uses two rockets launched in quick succession in order to defeat an adversary vehicle equipped with explosive reactive armor (ERA) and active protection systems (APS).

As mentioned previously, Russia has long prioritized artillery, and its long-range artillery capabilities are impressive, especially with regards to the volume of fire Russia is able to generate. Russian artillery doctrine favors volume over precision and each brigade contains a sizable artillery contingent including both tube and rocket-based systems. The backbone of the Russian artillery force is the 152mm MSTA howitzer, which is produced in both towed and self-propelled versions. These guns outrange the U.S. self-propelled M109 howitzer—although it has comparable (or inferior) performance to several allied howitzers such as the German PzH 2000 and French CAESAR. Russia is developing an advanced self-propelled howitzer to replace the MSTA-S.⁴¹⁴ The Koalitsiya-SV is beginning low-rate initial production, and it may be the longest-range conventional howitzer in existence.⁴¹⁵

Unlike NATO forces, which collectively field a single caliber of rocket artillery, Russia deploys light (122 mm), medium (220 mm), and heavy (300 mm) multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS). Each military district in Russia maintains a separate MLRS brigade in addition to the systems organic to Russian maneuver units. Operations in Ukraine have demonstrated the tremendous volume of fire that these systems are capable of producing and their ability to dominate the battlefield. Russia is planning to upgrade its rocket artillery capabilities in the coming years by fielding upgraded versions of its 122 mm, 220 mm, and 300 mm rocket munitions to

improve both their range and the types of targets they can engage. Many of these upgrades are meant to enhance capability against maneuvering armored targets.⁴¹⁶

In eastern Ukraine, Russian ground forces have demonstrated the ability to use small unmanned aerial systems (UAS) to conduct reconnaissance, acquire targets, and direct artillery strikes with increased accuracy. UAS capabilities vary from using small commercial octo- and quadcopters to drop incendiary and fragmentation grenades on front line troops to using larger tactical systems for artillery spotting and electronic warfare.

RUSSIAN ARTILLERY DOCTRINE FAVORS VOLUME OVER PRECISION

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Russian ground forces have also emphasized large numbers of snipers in operations in eastern Ukraine. This comes after sniper companies were added to their brigade structure in 2011.⁴¹⁷ In addition to conducting reconnaissance, snipers are used to influence and channelize the movement of enemy formations in order to concentrate targets for artillery.

Special Forces

Russia has a number of military (and some police and paramilitary) organizations that can be categorized as special forces. These forces include Russia's airborne forces (VDV) and various "special designation" (spetsnaz) units that exist across the military services, internal security



Russia will likely continue to rely on its special operations forces, such as the Airborne Forces (VDV), in future operations.

Baltic Sea, December 2014

Credit: Russian Ministry of Defense

services, intelligence services, and other organizations. Russia has relied heavily on its special forces to spearhead its military operations in Kosovo, Georgia, Crimea, eastern Ukraine, and Syria. This reliance speaks to the capabilities and readiness of Russian special forces compared to regular Russian ground forces.

Russia's special forces maintain a high percentage of professional soldiers and have higher manning and readiness levels compared to Russian general-purpose forces. Some are fully professional, and even those that are not get priority in selecting conscripts.⁴¹⁸ All of these forces have received substantial funding and tend to receive some preference for equipment.⁴¹⁹ Spetsnaz brigades are used for a variety of missions including surveillance and reconnaissance, targeted action prior to larger military engagements, counterinsurgency, and operations that mirror Soviet-style "active measures."⁴²⁰

It is important to understand that Russian special forces, and spetsnaz forces in particular, are generally not comparable to the

Western conception of special operations forces (SOF). Most Russian spetsnaz units tend to be highly deployable but fairly large elite light infantry forces that more closely resemble the U.S. 75th Ranger Regiment and the U.S. and Royal Marines in terms of doctrine.⁴²¹

In recent years, Russia has created SOF units and organizational structure that more closely resembles Western SOF concepts. As part of the New Look reforms after the Georgia War, Russia created the Special Operations Forces Command (KSO) in 2011. The KSO became operational in 2013, and, according to Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov, is "primarily intended for missions outside Russia."⁴²² It is difficult to find detailed information about the structure of the command and what organizations fall within or outside it, but some Russian analysts believe that it borrows at least somewhat from the U.S. Special Operations Command model in terms of serving as an umbrella organization to coordinate the myriad special forces units across the military and

security services. It seems more plausible that the force is more of a branch within the Russian armed forces. Others have speculated that the command remains relatively nascent, and comprises just a few specific units.⁴²³

The MoD also plans to grow the VDV, which remains an independent arm of the military, nearly doubling its size from 40,000 personnel to 72,000 by 2019.⁴²⁴ Despite the aforementioned efforts to improve the readiness of the regular Russian forces, future operations will likely continue to rely heavily on the VDV, spetsnaz, and the KSO.

Recent Military Operations: Ukraine and Syria

Russia's recent military operations in Ukraine and Syria provide a window into Russia's current capabilities and capacity in action. As outlined in the Chapter 2 case study, initial operations in Crimea relied heavily on special operations forces and leveraged

Russia's units stationed in Sevastopol. Russian forces were able to rapidly take control of key infrastructure and political sites such as the Crimean parliament. Once these were secured, Russian conventional forces moved in.

The seizure of Crimea was an imperfect test of Russian capabilities, however, because Russian forces faced limited resistance. Russia had the infrastructure in place to quickly and easily move forces in due to its existing bases on the peninsula. Although Crimea was a successful military operation, its unique

has continuously denied its direct involvement, often opting to hide its forces among local separatists, mercenaries, and "volunteers" from Russia. That said, Russia appears to maintain a robust coterie of "advisers" to provide, and often operate, a wide range of its own equipment—and, it seems, sometimes move into command roles as needed. The majority of this equipment is older Soviet-era equipment, although a few newer systems have popped up, including thermobaric artillery and air defense systems.

ALTHOUGH CRIMEA WAS A SUCCESSFUL MILITARY OPERATION, ITS UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS ARE UNLIKELY TO BE REPLICABLE ELSEWHERE.

characteristics are unlikely to be replicable elsewhere. One lesson lies in Russia's use of subterfuge and *maskirovka*, operations that deflect attention from and/or disguise one's actual intentions. Russia employed its special forces as deniable forces, the so-called "little green men," who wore uniforms without insignia and masqueraded as local militia members. These efforts gave Russia some level of plausible deniability, contributed to the overall state of confusion in the West and Kyiv, and potentially limited the Ukrainian military response.

The ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine has demonstrated both new Russian capabilities and persistent weaknesses. Russia

For the most part, the fighting in eastern Ukraine has devolved into World War I-style trench warfare, albeit with a modern twist. Russian forces have demonstrated some creative applications by blending new technology with old systems. For example, UAS and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities have been used to target massed artillery fires. Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe, described Russia's EW capabilities in eastern Ukraine as "eye watering."⁴²⁵ Russia may have also demonstrated some limited, albeit innovative, cyber capabilities. Some reports have suggested that malware was planted in a smartphone

application used by Ukrainian military personnel to process targeting data. According to those reports, Russian military intelligence then exploited the information to determine the location of Ukrainian forces.⁴²⁶ Skeptics, however, noted discrepancies between these stories and Ukrainian casualty data, among other things, and the Ukrainian Defense Ministry rejected the reports as false.⁴²⁷

Russian operations in Syria, by contrast, have shown Russia's capability to project and sustain an expeditionary force, defying the expectations of many Western observers. Operations in Syria have showcased improvements in Russian airpower and demonstrated an ability to conduct operations with extended air and sea lines of communication.⁴²⁸ The military has also demonstrated improved command and control capabilities and the capacity to maintain a relatively high operational tempo. Airstrikes in Syria averaged 60 per day from October through December 2015.⁴²⁹ Further, improvements in airlift and sealift facilitated an eventual buildup of more than 3,500 troops, approximately 70 aircraft, and several anti-aircraft systems. While this represents a major advance for Russian expeditionary capabilities, it is important to recognize the relatively limited scale of the operation and presence of existing Russian infrastructure in Syria. Persistent gaps in Russian lift are illustrated by the reliance on several older reflagged Turkish cargo vessels to move supplies into theater by sea via the "Syria Express."

Russia has touted Syrian operations as a testing ground for its

latest weapon systems. However, Russia's operations in Syria—including the first operational use of long-range cruise missiles, first use of direct attack PGMs, and deployment of its frontline combat aircraft—seem to be more about demonstration (and potentially arms sales) than military utility. For example, Russia has relied on PGMs for approximately 20 percent of its airstrikes.⁴³⁰ Other tactics—such as the circumnavigation of Europe by Tu-160 strategic bombers before conducting strikes in Syria—appear to be driven by military posturing rather than strictly operational utility. Russia's most obvious “deployment as demonstration” move may be that of its sole aircraft carrier to the eastern Mediterranean in late 2016.

Russian operations in Ukraine and Syria illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of its armed forces—within their specific contexts. Tactical innovations in Ukraine are unsettling—but small in scale. Syria demonstrates modern capabilities, but it is unclear how these systems would fare in a more contested environment. The combination of these two fights demonstrates Russia's capacity to sustain two conflicts and mobilize forces both near Russia and further afield, which some observers would have considered relatively surprising just a year or two earlier. However, these operations are sufficiently small in scale to allow Russia to pick and choose what it deploys and where. In a broader conflict, this benefit would disappear. Moreover, Syria, while impressive in its demonstration of power projection, is an air and special-forces operation in support of Syrian (and to a lesser extent Iranian) capabilities. While the

inherent coordination aspects are impressive, the operation is not testing Russian combined arms or its ability to mount a wholly Russian operation in another country.

Conclusions

Russia's reliance on a range of tools to attain its goals has been termed “hybrid” by a number of analysts. This terminology may make it seem newer than it is. Carl von Clausewitz wrote that war is an extension of politics by other means. Neither he nor other military thinkers have thought that the transition from one to the other was a clean break. Political-military success has long meant harnessing all means of political, economic, and military means to achieve political goals, including mixing conventional and unconventional tactics across all domains, utilizing overt and covert operations, and dispatching information campaigns. Russia has not so much perfected these techniques as, in its efforts to keep operations limited and costs low, combined elements of them to striking effect.

This cautions against anyone concerned about Russia's capabilities focusing exclusively on the military aspect. Though there are very real scenarios in which Western militaries could find themselves at a disadvantage. Russia is likely, despite some level of military showmanship, to continue to try to leverage its nonmilitary and indirect military tools to greater effect—except, as the case study analysis demonstrates, when it thinks that military action can be undertaken in a way that is comparatively cheap, effective, and low risk. Moscow cannot,

however, be sure of the Western response, particularly where it is unclear on so-called redlines or believes them unlikely to be enforced by Western militaries. This, combined with Russia's early successes of the last few years, creates a pattern of experimentation that opens it to overreach. Surprising success in Crimea led to more adventurism in eastern Ukraine. This did not go as well, even if Russia was able to glean other benefits.

Similarly, while Russia was able to bolster Assad in Syria, Moscow has no more of a long-term solution to that conflict than does anyone else, and as Russian citizens fighting against Assad in Syria continue to return home, it may find that the war comes home with them. Likewise, if Russia determines that its political interference in the U.S. elections is something to be attempted elsewhere, its efforts could easily backfire, damaging its influence and reputation, and precluding the deals and arrangements it seeks to enhance its security in the long term. Moreover, the Putin regime is extremely sensitive to threats to domestic public opinion. Despite its substantial successes in shaping the public mood, the Kremlin remains concerned that the Russian people might turn against the regime. If they are right to worry, the combination of a weak economy, nationalists frustrated with the war in Ukraine, and Islamists angry about Syria could yet lead to upheaval that limits Russian capacity for action.



CHAPTER

04



U.S. and Allied Instruments of Power

Developing a strategy toward Russia requires not only a thorough understanding of Russia's capabilities, but also a clear understanding of the United States' own toolkit. As during the Cold War, U.S. instruments of power can contribute to the preservation of peace by strengthening diplomatic relationships, promoting economic stability, and deterring aggression. They can also be wielded to coerce and punish states that would seek to challenge the peace. For nearly a quarter-century, the United States and its allies have not had to direct significant political, economic, or defense resources against a real or potential threat from Moscow. These circumstances have now changed and so must the application of the U.S. and allied toolkit.

This chapter describes the most important political, economic, and military tools available to the United States in implementing a security strategy toward Russia. Of course, one of the most valuable assets available to the United States is its alliances, which can amplify the strategic impact of nearly every action taken by the United States. This chapter, therefore, considers certain allied tools, where appropriate, with the acknowledgment that the United States will not be managing the Russia challenge alone. The analysis contained

below is focused primarily on the challenges that the United States faces on the European continent. This is not meant to suggest that Russia's ambitions are geographically limited. Europe, however, is where U.S. political, economic, and security interests come into greatest tension with Russian interests and where the stakes are arguably the highest beyond America's own shores.

Political and Diplomatic Instruments

Political and diplomatic tools serve as important points of leverage in managing the overall U.S. relationship with Russia. Russia's aggressive foreign policy has left it more isolated from the West in some respects and more engaged with it in others. While Russia's role in the international community already guarantees it a seat at the table on a range of issues where its

Putin will likely leverage Russia's hosting of the 2018 World Cup as an important propaganda tool to influence foreign audiences and bolster his position at home.

Zurich, Germany, December 2, 2010

Credit: Alexei Nikolsky/AFP/Getty Images



interests are at stake, including in Syria and Ukraine, its forcible reassertion of its status has enhanced its voice. Moreover, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia is able to veto or otherwise stymie resolutions put forth by the United States and its allies.

Balancing the reality that Russia cannot (and should not) be simply ignored with the need to impose real consequences for Russia's aggression will be a continuing challenge. Managing that challenge successfully will require nuance, creativity, coordination with allies, and credibility in terms of both promises and threats. Above all, it will require patience. Diplomacy often means playing the long game; its coercive tools are rarely designed to produce immediate results. Its mechanisms of offering rewards can be equally difficult to calibrate. Patience and persistence in the application of tools such as diplomatic sanctions, nonrecognition policies, and public diplomacy is, therefore, necessary.

Diplomatic Sanctions

Diplomatic sanctions are a common tool of statecraft employed by both the United States and Russia to convey disapproval. Diplomatic sanctions can include canceling meetings, summits, or exchanges; expelling or recalling diplomats; cutting off avenues of communication; downgrading diplomatic relations; and other measures. As such, they can be a double-edged sword in that they eliminate traditional mechanisms to discuss disagreements and conflict—making it more difficult for both parties to find a path forward.

Following Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the United States and many of its allies imposed diplomatic sanctions (alongside economic sanctions) by suspending certain high-level government-to-government contacts. This included the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission established by President Obama and President Medvedev in 2009 as a formal bilateral mechanism to manage different aspects of the U.S.-Russia relationship.⁴³¹ NATO

also suspended meetings of the NATO-Russia Council and practical NATO-Russia cooperation, and Russia was disinvented from the G-8. Most recently, in late December 2016, President Obama expelled 35 Russian diplomats and intelligence operatives from the United States in response to Russia's interference in the U.S. presidential election.⁴³²

Often diplomatic sanctions are met with tit-for-tat reprisals or countermoves—though Russia notably resisted such action following the expulsion of the Russian diplomats and intelligence operatives noted above. Imposing blanket bans on communications or preconditions to negotiations rarely results in an adversary changing its behavior or attaining policy goals. Under certain circumstances, however, diplomatic sanctions can be symbolically powerful and help shape public perceptions, as well as the bilateral agenda. In this regard, U.S. and European leaders would do well to continue to coordinate their diplomatic approach to Russia.

Boycotts are another form of diplomatic sanctions. In 1980, the United States and some of its allies boycotted the Summer Olympics in Moscow following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. More recently, in a blow to Russian prestige, most major world leaders boycotted Russia's Victory Day Parade commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.⁴³³ One promising opportunity to send a powerful and public message may lie in crafting a joint approach to the 2018 World Cup in Russia. The 2018 World Cup could plausibly be seen as the "crown jewel" of Putin's prestige-seeking foreign policy. Like the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Putin likely views the World Cup as an important propaganda tool to influence foreign audiences and bolster his position at home, particularly ahead of the 2018 Russian presidential election.⁴³⁴ Protesting the World Cup—either by agreeing that no Western leader will attend or by staging an alternative event—would be unlikely to change Russia's behavior in and of itself, but it could deny Putin the strategic messaging opportunity he desires and offer one instead to the United States and its allies. This said, the United States would not be effective with a World Cup-focused measure on its own—a much broader coalition of countries that are more visible in the sport would be required in order to have real impact.

Nonrecognition Policy

The United States and the vast majority of the international community have adopted a nonrecognition policy toward Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea, in addition to refusing

recognition is often accompanied by other types of sanctions and diplomatic restrictions on engagement. For instance, U.S. diplomats refused to have contact with officials from the Baltic Soviet Socialist Republics. Similar restrictions were imposed by

the Obama administration regarding engagements with Crimean officials.

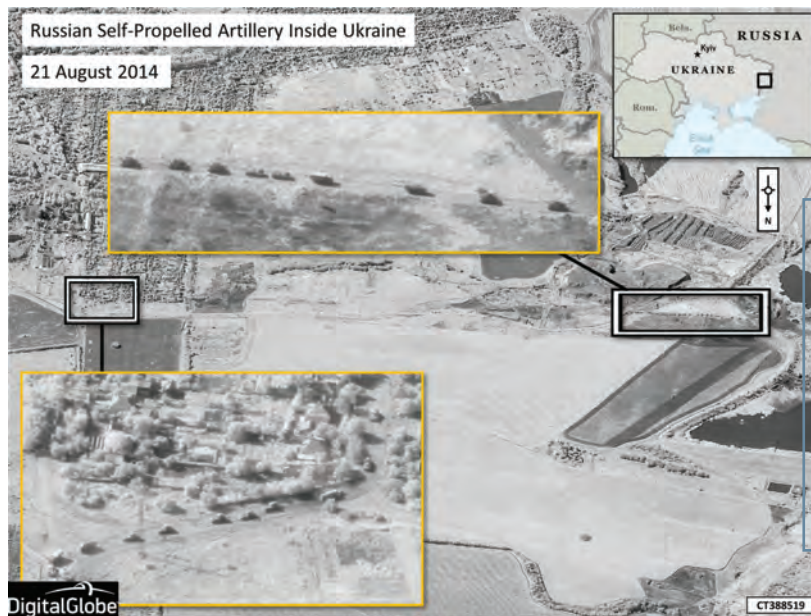
Critics of the nonrecognition policy may argue that there are reasons the Trump administration should explore changing U.S. policy toward Crimea. It could be viewed, for example, as an irritant in the relationship with Russia on an issue some might consider peripheral given

more pressing concerns. Some might seek to portray Crimea as a unique case in terms of the controversial circumstances of Khrushchev's 1954 transfer of the territory to Soviet Ukraine, and so may suggest that recognition would not necessarily establish a precedent or fundamentally change U.S. foreign policy positions. U.S. recognition could even be viewed as a potential bargaining chip; Russia likely places value on attaining recognition of its claim to the territory, and might be willing to offer concessions to the United States on other issues.

The downsides of recognition, however, would outweigh any potential benefits. Recognition would reward Russia for breaking international law, as well as

THE UNIQUE POWER AND POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE WORLD MEANS A CHANGE IN ITS NONRECOGNITION POLICY COULD UNDERMINE THE ESTABLISHED NORMS OF STATE BEHAVIOR...

to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia. Such positions send powerful signals of solidarity to the aggrieved and disapproval to the aggressor, and upholds a long-standing tenet of U.S. foreign policy that refuses to recognize territorial changes committed by acts of aggression. This policy dates back to the Stimson Doctrine from the early 1930s when the United States refused to recognize the territorial conquests of Imperial Japan, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany. U.S. nonrecognition policy was also applied to the Soviet Union's 1940 annexation of the three Baltic States, a policy that stood firm throughout the Cold War until they were able to gain their independence in 1991.⁴³⁵ Non-



In 2014, NATO released satellite imagery showing Russian combat troops inside Ukraine to push back against Russian misinformation.

Ukraine, August 21, 2014

Credit: NATO/DigitalGlobe

its violation of numerous multi-lateral and bilateral agreements to respect Ukraine's sovereignty. This could make it harder for the United States to hold Russia accountable on other commitments, particularly toward Kyiv.⁴³⁶ Recognition could also have severe consequences for U.S. relations with Ukraine, Georgia, and the many NATO allies who would be strongly opposed. It would weaken a key principle of post-World War II international relations—the unacceptability of altering borders by force—and embolden Russia and other would-be aggressor states, setting a dangerous precedent in a region littered with potential tinderboxes. Any quid pro quo would imply that attaining recognition of conquered territory is simply a matter of cutting a good deal with Washington. The unique power and position of the United States in the world means a change in its nonrecognition policy could undermine the established norms of state behavior more broadly. Even if the United States made an effort to portray recognition

of the Crimean annexation as a one-time only event, it would risk opening a Pandora's box of other predatory behavior by countries around the world.

Public Diplomacy and Information Operations

The Putin regime's crackdown on independent media and journalism are creating a closed-off information space dominated by Kremlin-controlled outlets. U.S. public diplomacy is an important tool that the United States can use to communicate truthful information to the Russian people and advance U.S. foreign policy goals. U.S. public diplomacy efforts were a pillar of its approach toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War, conducted mainly through the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), which was largely incorporated into the State Department in 1999.⁴³⁷ Today, U.S. international broadcasting is conducted by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), an independent federal agency that broadcasts Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty to foreign

populations including in Russia and other post-Soviet countries. Other functions for public diplomacy exist, such as education and cultural exchanges and person-to-person diplomacy within the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).⁴³⁸

Public diplomacy and other information tools can be useful for providing information to Russian and other foreign audiences to discredit Kremlin propaganda and misinformation. Setting the record straight against a torrent of direct and indirect sources of misinformation can be bolstered, in certain cases, with declassified intelligence and other means that force Russia to defend its claims.⁴³⁹ For example, U.S. and NATO public releases of satellite photography showing Russian combat forces fighting inside Ukraine offered indisputable evidence to global media outlets that Russia was lying about its involvement in the conflict.⁴⁴⁰

U.S. efforts to push back against Russian propaganda have gen-

erally been insufficient to date. Calls to reestablish the USIA are frequent, but this would not be a panacea to combat modern disinformation tactics. As one commentator put it, “let’s stop looking at a mid-twentieth century solution for a 21st century problem.”⁴⁴¹ The information tools available to the United States for a successful strategy toward Russia are in need of modernization and adaptation to global communication flows. There will need to be a top-to-bottom reevaluation of the authorities, tools, organizations, and resources dedicated to public diplomacy and other tools available to U.S. policymakers to compete with Russia in the information space with a clear strategy and purpose. Covert tools, such as Military Information Support Operations (MISO), can also be valuable but they are not sufficient today. A modern way forward must leverage popular and emerging information technologies, including social media. The United States should learn from the experience of the corporate world and other countries to develop methods and mechanisms that can effectively target messages to audiences and ensure that those messages reach their destinations. Private-sector messages and counter-propaganda efforts, especially independent media and respected civil society organizations, will be more important than ever.

Economic Tools

U.S. policymakers should not underestimate the value of economic tools in achieving policy ends toward Russia. While Putin has weathered Russia’s

current economic troubles with little damage to his popularity, Russia’s economic strength and dynamism pales in comparison to the United States and its European allies and partners. Over the long term, Putin’s political fortunes and his efforts to reas-

RUSSIA’S ECONOMIC STRENGTH AND DYNAMISM PALES IN COMPARISON TO THE UNITED STATES AND ITS EUROPEAN ALLIES AND PARTNERS.

sert Russia’s role in global affairs necessitate an end to stagnation, if not a return to the substantial economic growth Russia enjoyed in the mid-2000s. Russia’s failure to find effective economic alternatives to Europe (either through import substitutions or trade with China) mean that Putin will, sooner or later, need to restore Russia’s trade relations and access to capital markets in the West. U.S. economic tools—including economic sanctions; trade policy and investment policy; and energy policy—are an asymmetric advantage and source of leverage that should continue to be cohesively applied in the United States’ strategic approach toward Russia.

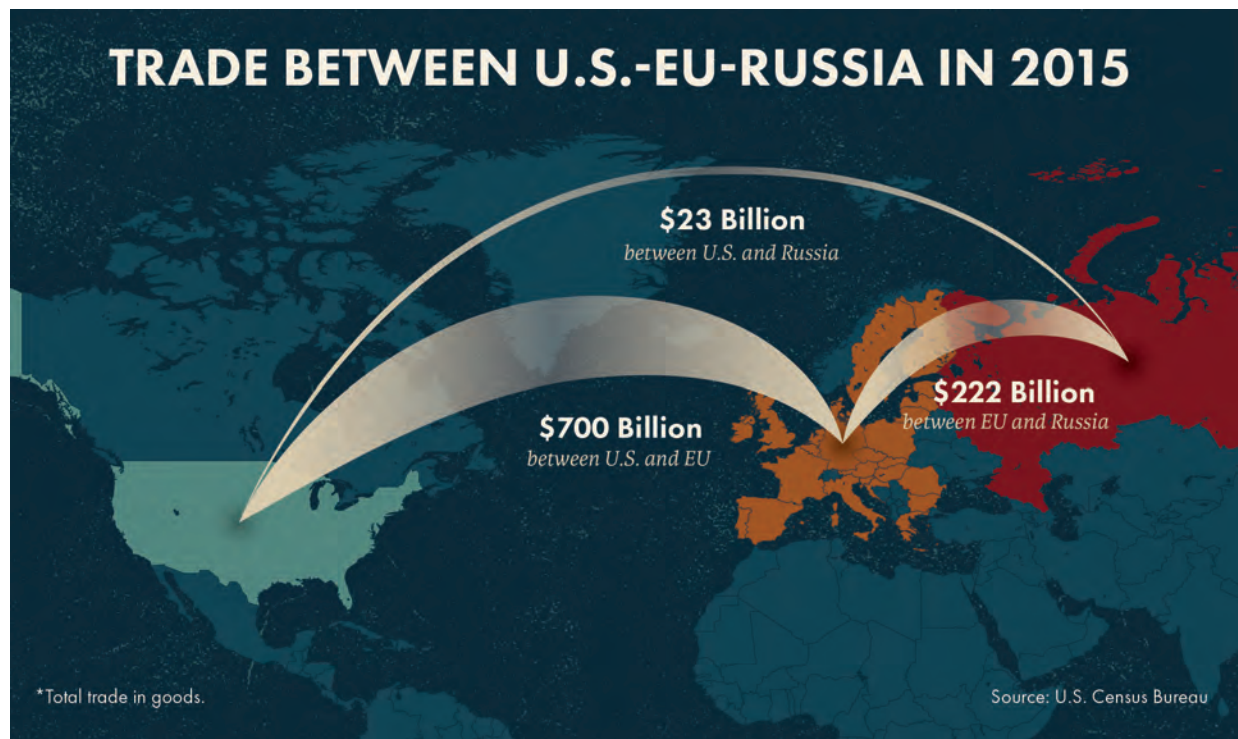
Economic Sanctions

Economic sanctions have played a central role in U.S. policy toward Russia since the start of the Ukraine crisis, resulting in added strain to Russia’s fragile economy and heightened tensions with Moscow.⁴⁴² Decades

of fine-tuning have transformed sanctions from what was once a blunt instrument of economic coercion into a precision tool that can be used against specific foreign companies, groups, and individuals. U.S. policymakers have an array of sanctions options at their disposal, ranging from targeted sanctions (or smart sanctions) against specific individuals and entities intensifying toward comprehensive sanctions that can restrict all economic activi-

ties. To achieve their desired objectives, however, sanctions must be nested within a comprehensive strategy that blends other elements of U.S. power and coercion and matched by U.S. allies and partners. The Trump administration will face crucial decisions early regarding the future of Russia sanctions, including whether to strengthen, maintain, or lift them and to what end, and how to ensure continued unity with the European Union and others.

The Obama administration first imposed targeted sanctions against Russia in response to its seizure of Crimea in mid-March 2014. Additional tiers of sanctions were imposed over the following weeks and months—with



each tier growing in scope and intensity—as Moscow’s aggression expanded into eastern Ukraine. Current U.S. sanctions on Russia include: (1) asset freezes and travel bans against Putin’s close associates and officials involved in operations in Ukraine; (2) asset freezes and restrictions on transactions with specific businesses with close ties to the Kremlin; (3) prohibitions on certain financial transactions on specified Russian financial, energy, and defense firms; (4) prohibitions on exports of technology, goods, and services to the Russian oil industry; (5) restrictions on defense and dual-use exports to Russia; and (6) a blanket ban on dealings with Russian-occupied Crimea.⁴⁴³ U.S. sanctions on Russia related to the Ukraine crisis are not the entire extent of the U.S. sanctions regime. In response to Russia’s influence campaign during the U.S. presidential election, President Obama levied economic sanctions on the GRU and FSB, four

Russian intelligence officials, and several technology companies.⁴⁴⁴ In the past, other U.S. administrations have applied sanctions on Russian arms companies for their dealings with Iran.

to the more extensive trade and financial ties between the European Union and Russia.⁴⁴⁵ Strong U.S. leadership and coordination with the European Union has been essential in maintain-

DECADES OF FINE-TUNING HAVE TRANSFORMED SANCTIONS FROM WHAT WAS ONCE A BLUNT INSTRUMENT OF ECONOMIC COERCION INTO A PRECISION TOOL

Ukraine-related sanctions have proven particularly impactful because they are multilateral. The EU has imposed a similar set of targeted economic sanctions, which have had a far greater impact on Russia’s economy than their U.S. counterparts due

ing consensus among the bloc’s 28 European capitals, many of which face domestic resistance to the high cost that sanctions have had on their local economies.⁴⁴⁶ The United States has also worked diligently to rally participation from every non-

EU member of NATO, with the exception of Turkey, along with major non-NATO U.S. allies including Australia, Japan, and South Korea, magnifying the impact of the sanctions.⁴⁴⁷

While economic sanctions have impacted the Russian economy, gauging their effectiveness as an instrument to change Russia's policy is difficult and reflects a broader debate about the efficacy of sanctions as tools of statecraft.⁴⁴⁸ U.S. and EU leaders have stated that the objective of their sanctions are to impose costs on Russia for its behavior to deter future aggression, attain Russian compliance with the Minsk agreement, and force it to respect Ukrainian sovereignty (i.e., withdrawal from Crimea).⁴⁴⁹ Critics have pointed out that sanctions have failed to change the Kremlin's behavior in eastern Ukraine or force it to retreat from Crimea, while imposing a significant burden on European markets.⁴⁵⁰ Senior U.S. officials have likewise acknowledged that sanctions have so far done little to change the facts on the ground.⁴⁵¹ Supporters of sanctions, however, contend that they represent a practical, low-risk course of action that, taken in combination with other measures, have the potential to affect an outcome over the long term and send a unified signal in defense of the international system, serving as a deterrent to other would-be aggressor states while still imposing costs on Moscow.⁴⁵² There is, indeed, some evidence that the threat of further Western sanctions may have deterred Russia from pressing for greater military gains in Ukraine in mid-2014.⁴⁵³

The Trump administration has a range of options available to it as it considers how sanctions will fit into its overall approach to Russia. We will briefly review the alternatives here (i.e., strengthen or lift), and make recommendations in Chapter 5. While each course of action entails risks and tradeoffs, there are two considerations that should apply to any decision. First, changes in U.S. sanctions should be closely coordinated with the European Union and other allies and partners to ensure continued multilateral cooperation. This is also important to help preserve the West's ability to effectively employ sanctions against other actors in the future. Second, changes in sanctions should also entail close coordination with Congress. The sanctions on Russia to date have had strong bipartisan support in Congress. While the president has traditionally enjoyed flexibility to impose, modify, or lift sanctions by executive order and is often granted waiver authority in sanctions legislation, some members have expressed interest in avenues to limit the president's unilateral ability to lift sanctions on Russia.⁴⁵⁴

Strengthening sanctions: Below is a menu of options for strengthening sanctions on Russia, divided across three illustrative categories of intensity (high, medium, and low) that could be used to support a range of different policies toward Russia. Any ratcheting up across or within these categories should be tied to specific policy objectives in order to make clear to Russia (and participating allies and partners) what must be done for the sanctions to be lifted. The risks of escalation must also be

thoroughly assessed. Certain high-intensity options start to encompass a comprehensive economic embargo, and may be considered tantamount to an act of war in some cases. In assessing options to strengthen the U.S. and EU sanctions regime, it will be important to keep in mind the potential impacts to Western businesses, as well as Moscow's ability to impose additional counter-sanctions, particularly targeting the European Union (given the comparatively low level of economic interaction between Russia and the United States). Absent significant new aggressive actions by Russia, the United States will also likely have difficulty gaining multilateral support for sanctions that are seen as overly punitive.⁴⁵⁵

Additionally, the more the United States uses its leadership of the global financial system to pressure Russia and other states with sanctions, the greater incentives Russia and others have to develop alternative financial institutions and mechanisms over the long term to avoid Western economic coercion. The development of alternative financial systems is already underway. A 2014 report by the Russian newspaper *Kommer-sant* showed that more than 90 percent of transactions with Russian banks crossed international borders.⁴⁵⁶ Russia, seeing its vulnerability in the international financial markets, is looking to diversify away from its reliance on SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) and other western banking mechanisms by developing its own. This diversification has many consequences, including decreased security for the av-

EXAMPLES OF SANCTIONS OPTIONS⁴⁵⁷

High-Intensity	Medium-Intensity	Low-Intensity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrict transfers of international funds to and from Russia, for example, by banning Russia from SWIFT. • Severely restrict Russia’s access to Western capital markets and financing with stringent prohibitions on investments in Russia, extending loans to Russia or buying bonds and equities. • Prohibit financial transactions, direct or indirect, with the Russian government. • Limit Russia’s ability to conduct foreign currency transactions. • Impose significant restrictions or an outright embargo on the importation of Russian oil and natural gas. • Freeze Russian government assets held overseas by Western financial institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impose modest restrictions on access to Western capital markets such as imposing limits on loans and credits amounts that could be extended to specific institutions. • Impose additional conditions on financial transactions with targeted Russian firms. • Cancel or prohibit specific large and high-visibility investments, deals, or projects with Russia. • Broad embargo on military sales and related material to Russia and bar importation of Russian arms. • Expand export-licensing requirements for goods and services to Russia. • Limit investments in the Russian energy sector or limit investments to existing projects. • Prohibit transfers of equipment and technology for oil and natural gas extraction. • Restrict Western firms’ ability to provide underwriting services for specific Russian firms or sectors. • Impose sanctions on firms that provide support services to the Russian military and security services. • Restrict certain forms of travel to Russia such as tourism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand asset freezes and travel bans to cover additional Russian officials. • Expand prohibitions on specific Russian firms with ties to the Kremlin and Russian security services. • Add additional—but still limited—restrictions on specified Russian firms’ access to Western capital markets, such as limiting the maturity periods for transferable securities or blacklisting additional firms. • Deepen energy-sector sanctions with restrictions on providing financial services for Russian oil and natural gas exploration and production. • Expand energy sanctions to including the provision of technologies, goods, and services for additional types of oil projects and to cover natural gas projects. • Ban financing and exports of specified sensitive technologies and dual-use items used by the Russian military or security services. • Place limited restrictions on imports or exports of a specific good such as luxury items. • Cancel government-to-government contracts. • Expand targeted sectoral sanctions to additional sectors such as mining and machinery.

erage user as well as a lessened ability to monitor the financial transactions of terrorist groups and other illicit organizations. Breaking the relative neutrality of systems such as SWIFT will further encourage states like Russia to develop and take part in alternative systems. While strengthened sanctions that take broader aim at Russia's economy, the 12th largest in the world, could be more effective at inducing political concessions from Moscow, they could also have volatile and unre-

in the past pursued secondary sanctions as a means to intensify their impact. Secondary sanctions are designed to force third parties to abide by U.S. prohibitions or face punishments themselves. In the case of the secondary sanctions imposed to halt Iran's nuclear program, for example, the United States gave foreign companies a stark choice: either cut business ties with Iran or risk being shut out of the U.S. financial system.

While secondary sanctions can increase the effective reach of

violations of their sovereignty. Secondary sanctions also pose a long-term risk of blemishing the global attractiveness of the U.S. financial system if the free flow of capital becomes constrained by numerous U.S. sanctions regimes. Secondary sanctions would be a potent yet controversial tool if levied in the case of Russia (a much bigger player in the global economy than Iran).

Lifting sanctions: The current U.S. sanctions on Russia were imposed by executive order under President Obama, which

President Trump could choose to rescind at any time unless Congress acts to codify them into law.⁴⁵⁹ Unilaterally lifting or easing sanctions irrespective of any changes in Russia's behavior would entail significant risks. Current U.S. and international sanctions are linked to Russia's implementation of the Minsk cease-fire agreements in eastern Ukraine and its return of Crimea to Ukraine. Removal or easing of the Minsk-related sanctions could induce further aggres-

sion by Russia in Ukraine and would certainly send a strong signal to Ukraine regarding the U.S. commitment (or lack thereof) to its territorial integrity. Likewise, both Moscow and Kyiv may view any lifting of the Crimea-related sanctions as de facto U.S. recognition of Crimea's annexation.

Moreover, any moves to lift sanctions in the absence of Russia's compliance with the United States' defined policy conditions could potentially be interpret-

THE CURRENT U.S. SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA WERE IMPOSED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER UNDER PRESIDENT OBAMA, WHICH PRESIDENT TRUMP COULD CHOOSE TO RESCIND AT ANY TIME UNLESS CONGRESS ACTS TO CODIFY THEM INTO LAW.

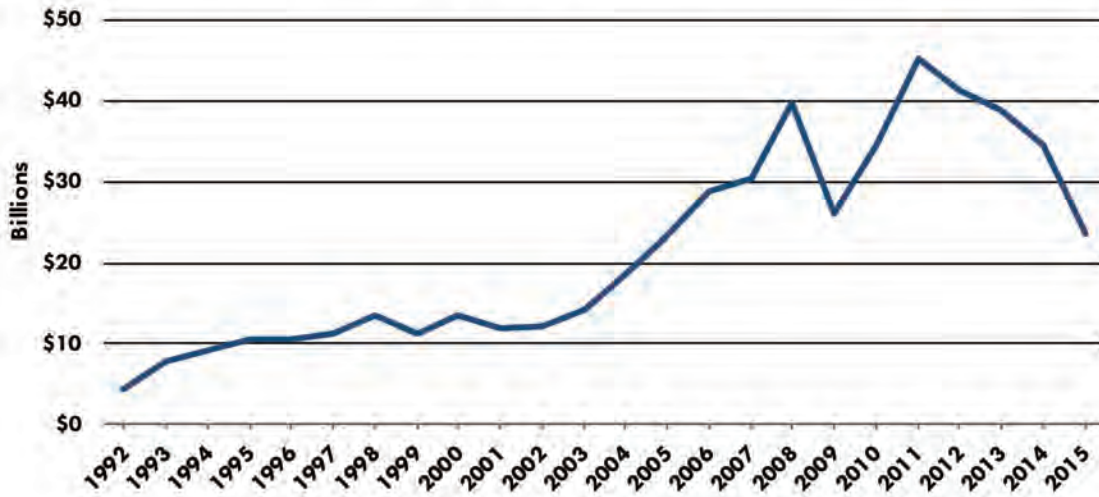
dictable economic consequences and ripple effects on the global economy that will need to be carefully weighed.

In addition to the above Russia-specific sanctions, the United States could levy sanctions on third states that force a choice between access to the U.S. economy or the Russian economy. Since U.S. sanctions only restrict U.S. persons and entities from doing business with those designated, the United States has

U.S. sanctions, as was the case with Iran, their use does entail significant tradeoffs. Former Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew warned that secondary sanctions should be used "only in the most exceptional circumstances, where—as with Iran—the threat is severe, where we have international consensus, and when ordinary sanctions have fallen short of their mark."⁴⁵⁸ Even close U.S. allies view secondary sanctions as

U.S.-RUSSIA TRADE VALUE 1992–2015

(Adjusted 2014 Dollars)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

ed by other would-be aggressor states as a weakening of U.S. resolve to oppose territorial aggression in all forms. Sanctions should only be lifted when Russia meets the defined conditions for removal in order to maintain U.S. credibility and incentivize further cooperation toward U.S. policy goals. A collapse of the European sanctions, a likely prospect in the absence of strong U.S. leadership in this context, would have similarly negative effects and would leave the United States with few options and little leverage.

Trade & Investment Policy

U.S. trade and investment policy is another important consideration in crafting a comprehensive strategy toward Russia. Despite the impact of Ukraine-related sanctions, the United States and Russia still maintain bilateral trade valued at about \$23 billion in 2015.⁴⁶⁰ While relatively minor from the U.S. perspective, it is significantly more valuable to Russia. The United States is Rus-

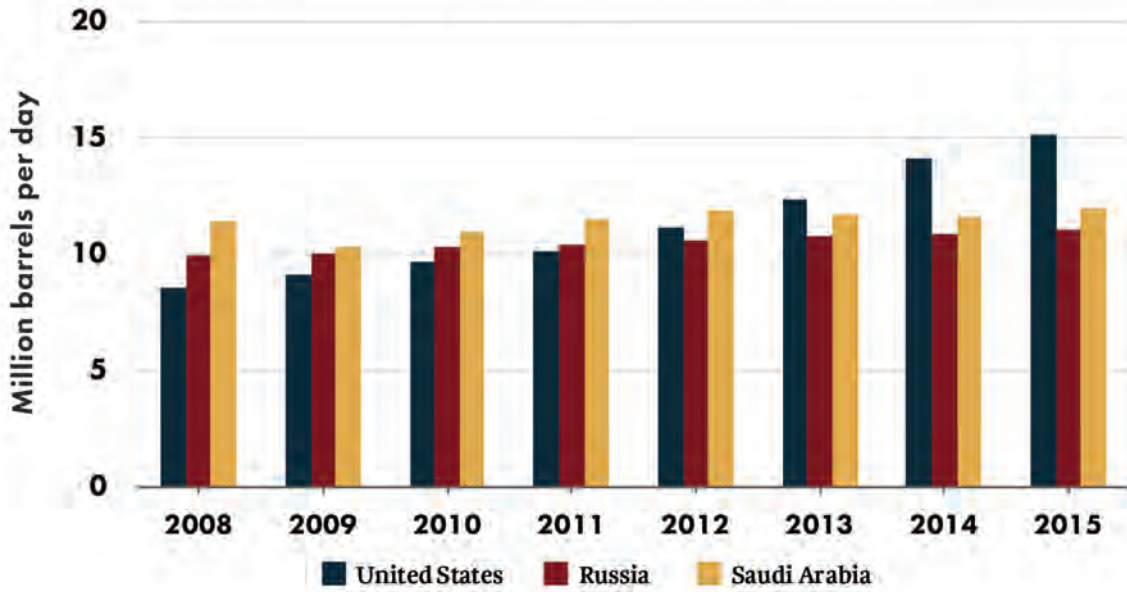
sia's sixth-largest trading partner and a crucial source of outside financing and investment.⁴⁶¹ To an extent, this offers Washington options to generate economic effects to either incentivize or punish Russian behavior.

U.S. trade and investment policy toward Russia has undergone significant changes in recent years. In 2012, the Obama administration and Congress worked together to end the last Cold War-era trade restrictions on Russia under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and extended normal trade relations to Moscow.⁴⁶² Bilateral trade had already begun to blossom even before that point, but had not yet matured before Russian aggression in Ukraine prompted the United States to impose sanctions.⁴⁶³ Coupled with heightened U.S.-Russian geopolitical tensions, sanctions contributed to the decline of bilateral trade by roughly 40 percent between 2013 and 2015.⁴⁶⁴ The Russian economy is highly dependent upon access to Western capital and financing. While most avenues

for access were not affected by current sanctions, the risk that additional sanctions could be imposed has spooked international investment markets, significantly dampening Western investment in Russia across the board.

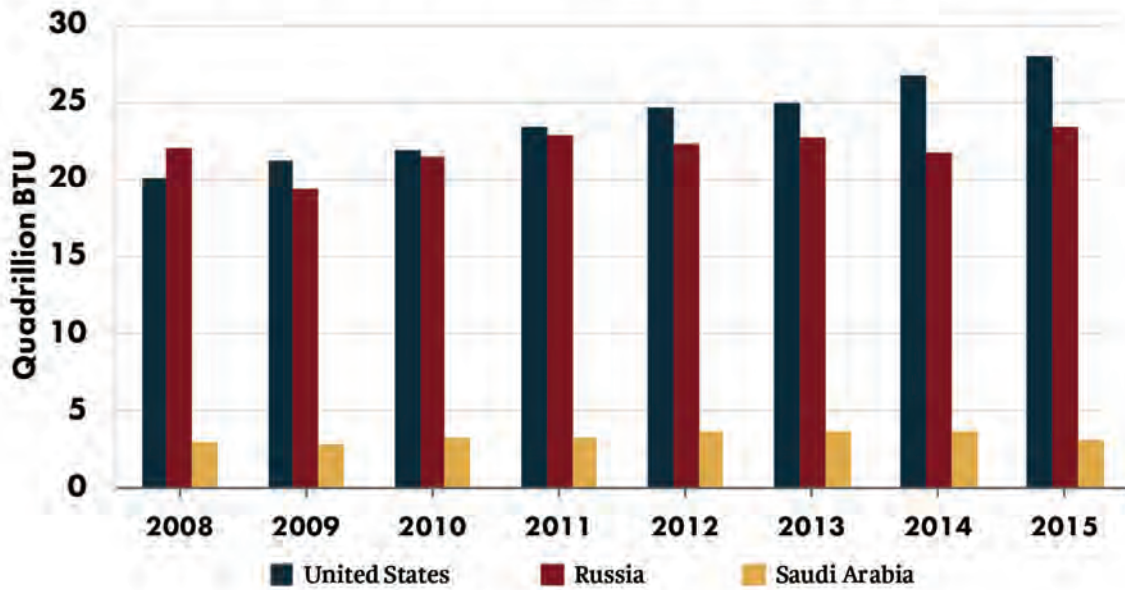
U.S. policymakers must consider how to leverage the trade relationships within the context of the triangle of economic ties between the United States, the European Union, and Russia. The United States and EU are each other's largest and most important trade and investment partners, with bilateral trade valued at nearly \$1.1 trillion in 2014.⁴⁶⁵ Closer U.S. and EU economic cooperation through agreements like the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) would continue to strengthen this relationship and could help American businesses, as well as bolster European governments vulnerable to Russian influence operations by giving a boost to their struggling economies. A more economically integrated EU-U.S. relation-

PETROLEUM PRODUCTION 2008–2015



Sources: EIA; Enerdata

NATURAL GAS PRODUCTION 2008–2015



Sources: EIA; Enerdata

ship would add significant leverage to the U.S. economic toolbox vis-à-vis Russia.

Energy Policy

Russia is the world's largest energy exporter and has enormous reserves of oil and natural gas. It is heavily dependent upon exports of hydrocarbons—crude oil and natural gas—to generate economic growth and fill its state coffers. The Kremlin also frequently uses its neighbors' dependency on its energy as a source of political leverage. The importance of energy to Russia's economy and foreign policy, however, also offers possible sources of leverage to the United States and its allies. The United States is the world's largest energy producer (when including coal) and a central actor in global energy markets. U.S. policymakers have a number of options at their disposal that can be used to either pressure or cooperate with Russia.

For a variety of reasons, the energy ties between the United States and Russia are relatively minimal, especially for such large energy players. By contrast, Russia and the European Union (and other European nations) are heavily dependent on each other in the energy sector. Some EU states made efforts to diversify their gas supplies following multiple disputes between Russia and Ukraine over transit fees that left a handful of countries without gas imports for two to three days in 2006 and almost three weeks in 2009.⁴⁶⁶ Diversification was elevated as political imperative within the European Union following the 2014 Ukraine crisis. It is not easy for Europe, however, due to long-term contract obliga-

tions and because Russia can offer more competitive prices than other natural gas producers, including the United States. Russia has stepped up efforts to solidify its energy relationships with major European countries like Germany and Turkey with the promise of secure energy through the development of more direct pipelines to Europe that will bypass Ukraine and other transit countries.

It has been suggested that the United States can support Europe's efforts to diversify natural gas supplies with liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports. There are, however, serious limitations on the extent that U.S. LNG can serve as a substitute or relieve Europe's dependency on Russia. The biggest factor is price. LNG is expensive given high transportation costs relative to cheap Russian natural gas delivered via pipeline. The limited pipeline connectivity between European countries with large LNG import capacity (such as Spain) and countries with high dependence on Russian natural gas is another obstacle.⁴⁶⁷ For example, the Baltic States and Finland import over 90 percent of their natural gas from Russia and are geographically isolated from the EU energy infrastructure.⁴⁶⁸ Central and Eastern European states such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary are highly dependent upon Russian gas imports but are better integrated into EU energy networks.⁴⁶⁹ U.S. energy policies that support LNG exports may be able to help, to some extent, decrease Russia's leverage over its European consumers by offering competitive alternatives when prices are high and acting as a

stopgap in the event of a major dispute. Moreover, supporting the growth of the global LNG market will help drive down prices and support an ongoing shift in regional natural gas markets that favor consumers rather than producers—weakening Russia's ability to leverage its advantage.⁴⁷⁰

The United States could choose to lift, maintain, or strengthen economic sanctions against the Russian energy industry and take other measures to encourage or discourage capital investment and technology that Russia needs to modernize its aging energy extraction infrastructure. Russia is increasingly in need of foreign investment to boost its aging energy industry, increase its efficiency, and develop new energy sources. Russia, for instance, does not have the domestic technology or financing to pursue offshore drilling in Arctic waters in the event that oil prices rise enough to make such an endeavor worthwhile.⁴⁷¹

In response to the Ukraine crisis, the United States and the European Union imposed targeted sanctions on four major Russian energy companies: Novatek, Rosneft, Transneft, and Gazprom Neft (a subsidiary of Gazprom). The sanctions limited the companies' access to U.S. capital markets and investment, in addition to prohibiting the export of certain advanced services and technologies. Notably, they suspended large joint deals involving Exxon Mobil and other major Western oil firms to support Russian state-owned oil companies in their efforts to develop offshore oil fields in the Arctic, the Black Sea, and elsewhere.⁴⁷² While U.S. sanctions on the Rus-

sian energy sector were fairly narrow, the reputational impacts of the sanctions drove away additional foreign investments.

U.S. economic tools will be among the most important policies for the Trump administration. The power of the U.S. economy is by far one of the United States' greatest assets and unfettered access to it remains a strong incentive for foreign states. The Trump administration will need to ensure that its economic decisions are coordinated with those of European leaders. If Europe loses faith in U.S. economic leadership and decides to forge ahead without the United States, the United States could find itself losing one of its most important sources of leverage to modify Russian behavior.

Military Instruments

This section assesses the range of military instruments available to the United States and provides recommendations to strengthen them. These recommendations are consistent with—and intended to be nested within—the broader Russia strategy that will be outlined in Chapter 5.

The Need for Conventional Deterrence

An armed conflict between the United States and Russia remains very unlikely, yet the consequences should it occur would be nothing short of catastrophic. Avoiding direct conflict with Russia is the ultimate goal of deterrence in Europe. There remains considerable debate, however, regarding how the United States and NATO should go about it.

Credible deterrence requires the United States and its allies to communicate clearly defined redlines and demonstrate the political will and capacity to back them up. While NATO's Article 5 collective security guarantee has hitherto been effective at deterring a military attack against a member state, Moscow's respect for U.S. alliance commitments is not automatic. Some NATO members, especially the Baltic States, but also Poland, Romania, and others, worry that the alliance's will and ability to deter conventional attacks is eroding, a concern that Russia appears eager to reinforce. NATO's challenge then is to reconceptualize its deterrence strategy to take into account the current threat environment facing its member states. Such a strategy must be explicit about what the alliance seeks to deter, and appear credible to allies, partners, and potential foes alike.

Deterrence is typically divided between nuclear threats and threats involving conventional forces.⁴⁷³ Nuclear threats are a form of deterrence by punishment due to the destructive power of nuclear weapons and the high risks of nuclear retaliation. During the Cold War, for example, NATO's deterrence strategy against the Soviet Union's conventional superiority in Europe relied on the threat of nuclear punishment.⁴⁷⁴ Nuclear deterrence, however, is both high risk and not particularly well suited against most nonnuclear threats. Nuclear threats would lack credibility in a "little green men" scenario, for example. The United States cannot, therefore, base a strategy to deter conventional and unconventional coercive actions primarily on the threat of

nuclear retaliation. The United States would be most credible if its nonnuclear forces possess the demonstrated capability to deter Russian aggression.⁴⁷⁵

Crafting an effective conventional component to a full-spectrum deterrence strategy in Europe is complicated by a number of factors, mostly related to the size and expenditure involved in maintaining large numbers of such forces during peacetime. This is not a new challenge. At various times during the Cold War, the United States and NATO sought to reduce their reliance on nuclear deterrence and commenced efforts to build up their conventional forces on the continent. Yet each of these efforts was stymied due to the political reluctance of Western leaders to bear the heavy costs of raising and maintaining conventional forces large enough to offer an effective defense. Indeed, the force levels necessary for a conventional defense (and a deterrence by denial strategy) are exceedingly, and, oftentimes, prohibitively expensive.⁴⁷⁶ At a time of pressing global security challenges, public finances in the United States and Europe are stretched and many governments remain reluctant to increase their defense spending to the levels that would be needed for a conventional defense or a deterrence by denial approach.

At the strategic level, U.S. and NATO conventional forces are superior to Russia in both quality and quantity. This is one of many reasons why conventional Russian aggression against NATO is unlikely. Russia, however, enjoys military superiority in the local balance across NATO's eastern flank, particularly considering

If a high-end fight were to occur in the Baltic States, one could conservatively estimate that the United States and NATO could well lose the first 90 days but would almost certainly win the next 90 days. This is less a question of fighting prowess and capabilities and more a function of the Baltic States' proximity to Russia and the United States' and other NATO allies' reliance on a reinforcement strategy. U.S. forces deployed to Europe are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what the entirety of the United States military could bring to bear in an actual Article 5 scenario. Deploying these forces, however, would take substantial time. Therefore, the posture of U.S. and NATO forces within the European theater—in terms of tripwire forces, rapid-response forces, and the ability to receive follow-on forces—is important for signaling to a potential adversary the defenders' will and capacity to impose costs for any aggression.

Tripwire forces like NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)—and, previously, the small U.S. troop deployments to the Baltic States—send a strong signal that if attacked, other U.S. and NATO forces would respond.⁴⁷⁸ The ultimate credibility of a tripwire force, however, depends on the force having relevant combat capabilities and being of sufficient size that an adversary could neither sidestep nor capture the force.⁴⁷⁹ Regarding rapid-response and follow-on reinforcements, the United States could shift additional air and naval forces into Europe relatively quickly, but the Army faces a major challenge in terms of providing rapid-response and follow-on rein-

CHANGE IN U.S. COMBAT FORCES IN EUROPE⁴⁸²

Year	Army Brigades	Combat Aircraft
1987	17	666
1997	4 (-77% from 1987)	168 (-75%)
2017	2 (-50% from 1997)	121 (-28%)

forcements given its diminished forward presence in Europe.

While specific timetables for reinforcing Europe are difficult to estimate, building a sufficient quantity of U.S. and allied heavy combat and sustainment forces in Eastern Europe would probably take several months. Large-scale reinforcement can be sped up to a degree by prepositioning equipment for heavy units in Europe. Moreover, sufficient forward positioned logistics to set the theater to receive and sustain additional forces are also essential to making U.S. deterrence commitments credible.

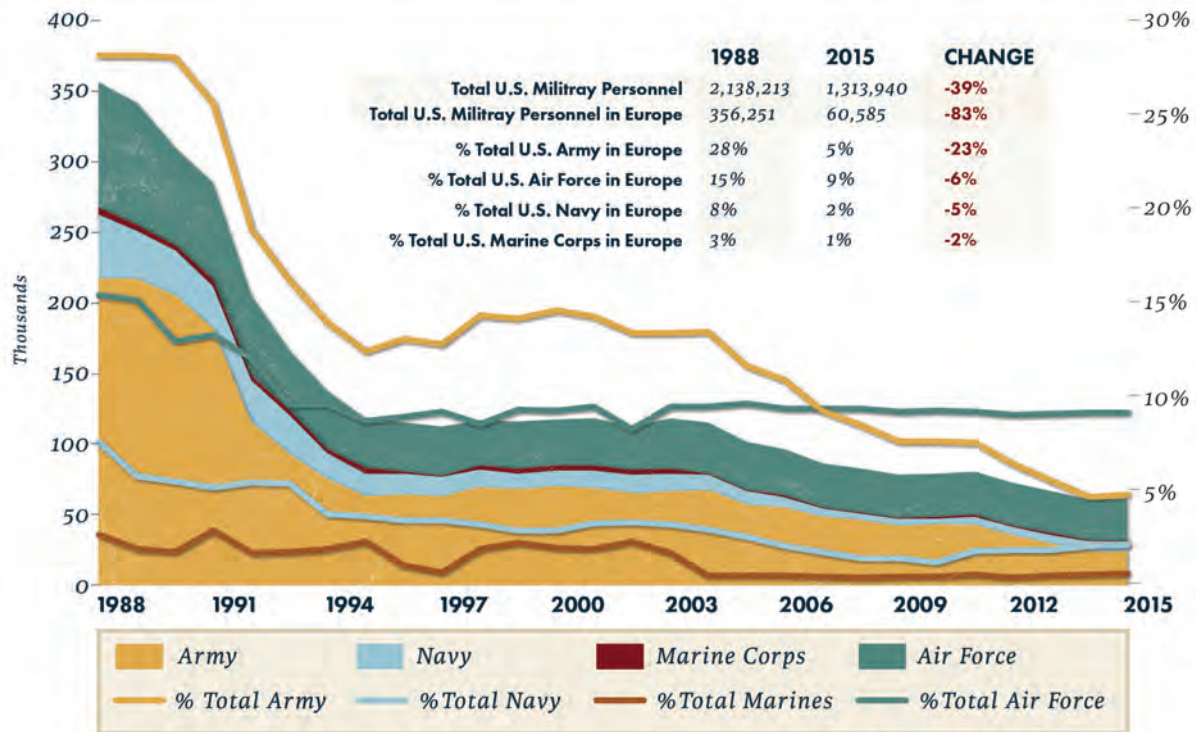
The Transformation of U.S. Forces in Europe

Questions regarding the number of U.S. forces needed for deterrence in Europe inevitably draw comparisons to the force levels that the United States maintained to deter the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact allies during the Cold War. While there are valuable insights to be learned from that era (and some comparisons are presented below, for illustrative purposes), the conventional military threats that the United States and NATO could face in Europe emanating from Russia and other sources, along with advancements in mil-

itary technologies, have changed enough to limit the value of simple topline comparisons. Indeed, exceeding force requirements is not necessarily superior to simply meeting them, and can even be counterproductive if additional forces are not carefully managed and strategically placed. Adjusting to the reality of a long-term challenge from Russia and shifting from reassurance efforts toward a credible deterrence strategy raises important questions about the adequacy of current force levels.

In the late 1980s, the United States had roughly 350,000 troops stationed in Europe alongside NATO forces to deter an attack by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact armies.⁴⁸⁰ The U.S. presence included two heavy Army corps (17 brigades), nine fighter wing equivalents (650+ combat aircraft), and stockpiles of prepositioned equipment to enable reinforcements to rapidly deploy to the continent in the event of a war.⁴⁸¹ U.S. force levels began to undergo significant reductions in 1988–1989 as the large Soviet forces forward stationed in the Warsaw Pact states gradually withdrew eastward and Moscow's alliance system buckled. The U.S. drawdown picked up speed as the Warsaw Pact dissolved and the Soviet Union itself disintegrated.

U.S. TROOPS IN EUROPE 1988–2015



Source: DOD; EUCOM Historian

The initial post-Cold War draw-down in Europe concluded in 1995–1996 with U.S. troop numbers leveling out at approximately 115,000, a 67 percent reduction from the late 1980s. Over the same period, the U.S. military reduced its overall troop levels by just 30 percent, meaning force cuts in Europe were more than double cuts occurring within the broader force.⁴⁸³ Despite their smaller footprint, U.S. forces in Europe retained substantial capabilities. The Army, for example, maintained a mixture of combat forces including four heavy and light brigades, a corps-level headquarters, enabler units, some reinforcement infrastructure, and prepositioned equipment for three brigades.⁴⁸⁴

As NATO's enlargement debate heated up in the late 1990s, the Department of Defense,

Congressional Budget Office, NATO, and others conducted studies to determine the military requirements of extending Article 5 guarantees to new members. They generally concluded that the potential new allies in Central Europe were defensible given existing U.S. force posture and reinforcement capabilities.⁴⁸⁵ These findings were underpinned by assumptions that the tranquil European security environment would persist, along with Russia's military weaknesses, and that the West would continue to build its fledgling partnership with Moscow. The 1998 DoD study, however, did note:

In the unlikely event that trends developed in such a way as to renew a direct, large-scale territorial threat to NATO members, then a fun-

*damentally different—and far more demanding—set of requirements and costs would be needed. In such a situation, the United States and its allies would need to reassess the security environment and respond accordingly.*⁴⁸⁶

After the 1999 accession to NATO of Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary, however, there was comparatively little deliberation over the military requirements to defend or reinforce additional entrants. Over time, U.S. force posture in Europe became increasingly disconnected from the realities of America's growing security commitments on the continent, largely due to assumptions about Russia's declining capabilities and the lack of intent to militarily challenge NATO enlargement. In August 2004, as NATO was expanding

its membership by seven (to include the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia), the Bush administration announced 40,000 troops would be withdrawn from Europe.⁴⁸⁷ Unlike the late 1990s, however, there was little debate or consideration as to the military requirements necessary to support these new allies in a crisis.

Without a pressing need to deter territorial aggression, U.S. European Command's (EUCOM) forces were reconfigured for new missions. This included training allied and partner forces ahead of their deployments to Afghanistan, providing rapid-response forces for crises beyond the continent, and ensuring strategic military access and support for other combatant commands. The drawdown announced in 2004—the second major reduction in Europe since the end of the Cold War—continued despite the warnings from EUCOM that the cuts were reaching too deep. These cuts also disproportionately reduced the Army's presence and brought about fundamental changes to U.S. military capabilities in Europe.⁴⁸⁸

The Army's two last remaining armored brigades in Europe were deactivated or withdrawn by mid-2013, leaving only two light brigades lacking the capability for combined arms warfare. Enabler units—including combat aviation, logisticians, and engineers—were hollowed out and remaining prepositioned equipment was largely withdrawn. The inactivation of V Corps in 2013 left EUCOM without a warfighting headquarters for land operations.⁴⁸⁹ The remaining U.S. forces in Europe—particularly ground forces—

were thought by EUCOM to even be insufficient to meet its steady-state missions. Small rotations of U.S.-based forces to Europe were planned to fill the gaps on a temporary basis. These rotations took on a new purpose immediately following the Ukraine crisis that included reassuring allied nations up and down the eastern flank. Nevertheless, drawdowns to U.S. permanent forces in Europe have continued since 2014. By 2017, approximately 60,000 U.S. troops remain permanently stationed in Europe, 12,000 fewer than in 2012 and about half the number from 2000.⁴⁹⁰

In light of the long-term Russia challenge, a review of U.S. force posture in Europe is needed to assess the requirements of a credible conventional deterrence strategy, including a reevaluation of legacy force reduction decisions made prior to the Ukraine crisis. The success of such a strategy will depend upon having the forces and capabilities in place to deter low-end threats, as well as the ability to rapidly surge air, land, and naval forces into theater for a high-end fight. Building reinforcement capacity through additional investments in prepositioned equipment, logisticians, and infrastructure to enable rapid reinforcement is, therefore, crucial.

U.S. and Allied Capability Gaps

The following sections examine areas where U.S. and allied non-nuclear forces face force posture challenges, capability gaps, or significant operating challenges deterring and, as needed, responding to Russian aggression. An exhaustive examination of all of the relevant capability ar-

reas fell beyond the scope of this report. Rather, the posture and capability areas examined here were identified by the study team as being both critical to a successful conventional deterrence strategy and in need of enhancement or reinvestment due to: developments in Russian warfighting concepts and/or technologies; the challenges imposed by the European theater (in particular the difficult physical and political geography of the eastern flank); or atrophy over time.

The nine capabilities examined below include: (1) precision strike; (2) air superiority; (3) integrated air and missile defense; (4) naval forces and maritime capabilities; (5) ground forces and combined arms warfare; (6) special operations forces; (7) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); (8) electronic warfare; and (9) cyber. Specific recommendations are offered in each area addressing how emerging capability gaps might be bridged, where to direct investments, how forces might adapt to theater-specific challenges, and how U.S. and allied forces can improve interoperability.

1 - Precision Strike

Precision strike is an essential element in the credibility of U.S. and NATO conventional deterrence. Precision strike enhances the ability of U.S. and NATO forces to hold an adversary's valuable military assets at risk, swiftly impose costs upon an adversary's forces from a distance, and more safely enable the other components of military force to be brought to bear. The United States and NATO have traditionally held a significant advan-

U.S. FORCE POSTURE IN EUROPE⁴⁹¹

Ground	Air	Naval
Wiesbaden, Germany ◇ U.S. Army Europe HQ ◇ 1 Division HQ* ◇ 1 Military Intelligence Brigade ◇ 1 Signals Brigade	Ramstein Air Base, Germany ◇ U.S. Air Forces in Europe HQ ◇ 3rd Air Force HQ ◇ 603rd Air Operations Center ◇ 1 Airlift Wing (14 C-130J) ◇ 1 Air Ground Operations Wing	Naval Support Activity Naples, Italy ◇ U.S. Naval Forces Europe HQ ◇ Sixth Fleet HQ ◇ 1 Amphibious Command Ship
Grafenwoehr & Vilseck, Germany ◇ 1 Stryker Brigade Combat Team ◇ 1 Military Police Battalion ◇ 1 Engineer Battalion	Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany ◇ 1 Fighter Squadron (24 F-16C/D)	Naval Station Rota, Spain ◇ 1 Destroyer Squadron (4 Guided Missile Destroyers)
Vicenza, Italy ◇ 1 Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne)	Aviano Air Base, Italy ◇ 2 Fighter Squadrons (21 F-16C/D) ⁴⁹²	Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy ◇ 1 Maritime Patrol Squadron* ◇ ISR Aircraft Detachment*
Western Poland (various) ◇ 1 Armored Brigade Combat Team*	RAF Lakenheath, UK ◇ 3 Fighter Squadrons (21 F-15C, 55 F-15E) ◇ 2 Combat Search & Rescue Squadrons (5 HH-60 Pave Hawks)	Naval Support Activity Souda Bay, Greece ◇ 1 Reconnaissance Squadron Detachment (RC/WC-135)*
Ansbach, Germany ◇ 1 Combat Aviation Brigade**	RAF Midenhall, UK ◇ 1 Air Refueling Wing (15 KC-135R) ◇ 1 Special Operations Wing (5 MC-130J, 5 CV-22B Osprey) ◇ 1 Reconnaissance Squadron (RC/WC-135*)	
Kaiserslautern, Germany ◇ 1 Patriot Battalion (4 Patriot Batteries)	Incirlik Air Base, Turkey ◇ 1 Air Base Wing	
Baumholder, Germany ◇ 1 Sustainment Brigade		
Panzer Kaserne, Germany ◇ 1 Special Forces Battalion ◇ 2 Naval Special Warfare Units		
Moron Air Base, Spain ◇ 1 Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (AFRICOM)*		
Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo (NATO) ◇ 1 Army National Guard Battalion*		

* Denotes rotational forces from the United States that are continuous/near continuous

** Denotes a hollow permanent unit that requires rotational forces from the United States

tage over potential adversaries, including Russia, in precision strike capabilities. This ranges from long-range precision strike (LRPS) weapons, such as conventional cruise missiles and short-range ballistic missiles, to direct-attack precision guided munitions (PGMs) dropped by tactical aircraft. Precision strike capabilities have had an essential role in the conduct of U.S. military operations over the past several decades. These capabilities allowed the United States and allies to build upon their significant advantages in air and naval power by engaging adversaries at standoff distances and expanded the reach of their forces and support to operations across warfighting domains. Precision strike has also dramatically increased the efficiency of military operations and provided policymakers the ability to employ force in more contested and complex environments, including urban areas, with reduced risk of collateral damage.

Given the utility of precision strike to U.S. and NATO military operations, it is no surprise that Russia both fears and covets this capability. The vast comparative advantage the United States once enjoyed in this area, however, has begun to diminish in recent years as Russia and other competitors develop their own capabilities. The threats posed by the diffusion of precision strike technologies have considerable implications for U.S. and allied militaries. While

Moscow has developed its own precision strike capabilities, it has also sought to adapt its forces to offset U.S. and NATO advantages. Russia has heavily invested in anti-air and missile defenses, electronic warfare capabilities, and refined its tactics and techniques in order to diminish the effectiveness of U.S. and NATO precision strike in a potential conflict.

Disparities in Allied Precision Strike Capabilities

While the United States possesses a robust ground-, air-, and sea-based precision strike capability, only a handful of NATO allies, including the United Kingdom,

The United States, Britain, and France are the only allied navies that possess the long-range conventional cruise missiles that have dominated the opening stages of modern military operations. This capability would be essential in any effort to suppress Russian A2/AD network or otherwise hold Russian targets at risk at standoff ranges. The sea-launched Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM), which has a maximum range of 1,550 miles, is the primary long-range standoff munition employed by the United States and the United Kingdom.⁴⁹³ Tomahawks have been used in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, and other conflicts to suppress enemy air defenses and

destroy command and control centers at the outset of operations in order to clear a path for tactical aircraft carrying shorter-range and direct-attack PGMs.

While both the French Navy and the Royal Navy possess land attack capabilities comparable to those operated by the United States, they do so in far more limited quantities. Moreover, apart from these three

countries, other European allies lack any real form of sea-based long-range precision strike capability. The Danish, Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, and Spanish navies all operate vessels that could technically launch long-range conventional munitions, but have not chosen to field such systems for financial and political reasons.⁴⁹⁴ While adding these weapons to the arsenal of NATO's surface combatants would

THE UNITED STATES AND NATO HAVE TRADITIONALLY HELD A SIGNIFICANT ADVANTAGE OVER POTENTIAL ADVERSARIES IN PRECISION STRIKE CAPABILITIES.

France, Germany, Italy, and Turkey, field somewhat similar capabilities. This disparity imposes some constraints on how the United States and NATO can effectively leverage their overriding advantages in air and naval power to strengthen deterrence in Europe—an already-challenging proposition on land due to Russia's proximity advantage along NATO's eastern flank.

potentially require tradeoffs with other munitions, they would also add an important capability to strengthen deterrence by punishment. In addition, this would improve the ability of allies to act independently in future operations should the United States be unable or unwilling to divert the necessary assets. Specifically, NATO allies should strive to put small numbers of conventional land attack weapons on the diesel electric submarines operated by several alliance nations, including Germany and potentially Norway. The relative operational stealth of submarines compared to other platforms would help deter an attempt by Russia to use its own long-range precision strike weapons to negate NATO's comparative advantage.

In addition to sea-based precision strike capabilities, several NATO air forces maintain a robust medium-range air-launched cruise missile (ALCM) capability comparable to the U.S. AGM-158 Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM). The British, French, and Italian air forces have air-launched Storm Shadow cruise missiles that provide their multirole fighters with a standoff precision strike capability.⁴⁹⁵ The uneven distribution of precision strike capabilities across the alliance places limitations on the flexibility of allied forces to meaningfully participate in a full-spectrum conflict or contribute to deterrence by punishment. The high-threat environment along the eastern flank would likely further constrain the ability of many NATO allies to operate their forces at an acceptable risk. Many allies could find themselves sitting on the sidelines of a conflict, at least initially. Only a handful of allies

plan to acquire fifth-generation aircraft like the F-35 that would be the most survivable within contested airspace (even many fourth-generation U.S. aircraft would be vulnerable against Russian air defenses).

While precision strike munitions have proven indispensable in recent conflicts, the high costs of air and naval delivery platforms, as well as the growing costs of the munitions themselves, pose a considerable barrier to entry for many allies. Small allied purchases of costly precision strike weapons tend to add up to an expensive new capability with extremely limited capacity. Tomahawks, for example, cost approximately \$1.4 million each.⁴⁹⁶ Wartime demand for PGMs like cruise missiles can rapidly exhaust the peacetime stockpiles of even the United States. Meanwhile, the ability to swiftly replenish inventories is constrained by an industrial base with a limited capacity to surge production of these complex munitions. In the opening two weeks of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, U.S. warships fired 700 Tomahawks—a third of the total U.S. inventory.⁴⁹⁷ In a confrontation with Russia, it is easy to foresee U.S. and allied long-range PGM stockpiles being rapidly depleted (this dynamic would impact Russia as well).

This problem extends beyond cruise missiles. During the NATO air campaign in Libya in 2011, major allies such as Britain ran low on certain high-end munitions while smaller allies like Denmark quickly exhausted their inventories of relatively inexpensive direct-attack PGMs.⁴⁹⁸ Efforts by NATO allies to address munitions shortages through

pooling and sharing arrangements have made some progress, but different platform requirements and legal export obstacles continue to pose problems otherwise solvable through a greater commitment of resources.⁴⁹⁹

Combating Russian A2/AD

The scarcity of long-range precision strike weapons across the alliance would be exacerbated by the difficulties of employing these munitions to gain air superiority. The mobility of Russian anti-air systems combined with the forested terrain of northeastern Europe, the use of “scoot-and-shoot” tactics, and the use of decoys would frustrate air defense suppression efforts.⁵⁰⁰ The lethality of Russian air defenses would also dramatically complicate the near-real-time ISR that NATO air and ground forces have come to rely upon to effectively employ precision strike weapons. Furthermore, the bulk of NATO's long-range strike capability, as well as its precision strike capability more broadly, depend upon munitions that are guided to targets with coordinates provided by GPS. Russia has significantly invested in EW capabilities to jam or spoof GPS signals, which could degrade U.S. and allied precision strike advantages. EW jammers, for example, could prevent cruise missiles from receiving updated targeting data midflight or render a smart bomb into a dumb bomb by disrupting the GPS-aided guidance used by the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM).⁵⁰¹

Given Russia's growing capabilities, the alliance should consider investing heavily in small- to medium-sized weapons, such as the AGM-88E Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile

(AARGM), that are purpose built for SEAD missions, along with general-purpose glide bombs such as the Joint Standoff Weapon (JSOW) and the GBU-53 Small Diameter Bomb II (SDB-II). Glide weapons would allow more fourth-generation aircraft, like the F-16 and F-18, to be used by the United States and other allies to deliver precision strike munitions in the opening stages of a campaign at greater range, decreasing (but not eliminating) their exposure to Russian surface-to-air missile systems. For example, the SDB-II is a relatively inexpensive 250-pound small glide bomb that can track and hit moving targets up to 70 miles away.⁵⁰² It is being fitted and tested on nearly every U.S. fighter and bomber airframe and is likely compatible with many European airframes.⁵⁰³

While small-diameter bombs pack relatively little punch, this would not be a concern against soft targets such as Russia's mobile surface-to-air missile systems. The missiles' small size allows aircraft to carry more of them (sometimes by a factor of 4), increasing sortie efficiency.⁵⁰⁴ Some reports suggest that U.S. strategic bombers such as the B-2 (and potentially the future B-21) could carry in excess of 200 small-diameter bombs, offering a formidable salvo against multiple fixed and moving targets.⁵⁰⁵ These munitions can also improve the efficiency of fifth-generation aircraft like the F-35 and F-22. The inventory of these stealth aircraft across the alliance is already limited due to their sheer cost, but their strike efficiency is constrained because, to maintain their stealth profile, they can only carry munitions within their modest

internal weapon bays. Small-diameter bombs increase the effectiveness of these aircraft for suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) missions. For example, the F-22 can carry only two JDAMs in its "clean" stealth configuration, but can carry eight SDB-IIs.⁵⁰⁶ Small-diameter bombs would also significantly increase the strike capacity of other U.S. and allied aircraft and allow nonstealth aircraft to engage at safer distances from air defenses. The additional range of glide weapons coupled with the enhanced payloads offered by small-diameter bombs would allow the United States and its allies to build upon their air advantages and weaken Russia's A2/AD complex. In a crisis, the alliance could also be politically strengthened by these capabilities by enabling allies with less-sophisticated aircraft to contribute to critical missions at the outset.

The United States and its allies must also mature their operational plans for how they would bring their considerable advantages in air and sea precision strike to bear given Eastern Europe's forbidding physical and political geography. For example, how could alliance maritime-based precision strike assets best be leveraged to enhance deterrence in a crisis with Russia on the eastern flank? The Baltic and Black Seas would likely be too risky for U.S. surface warships or submarines to operate in due to Russian defenses in these waters. While the United States and several allied navies have long-range conventional cruise missiles that could reach the eastern flank from the North Sea or the Mediterranean Sea, the flexibility of these

weapons decreases as range increases. Since current and future operational requirements demand sea-based strike capabilities reach deep onto land at standoff ranges, would NATO use nonlinear routing to avoid firing missiles through neutral countries' airspace given the tradeoff in effectiveness? There are no easy answers to these problems, but prudent planning for operational challenges such as these—even if conflict is unlikely—is important.

Ground-Based Precision Fires

Due to Europe's operating environment, U.S. and allied air and sea power will face challenges projecting precision strike capabilities to support their land forces directly with fire support and indirectly by suppressing enemy air defenses. There is a need for the United States and its allies to reexamine the utility of ground-based long-range precision fires in order to ensure additional support for land forces as well as contribute to air defense suppression and other roles.

The backbone of the Army and many allies' long-range ground fires capabilities are the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and the M270 Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS). Both systems fire the aging Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), which has a maximum range of 186 miles.⁵⁰⁷ The Army is in the very early stages of replacing ATACMS with its Long Range Precision Fires (LRPF) Missile program, which has a planned range of 310 miles, the maximum allowable range under the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty.⁵⁰⁸ However,

RUSSIA HAS LONG FEARED U.S. AND NATO AIR POWER, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHER ELEMENT OF WESTERN MILITARY STRENGTH.

the easy availability of close air support in recent low-intensity conflicts has caused the Army to neglect investment, capacity, and training in its Field Artillery branch.⁵⁰⁹ Moreover, improvements to U.S. ground-based fires capabilities will do little if the forces are not postured and configured where they would be needed. The Army does not have a fires brigade permanently deployed in Europe nor does it have prepositioned equipment for one. In a crisis, the fires brigades based in the United States would likely be near the back of the line to be airlifted or sealifted to Europe since priority would be given to maneuver forces. More effort, therefore, should be given to supporting the development of allied land-based long-range fires for those allies that would be better positioned.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Increase NATO's sea-based precision strike:** Allies should be encouraged to invest in conventional land attack weapons for their naval forces, particularly their submarines.
- **Maximize U.S. and allied precision strike advantages:** Invest in developing flexible and relatively low-cost precision strike capabilities such as small-diameter bombs and glide munitions that would increase the efficiency of U.S. and allied aircraft for precision strike.

2 - Air Superiority

Air superiority, or the ability to assert control of the skies, is a central component of U.S. and allied military power and, thus, also of its conventional deterrence strategy. It is essential for

enabling and protecting maritime, ground, and other air assets so they can swiftly impose high costs on an adversary, and for employing other forms of air power to strike an adversary's forces and military infrastructure behind the frontlines.⁵¹⁰ Many Western militaries have come to consider air superiority a precondition for operations. With it, allied forces can more safely conduct precision strike missions with minimal collateral damage; call in close air support during ground combat; quickly evacuate wounded troops from the battlefield; and, of course, protect Western populations from an adversary's attacks. The United States and its allies hold considerable advantages over Russia in terms of air power. The continuous improvements to Russia's A2/AD capabilities and the disadvantageous geography of NATO's eastern flank, however, would pose a major challenge to their ability to gain air superiority in a conflict.

Russia has long feared U.S. and NATO air power, perhaps more than any other element of Western military strength. During the latter years of the Cold War, NATO's conventional deterrent posture in Central Europe rested heavily on the alliance's qualitative advantages in fighter aircraft. The Soviets sought to deny NATO's air superiority by emphasizing sophisticated mobile surface-to-air missile systems and elaborate air defense networks. More recently, Russia has watched with concern the considerable improvements in U.S. and allied air power since the Persian Gulf War with the growth of precision weaponry, electronic warfare, and other capabilities. Subsequent conflicts, including the NATO air campaign in Libya in 2011, showcased the alliance's ability to rapidly and cheaply gain air superiority.⁵¹¹

Like the Soviet Union before it, Russia is making targeted investments in a range of capabilities that seek to challenge the U.S. and NATO advantage in the air. Moscow has directed recent investments toward developing and fielding mobile surface-to-air defense systems, long-range radar and sensor networks, modern interceptor aircraft, electronic warfare systems, and long-range precision strike capabilities. Together, these capabilities form the backbone of Russia's A2/AD strategy. The range and positioning of the systems along the span of NATO's eastern flank—reaching deep into NATO territory—gives Russia the ability to hold adversary aircraft and other forces at risk well beyond its own borders.

U.S. and Allied Air Force Posture

Gaining air superiority is a multi-domain effort and encompasses a mixture of offensive and defense forces. The numerical and qualitative advantages in fighter and multirole aircraft that the United States and NATO allies enjoy over Russia are substantial. While numbers alone fail to tell the full story—for example, readiness and operational configurations vary drastically across allied air forces—they do at least give an indication of the vast potential that exists for collective action.

Overall, the United States and its allies have approximately 3,000 tactical fighter and multirole aircraft of various capabilities in their inventories compared to about 800 Russian fighter and multirole aircraft.⁵¹² Of that, 1,700 aircraft belong to the United States. There are approximately 28,000 U.S. Air Force personnel permanently stationed in Europe under the command of U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) largely based in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy. This force includes six fighter squadrons (three wings) of F-15Cs, F-16C/Ds, and F-15Es totaling about 120 combat aircraft, many being primarily ground strike aircraft with some air-to-air capability. These fighter squadrons are based at RAF Lakenheath in the United Kingdom, Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany, and Aviano Air Base in Italy.⁵¹³

In addition, the United States maintains one air refueling wing with KC-135 tanker aircraft at RAF Mildenhall in the United Kingdom, one strategic lift wing with C-130Js at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and enabling

units and a robust support infrastructure. Other air bases located in Turkey, Spain, Romania, and Hungary are used to enable force projection across Europe and provide forces to other theaters.

The Air Force's permanent forces are strengthened by rotational deployments of U.S.-based aircraft that provide additional presence and training opportunities. While rotational deployments to Europe are routine, they are not continuous and generally provide only a squadron or less of additional forces.⁵¹⁴ Rotational forces include an assortment of aircraft including F-22s, F-15s, and A-10s. Most notable from a strategic deterrence perspective are the intermittent rotations of B-2 and B-52 bombers to participate in allied exercises.⁵¹⁵ The additional air presence provided through rotational deployments is usually half of a squadron or less and lasts between several weeks to several months at a time.⁵¹⁶

USAFE faces major posture changes in the coming years including legacy force structure reductions and base realignments that could significantly reduce its capabilities. Under current DoD plans, the 493rd Fighter Squadron—one of three squadrons based at Royal Air Force (RAF) station Lakenheath in the United Kingdom—faces inactivation without European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) funding, reducing the overall number of fighter squadrons in Europe from six to five. The 493rd FS, which flies F-15Cs, is the only dedicated U.S. air supremacy squadron in Europe. As with the Army's 12th CAB, the decision to remove this capability was based on budget con-

straints and a consideration of theater requirements prior to the Ukraine crisis.⁵¹⁷ While the Air Force is grappling with difficult challenges in terms of balancing force structure reductions under budget caps, going forward with legacy force reductions amidst such a drastically changed security environment demonstrates a dangerously stubborn and inflexible approach to posture management. Retaining a robust forward-deployed fighter presence in Europe and a dedicated air supremacy squadron in the theater must be a priority.

U.S. and allied air forces have built considerable interoperability through air campaigns in Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, along with constant combined training and the advantages of common airframes and weapons systems. After the United States, France has the largest modern aircraft inventory in NATO with approximately 270 Mirage 2000 and Rafale fighter and multirole aircraft. Turkey is a close second in terms of modern aircraft with about 260 F-16s, although it also has a large inventory of older F-4s. The United Kingdom has about 230 Eurofighter Typhoon and Tornado fighter and multirole aircraft.⁵¹⁸ Germany and Italy maintain 215 and 124 aircraft, respectively, each possessing a combination of Typhoons and Tornados.⁵¹⁹ Greece has about 190 F-16s and Mirage 2000s. Canada operates about 75 aging F/A-18s and has not yet made a final decision about a replacement aircraft after backing away from plans to acquire the F-35.⁵²⁰ Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands operate relatively smaller but potent air forces built primarily around the F-16.

The F-35 is designed to achieve air superiority against near-peer competitors and operate in highly contested airspace.

Utah Test and Training Range,
February 25, 2016

Credit: Jim Haseltine/U.S. Air Force



By contrast, the Central and Eastern European allies generally have fewer, if any, modern aircraft and little ability to field the capabilities needed to participate in or support a high-end fight in the air. Poland has the most significant air force on the eastern flank, with approximately 34 MiG-29 fighters and 48 F-16s.⁵²¹ Hungary and the Czech Republic each operate a single squadron of Gripen C/D multirole fighters. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have no air forces. Romania is acquiring a small inventory of 12 second-hand F-16s to replace its aging fleet of 36 MiG-21s. Bulgaria has deeply neglected its air force, leaving it with a barely serviceable fleet of MiG-29s (Sofia has repeatedly failed to come up with the resources to purchase either new or second-hand aircraft despite assurances it would do so when it joined NATO in 2004).⁵²²

Air-to-Air Operations

The United States has the considerable advantage of having fully deployed a fifth-generation fighter aircraft with the F-22, soon to be joined by the F-35,

which are specifically designed to achieve air superiority against near-peer competitors and operate in highly contested airspace. The multirole F-35 is slated to replace a number of U.S. and allied airframes, but its considerable cost will reduce force structure. A number of NATO allies are acquiring or planning to buy the F-35, including, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Deliveries, however, are occurring at a slow rate due to production delays, cost overruns, and issues with their aircraft's complex avionics and integrated weapon systems.⁵²³

In air-to-air combat, the United States emphasizes “beyond visible range” (BVR) engagements with adversary aircraft over “within visual range” (WVR) engagements, which means pilots do not need to physically see an adversary aircraft to engage it. BVR engagements offer a distinct advantage in most circumstances to the United States and NATO forces because their aircraft tend to operate more advanced radars and sensors, often enhanced by AWACS sup-

port, which provides them with the ability to detect and engage adversaries at significant distances. Much depends, however, on the range of air-to-air missiles in these engagements. The AIM-120 AMRAAM is the primary long-range air-to-air missile used by U.S. and NATO aircraft for BVR combat. After two decades of incremental improvements to the AIM-120 family of missiles, many experts believe this platform is reaching the end of its development life. European allies are planning to replace their AIM-120s with the Meteor missile, which offers significantly increased range and improved lethality and may be fitted to European-origin airframes, as well as F-16s and F-35s.⁵²⁴ Development of the next generation of U.S. long-range air-to-air missiles, however, was canceled due to budget cuts and a path forward for the United States remains uncertain.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Retain six U.S. fighter squadrons in Europe:** Given the importance of U.S. airpower

for deterrence, plans to withdraw the F-15C squadron at RAF Lakenheath, the only dedicated air supremacy fighter squadron in Europe, should be canceled. The Air Force should also explore more F-22 rotational deployments to Europe, along with expanding the “Rapid Raptor” concept of exercising short-notice deployments to temporary operating locations overseas.⁵²⁵ Over the long term, the Air Force should consider basing an F-22 squadron in Europe, possibly to replace the F-15C squadron or another unit.

- **Accelerate U.S. F-35A basing:** Accelerate plans to replace the two squadrons of F-15Es at RAF Lakenheath with F-35As (54 aircraft in total), currently slated to begin in 2020 with deployments phased over subsequent years, to address the need for high-end aircraft and maximize opportunities for integrating U.S. F-35As with allied air forces.
- **Invest in counter-air capabilities:** The United States and allies should continue to invest in long-range air-to-air missiles to ensure their aircraft maintain the advantage in BVR engagements and can operate at less risk from adversary aircraft and air defenses.
- **Train to fight in contested airspace:** Given the scarcity and cost of fifth-generation aircraft, U.S. and NATO air forces should better prepare for operations that assume a contested environment and embrace new tactics (or in some cases,

CURRENT AND PLANNED U.S. AND NATO BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSES IN EUROPE ARE NOT THE RIGHT TOOLS TO DEFEND AGAINST RUSSIA’S GROWING ARSENAL OF CRUISE MISSILES.

reintegrate old tactics) such as low-altitude air operations to operate beneath adversary air defenses.⁵²⁶

- **Embrace a multi-domain approach to air superiority:** While it will be important to invest in penetrating counter-air platforms like the F-22 that can operate within an adversary’s defenses, gaining air superiority in a contested European environment should also leverage U.S. and allied advantages in precision strike, electronic warfare, cyber, C4ISR, and special operations forces.

3 - Integrated Air and Missile Defense

Integrated air and missile defense is among the most pressing capability challenges facing the United States and its allies in Europe. The growing sophistication of Russia’s long-range precision strike capabilities—primarily its conventional cruise missiles—has the potential to weaken the credibility of the alliance’s conventional deterrent by thwarting its ability to reinforce vulnerable areas and by holding at risk critical allied systems that would be used to

retaliate in a high-end conflict. While NATO formally adopted ballistic missile defense as a core mission in 2010 and has pursued systems to defend against extra-regional threats from states like Iran, it has not devoted much attention or resources toward other air and missile challenges. Advancements in conventional long-range precision guided weaponry since the end of the Cold War and the maturation of these capabilities within the Russian military, however, means much work remains for the United States and NATO in meeting this challenge.

Current U.S. and allied air and missile defenses in Europe comprise a patchwork of national, multinational, and alliance-owned ground-, air-, and sea-based systems. In terms of European ground-based air defense systems, the United States has one Patriot battalion forward stationed in Germany. Germany, Spain, and Greece also operate Patriot air defense units. Germany has the most robust Patriot capability but plans to replace it in the coming years with the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS) system.⁵²⁷ Poland also appears ready to move

forward with its own purchase of Patriot.⁵²⁸ France and Italy operate the SAMP/T system, which is roughly equivalent to the Patriot, while Norway, Spain, and the Netherlands operate the medium-range NASAMS-2 (Norwegian Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System).

At sea, the United States has four Aegis BMD-capable destroyers forward stationed in Spain, and Spain and Norway also operate Aegis-enabled warships. The United Kingdom, France, and Italy have frigates and destroyers that operate the Principal Anti Air Missile System (PAAMS). Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands operate similarly advanced air-defense frigates and destroyers.⁵²⁹ Despite the diversity across air and missile defense platforms, some synergies and interoperability have been achieved in recent years as demonstrated through combined naval ballistic missile defense exercises in which allied warships provided tracking for U.S. destroyers to intercept missiles.⁵³⁰

In the interest of preserving strategic stability and Moscow's confidence in its nuclear deterrent, the United States and NATO have not deployed missile defenses in Europe that would threaten Russia's intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). For the better part of a decade, U.S. and allied missile defense efforts in Europe have therefore been exclusively oriented against a limited medium- and long-range ballistic missile attack originating from the direction of Iran.⁵³¹ These efforts include the U.S. European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) and NATO's broader Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) architecture.⁵³²

While EPAA and NATO BMD are not directed toward Russia as a matter of policy, certain allies have been known to purposely conflate technical progress on EPAA and NATO BMD with efforts to strengthen alliance deterrence against Russia.⁵³³ Any substantive shift to reorient these capabilities toward Russian strategic nuclear forces, however, would not only be perceived as highly provocative by Russia and politically divisive within the alliance, but would also fail to provide the needed capability to address the actual missile threats posed by Russia.⁵³⁴ Current and planned U.S. and NATO ballistic missile defenses in Europe are not the right tools to defend against Russia's growing arsenal of cruise missiles. Defending against low-tier threats like cruise missiles generally requires different shooter and sensor systems than those used in ballistic missile defense.⁵³⁵

Given shifts in the threat environment, U.S. and NATO theater ballistic missile defense planning in Europe requires a complete review. Both EPAA and NATO BMD were adopted during a period when Russia was an emerging security partner and the prevailing threat to allied territory was long-range ballistic missiles being developed by Iran.⁵³⁶ While Iran's ballistic missile program continues to progress even after the nuclear deal (Tehran is also developing long-range cruise missiles), the current balance of threats merits a reexamination of U.S. and alliance air and missile defense priorities and the capabilities required to address them. Air and missile defense resources and assets are extremely limited across the alliance but are heavily tilted toward ballistic

missile defenses. Given the challenges posed by Russian cruise missiles and other strike capabilities, however, this imbalance should be cause for concern.

The more pressing challenge that the United States and NATO face is developing sufficient low-tier air and missile defenses in Europe to reduce the risks to alliance reinforcement operations and conventional retaliation capabilities. Low-tier air and missile defenses would pose far less of a threat to Russian strategic forces than ballistic missile defenses (although one should still expect Moscow to be vocally opposed). Strengthening U.S. and NATO deterrence against Russian low-tier air and missile threats will entail a blend of offensive and defensive instruments. This could involve investments in and deployments of conventional offensive capabilities to deter Russia and hold its assets at risk if deterrence fails, as well as active and passive defensive capabilities. Active defenses for low-tier threats should be based around strengthening existing U.S. and allied integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) with multiple layers of networked sensors and shooters that can frustrate attacks, improve the survivability of critical sites such as command and control nodes and rear bases, and provide mobile protection for maneuver forces. Passive defenses should include increasing mobility for forces given Russia's shortcomings in C4ISR to conduct real-time dynamic targeting at significant distances. Other efforts should include tactical and operational dispersion of vital assets such as enabler aircraft, munitions stockpiles, and prepositioned equipment.



A PATRIOT missile battery from the U.S. Army's 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command based in Germany participates in exercises in Poland.

Sochaczew, Poland, March 21, 2015

Credit: Janek Skarzynski/AFP/Getty Images

Adequate sensors to detect cruise missiles may be the most urgently needed asset for credible air and missile defenses in Europe, followed closely by shooter platforms. While most existing U.S. and allied IAMD systems like Patriot, Aegis-employed SM-2 and SM-6, and NA-SAMS are technically capable of *intercepting* cruise missiles, their ground-level radars are largely ineffective at detecting and tracking low-flying cruise missiles due to terrain obstacles and the curvature of the Earth. These systems can be enabled to engage against low-tier threats at far greater ranges if supplied with data from external sensors such as airborne and/or elevated platforms with look-down/shoot-down radars that can see incoming cruise missiles over the horizon.⁵³⁷

Developing a low-tier integrated sensor network, however, has proven difficult given resource constraints, the emphasis on ballistic missile defenses, and the operational tradeoffs imposed by dedicating forces to missile defense missions. For example, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and NATO operate AWACS fleets capable

of detecting cruise missiles for ground-based interceptors. The utility of these aircraft, however, is limited by their small numbers, competing operational requirements, and high operating costs.⁵³⁸ All U.S. fighter aircraft carry the necessary look-down/shoot-down radars in addition to air-to-air missiles that could intercept a cruise missile, but fighter aircraft face even greater costs and operational demands than AWACS and can hardly be expected to provide persistent coverage over a fixed area.⁵³⁹

The Army's attempt to acquire a wide-area cruise missile detection capability, called the Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor (JLENS), has also proven difficult. JLENS comprises two tethered aerostats with sensors flying at about 10,000 feet that can detect cruise missiles and other low-tier threats over a 360-degree area the size of Texas.⁵⁴⁰ This is particularly advantageous given that cruise missiles—which could be fired by an adversary submarine or aircraft—pose a multidirectional threat, whereas many currently deployed systems like Patriot currently lack 360-degree

radars. While aspects of JLENS were promising in terms of its cost-effectiveness (compared to alternative detection methods) and its ability to provide persistent detection over a large area, the program appears likely to be canceled by Congress amid controversy over the long-running program's costs and a fiasco that occurred during testing.⁵⁴¹ No viable alternative to JLENS is forthcoming.⁵⁴²

Over the short and medium term, the United States and allies should give priority to developing several layers of sensors to detect low-tier threats like cruise missiles to enable existing interceptor platforms. These sensors should be interoperable with existing U.S. and allied IAMD systems, like Patriot, and command and control architectures, like the Army's Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System (IBCS) and NATO's Air Command and Control System (ACCS). Efforts must also be made to increase the number of shooter systems, as well as ensure integrated command and control with allies to maximize capabilities.

The United States and NATO also need to invest in low-tier mobile shooters that can

defend maneuver forces. This would also require reinserting air defense units into maneuver forces. The Army currently has a glaring capability gap in short-range and medium-range air and missile defenses, which has forced U.S. troops to rely on allied Short-Range Air Defense (SHORAD) capabilities while training in Europe.⁵⁴³ While the Army's Indirect Fire Protection Capability (IFPC) has shown promise against low-tier threats, it is still under development.⁵⁴⁴ Yet systems like IFPC and Patriot do not provide the mobile and low-tier SHORAD capability like the aging Humvee-based Avenger platform does to help against an adversary's UAS, helicopters, and low-flying aircraft.

Over the long term, the United States and allies will need to begin investing in joint research for IAMD capabilities that can produce low-cost per shot interceptors capable of fighting high-volume engagements. Looking forward, areas for investment in long-term development include directed energy weapons such as the Army's high-energy laser-mobile demonstration (HEL-MD), high-endurance unmanned systems, and distributed interceptor concepts.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Reevaluate missile defense threats and priorities in Europe:** Given the challenges posed by low-tier threats such as cruise missiles and the changed European security landscape, a strategic review on the future of EPAA and NATO BMD should be conducted to ensure missile defense priorities and resources are aligned with threats.

- **Develop low-tier networked sensors:** Direct allied investments toward the development of a sensor network to detect low-tier missile and air threats using networked air-, sea-, and ground-based sensors. For the United States, short-term priority should be given to increasing point defense at critical areas and providing SHORAD for ground forces.
- **Emphasize passive defenses and offensive systems:** Passive defensive measures should be explored to exploit Russia's weaknesses at dynamic targeting and because of their relative cost effectiveness compared to defensive systems. U.S. and allied military bases and other critical sites should improve survivability and complicate adversary planning. Offensive systems such as long-range precision strike weapons are another avenue that provide a deterrent.
- **Support European wide-area air and missile defense capability:** While European allies must take the lead on developing wide-area low-tier missile defenses on the continent, the United States should explore opportunities to work with and enable allies given existing U.S. capabilities and systems. If the JLENS program is canceled, opportunities should be explored to repurpose its radars for other low-cost systems that could help provide allies with some wide-area sensor capabilities. Opportunities should also be explored with allies on a federated approach to low-tier air defenses including SHORAD.

- **Add U.S. Patriot deployments:** When possible, an additional Patriot battalion should be rotated to Europe to enhance interoperability with allied IAMD systems through challenging exercises that include multi-domain threats and ground, air, and maritime sensor and shooter platforms.

4 - Naval Forces and Maritime Capabilities

While Russia's recent military aggression and coercive actions have primarily occurred on land, the conventional threat posed by Russia is multi-domain in nature. Russia's increasing naval capabilities and capacity have led the United States and NATO to consider how best to leverage their advantages in naval power to strengthen deterrence and the new challenges of operating and projecting power in a contested European maritime domain. Due to persistent challenges from near-peer and regional competitors in the Asia-Pacific and the Persian Gulf, the United States has sought to maintain a globally capable naval force with the ability to project power across oceans, along with capabilities needed to win high-end maritime confrontations. By contrast, most allied nations have drastically reduced their naval force structures. They have cut their high-end capabilities and neglected interoperability in favor of focusing on new maritime missions, such as counterpiracy. While the United States and NATO retain clear advantages in the maritime domain, there are key capability gaps that need to be addressed in order to cement this advantage.



On April 11–12, 2016, four Russian jets and two helicopters buzzed the USS *Donald Cook* in the Baltic Sea, making over 20 passes within 1,000 yards at an altitude of 100 feet.

Baltic Sea, April 12, 2016

Credit: U.S. Navy

Understanding the Russian maritime threat requires an accurate accounting of Moscow's capabilities and how they are being used. As discussed in Chapter 3, Russia maintains a powerful core of maritime capabilities above, on, and below the waves. But, as with many aspects of Russian power, not every facet of Moscow's naval buildup, growing capabilities, and assertive maritime activities is as it seems. And they are not all intended to be provocative.

U.S. and Allied Naval Forces

The U.S. Navy has about 271 naval combatants.⁵⁴⁵ Of those, the United States has five ships homeported in Europe and maintains a robust presence in and around European waters. European members of NATO and close alliance partners on the continent, including Sweden and Finland, operate about 200 major naval combatants in total.⁵⁴⁶ Russia, by contrast, has about 90 surface vessels and submarines and 100 small vessels limited to littoral waters.⁵⁴⁷ These figures, however, mask Russia's considerable disadvantages compared

to NATO fleets in terms of ship size, capabilities, and readiness.

The U.S. Navy maintains its presence in European waters through a mixture of forward-deployed warships and the occasional presence of Atlantic-based fleet forces. There are currently about 7,100 naval personnel forward stationed in Europe under U.S. Naval Forces in Europe (NAVEUR) headquartered in Naples, Italy. There are five Navy warships homeported in Europe including a *Blue Ridge*-class command ship near Naples that serves as the flagship of the U.S. Sixth Fleet and a destroyer squadron with four *Arleigh Burke*-class guided-missile Aegis destroyers (DDGs) at Naval Station Rota in Spain. The destroyers are a component of the United States' theater ballistic missile defense strategy under the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) and also part of NATO's ballistic missile defense architecture. These destroyers are capable of conducting a range of missions in addition to ballistic missile defense, including precision strike and antisubmarine warfare, and have provided

a flexible means of supporting allies with a naval presence.⁵⁴⁸ Destroyer operations in the Baltic and Black Seas in recent years have drawn strong and sometimes dangerous responses from Russian aircraft and naval vessels. This included a high-profile incident in April 2016 during which Russian aircraft flew dangerously close to the USS *Donald Cook* in the Baltic Sea.⁵⁴⁹

In addition to the posture of its surface forces, naval bases in Sicily and Crete provide expeditionary air bases for U.S. aircraft to access the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea, as well as the Middle East and Africa. A Navy maritime patrol squadron from the United States frequently rotates to these bases to provide ISR coverage for the region. Recently the Navy has begun preparations to deploy P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft on a rotational basis at Keflavik Air Base in Iceland to monitor increased Russian naval activity.⁵⁵⁰ Given long-term requirements to monitor Russian naval activity in European waters, the Navy could consider either a more persistent deployment of maritime patrol squad-

rons or a forward-deployed squadron to the Mediterranean, where permanent facilities exist, with a rotational detachment in Iceland to enhance antisubmarine warfare (ASW) capabilities.

Beyond forward-stationed forces, the U.S. Navy's presence in European waters is more typically due to requirements in the Middle East. While the Navy's presence is occasionally augmented in the Mediterranean by a Carrier Strike Group and other forces, their primary mission is to transit the Suez Canal to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Therefore, it is imperative to prioritize building interoperability with allies to improve the capabilities of the alliance's Standing NATO Maritime Groups, whose requirements are often left unsourced.

While U.S. and allied naval capabilities dwarf those of Russia, NATO's maritime capability and capacity for high-end conflicts has atrophied over the years and requires reinvestment. There are positive signs that European naval force structure is beginning to recover and that countries are redirecting investments toward maritime capability gaps created by budget cuts resulting from the 2008 economic crisis. The Royal Navy, for example, will commission the first of its two new aircraft carriers in 2018, giving European navies the ability to generate two to three carrier battle groups.⁵⁵¹ In addition, several allied navies are or will shortly be taking delivery of a new generation of surface combatants and/or submarines.

Maritime Capabilities

Problems persist in terms of achieving interoperability be-

tween major allied weapons systems and training, particularly as it relates to air and missile defense and antisubmarine warfare (ASW). The capabilities needed to seamlessly integrate U.S. and allied vessels into combined formations are critical to

vessels like minesweepers. By contrast, European navies tend to lack large surface combatants, but tend to have sufficient numbers of small surface combatants and support vessels.

The extent to which allied navies can actually work together

WHILE U.S. AND ALLIED NAVAL CAPABILITIES DWARF THOSE OF RUSSIA, NATO'S MARITIME CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY FOR HIGH-END CONFLICTS HAS ATROPHIED OVER THE YEARS AND REQUIRES REINVESTMENT.

ensuring NATO's advantages in the European maritime domain. In a contingency, only a portion of the available U.S. naval forces could be committed to Europe due to other global missions, such as contending with Russia's Pacific Fleet and protecting sea lines of communication. Integration among allied maritime forces, as well as with the United States, is therefore crucial to the alliance's ability to collectively leverage its maritime power and fight together seamlessly. From a pure force structure standpoint, there are some natural synergies between U.S. and allied naval forces. The U.S. Navy is balanced more toward aircraft carriers, amphibious warfare ships, and large surface combatants for force projection and sea control, but has neglected smaller surface combatants and support

to defeat advanced air and missile threats is uncertain, however, given the diversity in ships and air defense weapons. The current lack of interoperability in this area is especially worrying because Russia has invested heavily in new multiplatform, anti-ship cruise missiles and may field hypersonic cruise missiles in the coming decade.⁵⁵² Moreover, the contested waters along NATO's eastern flank tend to be within range of Russian airbases, exposing allied vessels to air-to-ship missile threats. NATO allies must, therefore, work diligently to develop an integrated air defense capability for its surface groups.

In a high-threat environment, allied ships need to be able to share real-time information between platforms and manage complex

missile engagements against a large number of targets. Over the long term, this will require an integrated air and missile defense system that should include the ability to engage threats from non-shipboard sensors, similar to the U.S. Navy's combined engagement capability (CEC).⁵⁵³ For the Royal Navy and Italian Navy, developing this capability will maximize the value of their F-35 buys. While these are the only nations in Europe that currently plan to operate the F-35 variant at sea, several other allies are purchasing the land-based versions of the aircraft and are considering acquiring additional advanced aerial sensing platforms. To improve NATO's ability to face air and missile threats, NATO naval forces will need to be able to communicate more effectively.

NATO allies also face shortcomings in ASW. As in the air defense mission, these problems have more to do with interoperability and training. During the Cold War, NATO forces regularly exercised and executed large-scale, theater-wide ASW missions. Monitoring of the Greenland, Iceland, UK (GIUK) gap, the transit corridor for Soviet submarines into the broader North Atlantic, was a key task for European navies. Today, Russian undersea activity again threatens the GIUK gap, the Baltic Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. There are promising signs that NATO nations are taking the threat seriously and directing funds to new ASW platforms. Both the United Kingdom and Norway have recently committed to acquiring new maritime patrol aircraft.⁵⁵⁴ Unfortunately, NATO has lost the "muscle memory" to conduct complex ASW operations.⁵⁵⁵

Effective ASW can lessen the asymmetric impact of Russian submarine operations by partially removing their veil of secrecy. NATO is making strides to rebuild this capacity, most prominently with its Dynamic Mongoose exercise series.⁵⁵⁶ Unfortunately, there is no quick answer to this problem. Correcting NATO's ASW deficiencies will require sustained training and exercising at both the national and alliance level. These will have to be paired with targeted investments aimed at replacing aging aerial and surface ASW platforms.

Allied maritime capabilities will not form the core of counter Russian activity, but they can limit Russia's ability to act completely on its own terms, especially as it seeks to assert itself throughout the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. Naval forces have always been an important area of advantage for NATO—an advantage that must not wane. With targeted investments, enhanced training, and a few new capabilities, however, NATO will be more than able of responding to the Russian maritime threat and using its naval power to strengthen deterrence.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Increase priority for European deployments and training:** Generate more naval presence in European waters, including regular patrols and exercises in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea. This should include a U.S. Carrier Strike Group participation in a large and demanding NATO maritime and joint exercise to demonstrate multi-domain capabilities and build interoperability between

large U.S. surface groups and allied forces, which has degraded in recent years.

- **Increase antisubmarine warfare capabilities:** Enhance presence of maritime patrol aircraft in the North Sea and Mediterranean for ASW, including reestablishing regular rotations to Keflavik Air Base for U.S. and allied aircraft. Over the long term, the Navy should explore the utility of a forward-deployed maritime patrol squadron to Europe given enduring requirements in the Mediterranean Sea and the North Sea. The United States should also support antisubmarine warfare training with allies and contribute to training and exercises at both the alliance level and bilaterally.
- **Better integrate NATO maritime air defenses:** Encourage allied investment toward integrated and interoperable maritime air defense capabilities for NATO surface groups.
- **Utilize U.S. forward-deployed destroyers:** The main mission of the four U.S. destroyers homeported in Spain to support EPAA should be reconsidered in light of the changing threat environment. In addition to ballistic missile defense, these multi-mission destroyers offer capabilities for long-range precision strike, antisubmarine warfare, and other roles that should be utilized to build interoperability with allied maritime forces.

5 – Ground Forces and Combined Arms Warfare

U.S. ground forces are not only larger than Russia's, but they

Troops from the U.S. Army's 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division based at Fort Hood, Texas, transport equipment for Atlantic Resolve exercises in Lithuania.

Rukla, Lithuania, October 4, 2014

Credit: Petras Malikas/AFP/Getty Images



possess a far higher degree of readiness, quality of personnel and equipment, and overall war-fighting capability. Nevertheless, the United States and its allies face major challenges in terms of ensuring their ground forces are properly configured and sufficiently postured to deter aggression against the alliance and able to respond to contingencies in Europe. After years of focusing on counterinsurgency and stability operations, U.S. and allied ground forces face key capability gaps related to combined arms warfare. The United States must, therefore, prioritize the development of its short-range air defenses, antitank capabilities, tactical-level ISR and communications, and artillery and fires.

Ground Forces Posture

There are approximately 24,000 Army personnel stationed on the continent under the command of U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR). The forward-stationed combat forces consist of two brigade combat teams (BCTs): the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (Stryker) based in southern Germany and the 173rd Airborne Brigade based in northern Italy. These two light

BCTs amount to about 7,500 total combat troops. In 2014, in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, the United States launched Operation Atlantic Resolve (OAR) to enhance the U.S. air, land, and sea presence across NATO's eastern flank. This ongoing operation relies heavily on rotational ground units deployed to Europe on a temporary basis to provide additional forces and capabilities otherwise unavailable in the theater due to years of drawdown. USAREUR has been augmented by rotational forces that include an Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), combat aviation units, a warfighting headquarters, and other enablers. These rotational forces have raised the total Army force in Europe to about 29,000 personnel.

Determining the best mix of permanent and rotational forces requires weighing tradeoffs on sustainability, capability, signaling, and affordability.⁵⁵⁷ Begun in January 2017, the Department of Defense reconfigured its rotational presence in Europe to include heel-to-toe ABCT rotations from bases in the United States, bringing their equipment with them rather than relying

on prepositioned activity sets in Europe. The cost and effort entailed in providing this particular kind of force (armored) on a rotational basis without prepositioned equipment is considerable. The most recent deployment entailed transporting 87 Abrams tanks, 18 Paladins, 144 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 400 Humvees, hundreds of support vehicles, and thousands of additional pieces of equipment by ship across the Atlantic and then loading the equipment onto dozens of trains bound for Germany, Poland, and other countries.⁵⁵⁸ The 2017 ERI request earmarked \$637 million to provide this presence for one year, not including equipment transport.⁵⁵⁹ The enduring requirement for an armored presence, in addition to the strain such rotations place on U.S. troops, argue for a permanently stationed ABCT in Europe. This would bring the total number of permanent BCTs on the continent to three (one less than in 2012).

Army combat aviation forces in Europe are another challenge. Due to budget cuts and Army force structure reductions in 2014, the 12th Combat Avia-

tion Brigade (CAB) in Germany was gradually reduced to a headquarters element. Despite the continuing requirement for Army aviation assets in Europe, the 12th CAB's last remaining attack helicopters were withdrawn and redeployed to Alaska in August 2015.⁵⁶⁰ To backfill the loss, the 12th CAB is provided rotational forces from the United States that deploy on a heel-to-toe basis every nine months, funded under ERI. As with ABCTs, rotating aviation forces is a significant and expensive undertaking. Dozens of attack and transport helicopters assigned to units in the United States must be disassembled, meticulously packed, airlifted across the Atlantic, and then reassembled. More than 1,700 troops and other equipment must be moved as well. The 2017 ERI request seeks \$40 million to cover the one-year costs of transporting the CAB equipment to Europe. The United States should consider options for permanently stationing a CAB in Europe to avoid such a costly process and fill a critical aviation capability requirement that was under sourced even before the removal of the 12th CAB and the renewed tensions with Russia.

Apart from the Army, the United States has approximately 1,100 Marines permanently stationed in Europe under Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa (MARFOREUR/MARFORAF) headquartered in Germany. The limited Marine Corps presence in Europe reflects the service's expeditionary character, as well as its focus dating to the Cold War on the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and more recently Africa. The Marines have no major for-

ward-stationed combat units in Europe, but maintain a presence along NATO's north and south-eastern flanks through rotational deployments aimed at theater security cooperation.

In the north, the Marines maintain a sizable stockpile of prepositioned equipment in caves in Norway under the Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Norway (MCPN), first established in the 1980s. MCPN is designed to equip a 4,500-man Marine Air-Ground Task Force with ground and air support elements and is configured to sustain two weeks of operations ranging from theater security cooperation to mid-intensity combat.⁵⁶¹ The Marines use this equipment regularly to conduct cold weather training exercises with allies and partners. In 2016, this exercise included 2,000 marines and 14,000 multinational troops.⁵⁶² In January 2017, the Marines began experimenting with a more regular rotational presence to Norway composed of a company-sized deployment (about 300 troops), a move that drew strong protests from Russia, including a nuclear threat from a senior Russian parliamentarian.⁵⁶³

On the southeast flank, Marine forces make up the Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF), which is a six-month rotational battalion-sized presence (300–500 marines) in Romania and Bulgaria.⁵⁶⁴ Under OAR, the Marines have begun shifting the focus of the BSRF activities toward combined-arms warfare training and increasing exercises with allied mechanized forces to increase their relevancy in deterring Russia.⁵⁶⁵

The Marine Corps presence in the region is intermittently supported by sea-based expedi-

tionary forces—known as Amphibious Readiness Groups and embarked Marine Expeditionary Units (ARG/MEUs)—that often transit through European waters on their way to and from deployments in the Middle East. Additionally, the Marines have rotationally deployed a Special Purpose Marine-Air Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) to Morón Air Base in Spain. Falling under the command of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the SPMAGTF comprises 500 Marines and 12 MV-22B Ospreys and is configured as a rapid-response force for crises that may emerge in Africa. This force, however, was recently halved due to deployment pressures on the Osprey fleet.⁵⁶⁶

Combined Arms Warfare

U.S. ground forces have come to expect that the Air Force and other services will be able to quickly achieve air superiority and provide close air support as they have in every post-Cold War fight. This assumption led the Army to remove air defense capabilities from its maneuver forces and neglect the development of modern short-range air defense (SHORAD) capabilities. The presence of advanced Russian A2/AD capabilities in Eastern Europe, however, means that U.S. and NATO air superiority cannot be guaranteed in the initial stages of combat. To reduce the resulting vulnerability to ground forces, the United States should prioritize providing SHORAD capabilities for maneuver forces, in addition to developing modern infantry and vehicle-mounted precision-guided missiles (PGM). The PGMs that are organic to regular infantry units

have not significantly changed since the 1970s, when anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) and man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) became widely available. The Stinger MANPADS and TOW and Javelin ATGMs have become outdated, however, and need to be miniaturized and outfitted with superior warheads.

The potential for contested airspace also increases the importance of artillery support for U.S. and allied ground forces. As the war in eastern Ukraine has illustrated, Russia and its proxy forces rely heavily on artillery and advantages in rocket mass, range, and destructive power. While the Army has made improvements incorporating precision into its artillery, it has generally neglected the development and role of artillery in the context of a high-intensity combined arms conflict.⁵⁶⁷ The Army has recently seen success upgrading its Paladin self-propelled howitzer with the M109A7, which is expected to enter full-scale production in 2017. The M109A7 includes a brand-new chassis, engine, transmission, suspension, and steering system—all components common to Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, which will reduce cost and improve interoperability.⁵⁶⁸ The M109A7 is a welcome upgrade but falls short of the potential of the now-canceled Future Combat System that could have provided significant improvements to artillery range and mass.

Secure communication is another necessary capability that the Army and allied ground forces must refine in order to coordinate operations securely in the face of advancing Russian

electronic warfare and jamming capabilities. Likewise, ISR must be carefully controlled and shared through NATO's classified computer network, the battlefield information collection and exploitation system (BICES), which also provides operational security for planned and ongoing operations. However, the BICES terminals are not widely available to units at the company level, making secure, tactical-level communication with NATO allies in the field difficult.⁵⁶⁹

The advantages that U.S. forces enjoy today in combined-arms warfare may diminish over the long term without proper investment, especially if Russia continues its pace of development.

Specific recommendations to strengthen U.S. force posture and improve U.S. and allied combined-arms capabilities include:

- **Forward deploy an armored brigade combat team:** There is a clear and enduring requirement in Europe for the warfighting capabilities provided by Army armored forces. While upfront costs would be high, rotational deployments are not a sustainable or cost-effective over the long term. A permanently stationed ABCT in Europe would also provide more capability than a rotational unit as it would be able to operate as a whole from a fixed permanent base, rather than at dispersed locations, and save the time lost through packing and shipping gear every nine months. It would also build stronger in-theater relationships with allied forces. Finally, it would relieve the stresses on the Army's armored units

caused by the need to generate a rotational ABCT every nine months as it essentially takes three ABCTs to generate a constant rotational presence of a single ABCT.

- **Restore a full-strength combat aviation brigade:** Rotating aviation forces from the United States to round out to the otherwise hollow 12th Combat Aviation Brigade is an excessively expensive and unsustainable way to meet current and future requirements. A U.S.-based CAB should be permanently assigned to Europe to meet this requirement within the active Army's end-strength target of 11 CABs.
- **Forward station a mission command element:** Given long-term requirements for this capability in Europe, a mission command element should be permanently assigned back to Europe.
- **Add prepositioned equipment:** Army Prepositioned Stocks (APS) should be established in Europe sufficient for two ABCTs (one above and beyond the current DoD plan) and two sets of enabler forces for a fires brigade and a sustainment brigade to ensure follow-on forces can deploy to Europe quickly in a crisis.
- **Augment ground logistics:** Forward deploying additional logistics forces and equipment to Europe would strengthen deterrence by improving reinforcement capacity and better enable surge operations. Forward deploying additional logistics units would strengthen joint capabilities and represents a more cost-effective approach than adding addi-

tional ground combat forces above the minimal thresholds recommended here.

- **Improve short-range air defense capabilities:** In a contested airspace where the U.S. Army is not guaranteed immediate air support from the Air Force, it needs to provide SHORAD capabilities to maneuver forces and develop modern infantry and vehicle-mounted precision-guided missiles.
- **Increase the capability of artillery:** The Russian military heavily utilizes artillery in battle and the United States needs the ability to respond with strength as well as the agility it already enjoys. ABCTs assigned to Europe should be equipped with new M109A7 howitzers and the Army should develop modern artillery systems with increased range and mass.
- **Establish secure tactical communications with NATO allies:** The United States and its allies must improve EMS resiliency and develop secure and interoperable radio communications to combat Russian electronic warfare efforts and coordinate intelligence sharing and joint operations.

6 - Special Operations Forces

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have an important and multifaceted role to play in working with allies to build their internal resilience, as well as serving as vital enablers for U.S. and allied forces. SOF possess a comparative advantage over general-purpose forces across three related lines of effort. First, SOF can be leveraged to support and

enable small allied response forces to swiftly confront and counter unconventional warfare strategies, such as those involving deniable forces (i.e., “little green men”). Second, SOF can be employed to help allies develop their own unconventional warfare capabilities in order to make vulnerable allies difficult and costly to occupy. Third, SOF’s enabling role for U.S. and NATO air, land, and maritime forces can be tailored to address some of the high-end challenges posed by Russian forces, such as A2/AD.

The United States maintains a robust presence of permanently deployed SOF in Europe under Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) in Germany, including the 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and two Naval Special Warfare units (i.e., Navy SEALs). Additionally, the 352nd Special Operations Wing stationed at RAF Mildenhall in the United Kingdom provides mobility for SOF and performs unique missions including precision strike, combat air control, and other functions.⁵⁷⁰ The main priority for European-based SOF is providing support to CENTCOM and AFRICOM operations against violent extremist organizations. Nevertheless, U.S. SOF in Europe have conducted in-theater rotational deployments to the Baltic States since mid-2014 that are focused on training and partnering with allied forces on unconventional warfare.

Countering Unconventional Warfare

U.S. and allied SOF are uniquely placed to help vulnerable states develop their capability to exploit the weaknesses in Russia’s

unconventional warfare techniques. While Moscow’s use of low-signature and deniable forces in Ukraine stirred fears of similar aggression across the eastern flank, the limitations of this approach have often failed to be appreciated. In Crimea, Russia’s use of deniable forces—comprising its most elite land forces (spetsnaz, Airborne Troops (VDV), and naval infantry)—was largely successful because the Ukrainian forces did not resist, not because the Russians were more numerous or better equipped. In eastern Ukraine, several weeks of growing unrest passed before Kyiv launched a counteroffensive aimed at reasserting its control over separatist areas, providing Russia precious time to raise and organize proxy forces. Using deniable forces imposes constraints on the aggressor in terms of the size and capabilities that can be reasonably employed (or raised locally) to achieve objectives while still remaining deniable. One lesson from the Ukraine conflict must, therefore, be that the best defense against deniable forces and similar unconventional warfare threats is a rapid response using decisive force.⁵⁷¹

Given their expertise with small unit tactics, limited employment of force, and ability to operate discreetly, SOF can be used to train, advise, and enable allied military and security forces to rapidly detect and respond to threats that fall below the threshold of conventional warfare. U.S. SOF also benefit from specific legal authorities that allow them to work closely and more creatively with other countries’ internal security forces. For example, while the small size of the Baltic militaries means they

stand no chance against Russian conventional forces, responding to deniable forces is within their capacity. In combination with their knowledge of small-unit tactics and direct action, SOF can support the development of allied governments' plans, forces, and capabilities necessary

to unconventional warfare. Military Information Support Operations (MISO)—a core competency of U.S. SOF—include tailored and strategic communication activities, sometimes lacking originator attribution, to establish and reinforce the credibility and veracity of the United States'

IF DETERRENCE FAILS, THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE EASTERN FLANK AND THE LOCAL MILITARY IMBALANCE WITH RUSSIA PROVIDES FEW REALISTIC AVENUES FOR U.S. AND ALLIED GROUND FORCES TO PREVENT THE BALTIC STATES FROM BEING OVERRUN.

to counter potential aggression through unconventional warfare. If ordered, SOF could also provide critical enabling support to allied security forces during a crisis. In such scenarios, it would be important to keep in mind that, while such a strategy could foil Russian attempts at low-intensity aggression, it could also entail the risk that Russia would escalate to higher-order aggression to achieve its goals. There is no solution that is risk-free, however, and much depends upon Russia's perceptions of its options.

Countering Russian information operations is another important part of building allied resiliency

presence in a region and counteract foreign propaganda efforts. Although not sufficient in and of itself, MISO can be a valuable tool in creating and shaping accurate local perceptions among audiences that are predisposed to distrust U.S. intentions based on the lies being promulgated by states such as Russia. Russian-language outlets in the Baltic States—for example—have spread fake news stories about military exercises and given intense and distorted coverage of minor incidents between foreign troops and local civilians. MISO can also be used, as necessary, to enable offensive cyber and EW operations against Russian propaganda outlets.

Conducting

Unconventional Warfare

SOF are also uniquely able to contribute to the development of the Baltic States and other vulnerable allies' own unconventional warfare capabilities. If deterrence fails, the geography of the eastern flank and the local military imbalance

with Russia provides few realistic avenues for U.S. and allied ground forces to prevent the Baltic States from being overrun.⁵⁷² To prepare for a worst-case scenario, U.S. and allied SOF can assist the Baltic States in developing the capabilities to transform themselves into a hornet's nest if occupied. This would also contribute to deterrence by signaling to Russia that any aggression would be met with violent local resistance and complicate efforts to achieve a *fait accompli* before other U.S. and allied forces can respond.

This approach must be built into each of the Baltic States' national defense strategies, similar to the one long pursued by Finland.⁵⁷³ U.S. SOF training and advice for what is known as foreign internal defense (FID) should be conducted not only with allied active-duty forces, but also with their volunteer national guard structures, such as the Estonian Defence League, the Latvian National Guard, and the Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Forces. SOF training should be connected with a U.S. security assistance strategy aimed at enhancing these allies' military capabilities to wage a costly asymmetric conflict.

Enabling Collective Action and Joint Operations

SOF can also fill a critical role in enabling other areas of U.S. and NATO military power in a high-end conflict. For example, SOF

infantry PGMs and small UAVs could also make direct action by SOF against certain targets, such as surface-to-air missiles systems, a potent method to disrupt Russia's A2/AD strategy.⁵⁷⁴ The PGMs that are organic to regular

infantry and SOF units have not significantly changed since the 1970s, when antitank guided missiles and man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) became widely available. Emerging miniature PGM ca-

pabilities, such as the Pike missile, a two-pound laser-guided missile that can be fired from a standard rifle-mounted grenade launcher and hit targets over a mile away, could begin to significantly increase the firepower, engagement ranges, and precision available to SOF.⁵⁷⁵

SOF can also force potential adversaries to change how they would prefer to operate in ways that other U.S. and allied forces can capitalize on. For example, if Russia perceives direct attacks from SOF units as a threat to its mobile surface-to-air missile systems, it might increase the number of troops it attaches to each system to bolster its security perimeter. This could make direct action by SOF a less attractive strategy; however, those added security forces might make the systems they are protecting easier to spot from above by U.S. and allied aircraft, while also disrupting their own ability to "shoot and scoot."

Going forward, U.S. and allied SOF will need to continue to invest in and evolve the tactics and capabilities necessary for operations against near-peer competitors in highly contested environments.⁵⁷⁶ Conflicts over the last decade have, to a certain degree, inversed the traditional relationship between general-purpose forces and SOF. Much investment, for example, has been dedicated to better preparing general-purpose forces to conduct or enable traditional SOF missions, such as countering terrorism and countering insurgencies. While this will surely remain crucial, it is clear that more investment is needed to ensure that SOF can better enable general-purpose forces in a high-end confrontation under today's conditions.

The United States and its allies need to continue to examine Russia's unconventional warfare strategies, identify their weak points, and find ways to exploit those weaknesses to make the strategy unappealing to Russia. From a deterrence perspective, a key objective for the United States and its allies should be to find ways to leverage their strengths in SOF to undermine Russia's confidence in its A2/AD strategy and other areas. This should also include introducing new ways for SOF to hold at risk the capabilities that Russia perceives as critical to a fight against U.S. and NATO forces, and force Russian forces operate in inefficient and disadvantageous ways.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Exploit the weakness of Russia's unconventional warfare strategies:** SOF's unique capabilities should be leveraged

MORE INVESTMENT IS NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT SOF CAN BETTER ENABLE GENERAL-PURPOSE FORCES IN A HIGH-END CONFRONTATION.

can assist U.S. and allied efforts to gain air superiority by conducting special reconnaissance missions—including spotting mobile air defense systems and serving as forward air controllers to guide precision strikes. SOF could also be used to enable offensive military cyber operations. This could include using SOF reconnaissance forces to gain physical access to adversary C4ISR networks and other closed military and intelligence communications systems to enable or conduct cyber-espionage and/or cyberattack operations.

More attention should be paid toward marrying traditional SOF missions like special reconnaissance with emerging technologies to hold Russian forces at greater risk and complicate Moscow's risk calculus. This could be particularly effective given the relative low cost of SOF capabilities compared to developing new high-end capabilities for general-purpose forces. Advancements in the miniaturization of

to help allies build resiliency and the forces needed to counter aggression through unconventional warfare and strengthen deterrence against lower-end threats.

- **Build allied unconventional warfare capabilities:** SOF should be nested within a broader strategy to reduce the appeal of conventional aggression by supporting and building vulnerable allies' internal unconventional warfare capabilities.
- **Leverage SOF for the high-end fight:** The size and capabilities of U.S. and allied SOF provide an advantage in a high-end confrontation and they should be prepared to enable critical missions such as establishing air superiority and provide enabling support to general-purpose forces.

7 - Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR)

ISR capabilities underpin the modern way of war. In recent years, U.S. ISR capabilities have become synonymous in the public imagination with live video feeds of distant battlefields and drone strikes against terrorist enclaves. The ISR enterprise, however, entails a wide family of systems and capabilities that includes collection platforms (including manned and unmanned aircraft, reconnaissance satellites, as well as other air, land, maritime, and cyber platforms), sensors, datalinks, personnel, and the analytic capabilities that process raw data into actionable intelligence for warfighters. ISR is not only vital for directing U.S. and allied combat power. It combines various sources and methods—including

human, signals, geospatial, imagery, open-source, and other forms of intelligence—to paint a truer picture for policymakers of global events and the forces shaping them. This, in turn, influences the policies and strategies put in place to manage and defend U.S. interests. This section primarily explores U.S. and allied military owned and operated ISR capabilities. However, the capabilities brought to bear by the broader U.S. and allied intelligence apparatus are also valuable.

Strategic ISR

Strategic ISR capabilities developed by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War offered both sides the means to monitor the other's nuclear and conventional military forces and helped to reduce—but not eliminate—the risk of surprise attacks. In the late 1950s, the United States relied on U-2 photographic aerial reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union. Later, as technology evolved, these flights were replaced by reconnaissance satellites. Today, reconnaissance satellites, or National Technical Means (NTM), remain not only vital to monitoring Russian compliance with various arms control treaties, but to tracking Russian military actions. Effective use of ISR capabilities can help reduce ambiguity in crisis situations and, in some cases, lift the veil on certain Russian coercive activities. For example, overhead imagery of Russia's military buildup in Syria in early September 2015 provided U.S. policymakers with advance warning of the Russian airstrikes that would take place later that month.⁵⁷⁷

The United States is believed to maintain the largest and most

sophisticated constellation of reconnaissance satellites in the world, with the ability to perform a variety of ISR missions.⁵⁷⁸ The United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy each operate smaller satellite fleets for military use.⁵⁷⁹ U.S. and allied forces have become dependent upon satellites to provide ISR, as well as to enable global military communications. These platforms are vulnerable to antispace capabilities being developed by Russia and other near-peer adversaries. Russia has developed nonkinetic, antispace capabilities including ground-based jamming systems intended to disable satellite datalinks and lasers to disrupt satellites' sensors.⁵⁸⁰ Russia is also believed to be developing kinetic antisatellite weapons that would undoubtedly be aimed at some of these assets.

Nonstrategic ISR

The diffusion of airborne ISR capabilities down to the tactical level over the past 15 years has provided U.S. and allied forces with a significant advantage on the battlefield. Today, airborne ISR capabilities allow U.S. forces to identify, locate, track, and accurately strike a moving target, such as a vehicle carrying insurgents in a major urban environment, with minimal collateral damage. U.S. military operations have come to rely heavily on such theater- and tactical-level ISR assets to protect U.S. and allied forces, provide close air support, and monitor adversary activities.

In terms of ISR platforms, the United States military operates a robust fleet of unmanned aircraft augmented by a smaller number of manned aircraft, as



Many U.S. ISR collection platforms, systems, and operating practices developed since 2001 were designed to support stability and counterterrorism operations and are poorly suited to meet the operational requirements of a high-end fight.

RQ-4 Global Hawk at Beale Air Force Base, California, 2006

Credit: Senior Airman Christine Collier

well as space-based assets. The Air Force operates approximately 450 ISR aircraft, of which about 360 are unmanned.⁵⁸¹ It also reportedly operates strategic ISR aircraft in conjunction with the intelligence community, such as the RQ-170 Sentinel, one of which crashed in Iran in 2011 while collecting on Tehran's nuclear program.⁵⁸² The Army, Navy, and Marines operate additional unmanned and manned ISR aircraft and other platforms. Tactical and theater-level ISR aircraft include the MQ-1 Predator and the MQ-9 Reaper (both of which can be armed), as well as a variety of other unmanned and manned systems. Strategic airborne assets include the RQ-4 Global Hawk and manned aircraft largely developed during the Cold War, including the U-2, RC-135 variants, and the E-8 JSTARS. Additionally, the United States and several allies are believed to have or be developing a small number of aircraft purpose-built to conduct ISR missions in nonpermissive environments, largely for strategic intelligence collection.⁵⁸³ Fifth-generation fighter aircraft such as the F-35—which are being fielded by the United

States and several NATO allies—have noteworthy ISR capabilities that can augment purpose-built penetrating ISR assets in contested areas. The future U.S. bomber aircraft, the B-21 Raider, may also have significant capabilities in this respect.

The United Kingdom and France operate relatively robust ISR fleets, which are optimized for counterterrorism and counterinsurgency missions, as opposed to high-end operations. Across NATO nations more broadly there is a worrying lack of ISR capacity. Throughout NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya, shortfalls in allied ISR capacity led allies to rely heavily upon U.S. airborne ISR assets to enable their airstrikes.⁵⁸⁴ During a high-end crisis, however, U.S. ISR airborne assets would first and foremost be used to support U.S. operational requirements and not necessarily be readily available to enable allied forces, potentially diminishing alliance-wide combat power.

Over the past several years, the United States has increased individual allies' ISR capacity through sales of the MQ-9

Reaper to France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. The United Kingdom and Italy both operate armed versions of this aircraft. In addition to national assets, NATO will soon standup the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system, which includes five jointly owned RQ-4 Global Hawk aircraft based at Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily.⁵⁸⁵ While AGS will help meet some of the alliance's ISR demands, it will not provide sufficient capacity across the entire European theater.

ISR Challenges

Despite some advances, three major challenges remain in terms of allied ISR: (1) inadequate capacity, especially as it relates to platforms needed for contested airspace operations; (2) datalink limitations in communications-degraded environments; and (3) difficulties with information sharing. The first challenge is a result of the nature of U.S. combat operations since 9/11. Many of the collection platforms, systems, and operating practices developed over the past decade and

a half were designed to support stability and counterterrorism operations and are poorly suited to meet the operational requirements of a high-end fight. For example, most airborne ISR collection platforms are designed to fly in uncontested airspace and would not survive long against an adversary with even basic air defenses, let alone Russia's sophisticated A2/AD network. The U.S. and NATO ISR enterprises will need to be adapted and enhanced to prepare for the very different operating environment they would encounter in a fight against a state like Russia. While upgrades to existing platforms like the MQ-9 Reaper may improve their performance in contested airspace, they would still face significant risks until air defenses were significantly degraded. There is a clear need for more allied ISR aircraft that can operate in contested airspace and track dynamic targets such as mobile threats, fixed SAMs, EW systems, and short-range ballistic missiles to conduct or enable precision strikes and/or support ground forces.

Second, ISR capabilities will be largely useless without the ability to successfully transmit data from the collection platform to other systems and users. While UAS have dramatically increased the scale of ISR collection in recent conflicts, their total reliance on remote datalinks—in addition to the heavy demand on limited satellite bandwidth to both remotely control the aircraft as well as transmit the raw data back to analytic centers for processing—is a significant drawback. The high-bandwidth demands of UAS aircraft make them highly vulnerable to jamming—interrupted datalinks

can not only disable UAS sensors, but can cause the pilot flying it remotely to lose control of the aircraft. The high-bandwidth transmissions emitted by UAS can also make them vulnerable to detection by adversary air defenses. In contrast, large, manned ISR aircraft like the E-8 JSTARS have crews that process the raw data into actionable intelligence onboard and produce far smaller transmissions, which make them less vulnerable to jamming. Solving the datalink problem will require the integration of currently fielded manned and unmanned platforms, a push for open architecture in newly developed systems, and/or changes in operating procedures. Additionally, the transmission process and timeline will need to be shortened. Instead of transmitting ISR data and intelligence to rear-based analytic centers for processing, the future ISR enterprise will likely transmit autonomously or semi-autonomously processed data directly to warfighters by line of sight datalinks that are harder to detect and jam.

The third, and perhaps most fundamental, challenge is the lack of adequate intelligence sharing within the alliance essential to integrating NATO's ISR architecture. In certain cases, this has led to different threat pictures and joint operational constraints. Most nations are extremely protective of the intelligence generated by national ISR platforms. U.S. classification restrictions guard ISR information derived from highly sensitive sources and methods that, if revealed, could expose both the presence of U.S. assets (human and machine) and the level of penetration into an adversary's

programs and activities. There are also policy and legal concerns over sharing lethal, or actionable, intelligence with allied and partner nations as doing so may create liability for any resulting errors. These concerns are not imprudent and intelligence sharing should rightly entail scrutiny, especially considering that not all allied networks and agencies are equally secure. The bar for sharing, however, is often set unreasonably high, and the intelligence passed is often untimely or unpersuasive. Enhanced sharing with key allies—especially those that the United States expects to support and enable its policies, notably France—should be pursued in order to better synchronize allied threat assessments (and the resulting policies), and better enable joint operations.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Rebalance intelligence resources:** The Department of Defense and the intelligence community should reexamine the resources committed to collecting and analyzing intelligence on Russia in light of its coercive activities and military interventions in Europe and elsewhere. This should include a review of collection assets and capabilities including the allocation of ISR aircraft in Europe, the tasking of space-based assets, efforts dedicated to human intelligence (HUMINT) collection, and other sources and methods. There is also a need to invest in human capital and foster greater analytic expertise on Russia across the intelligence community (including Russian-language skills).

- **Enable acquisition and upgrades to allied airborne ISR fleets:** The United States should continue to support the expansion of allied ISR airborne capacity. A number of NATO allies now operate a solid core of U.S.-origin ISR aircraft such as the MQ-9 Reaper. Allies will require additional capacity and their current fleets will require modifications to make them more viable in a high-end fight. Current U.S. export restrictions on UAS, however, place burdensome requirements on sales to even close U.S. European allies and should be revisited.⁵⁸⁶
- **Develop nonpermissive airborne ISR capabilities:** The United States and major allies need to develop and field airborne ISR platforms that can operate in highly contested airspace to enable precision strike and support SEAD and other operations. The sensitivity surrounding these systems would unfortunately make a large multinational collaboration extremely difficult. Instead, the United States should use its close defense relationship with the United Kingdom to ensure that there are appropriate facilities available for forward basing existing and future nonpermissive U.S. airborne ISR assets should they need to be deployed to Europe in a crisis. Furthermore, the United States and the United Kingdom should explore collaboration on future nonpermissive multirole aircraft.
- **Develop solutions for degraded communications operations:** Current U.S. and allied airborne ISR platforms rely on

high-bandwidth satellite datalinks that connect the aircraft to ground systems and are highly vulnerable to jamming. There is not necessarily a technical solution that can fully resolve this problem. Instead, the United States and allies will have to develop tactics, techniques, procedures that pair artificial intelligence, and future networking technologies, such as optical datalinks and onboard data processing, as workarounds.

- **Review and revise intelligence sharing policies with key allies:** The United States should review its current intelligence-sharing authorities with NATO allies, especially as it relates to joint security challenges, including Russia. While bilateral channels will likely remain the primary sharing mechanism for highly sensitive intelligence, new authorities and procedures should be sought that broaden the amount, quality, and timeliness of both the operational and strategic-level intelligence being shared with NATO and key partners.

8 - Electronic Warfare

Leveraging the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) allows U.S. and NATO forces to act rapidly and strike with precision. Renewed Russian investments in EW capabilities are increasingly putting at risk a wide range of critical U.S. and allied capabilities that rely upon the EMS, including integrated communications, precision weaponry, and unmanned systems. But while Russia's commitment to EW capabilities has redoubled, similar capabilities and expertise across U.S. and NATO forces has atrophied con-

siderably since the 1990s, especially the capabilities needed for a high-end fight.⁵⁸⁷

Recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have required the United States and its allies to focus their EW efforts on defeating a wide array of radio-controlled improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and commercial communication systems. The bulk of U.S. high-end EW capacity lies in the Navy's EA-18G Growlers. In addition, the F-35 has a powerful EW suite built into the airframe and novel EW munitions such as the MALD-J and the Non-Kinetic Counter Electronics (NKCE) program that may offer U.S. and allied air forces new electronic attack capabilities. However, these are all either future systems, fielded in small numbers, or largely aligned against threats in the Asia-Pacific.

Beyond offensive EW systems, U.S. and allied datalinks and sensors that rely on the EMS will have to build increased resiliency in order to effectively operate in degraded EMS environments. Resiliency includes "smart" radios and radars that can rapidly cycle between frequencies in order to defeat enemy jamming as well as new line-of-sight communication technologies that are inherently jam proof. Increasing resiliency and therefore decreasing vulnerability to adversary EW capabilities may require new concepts of operations that minimize U.S. and NATO reliance on satellite communications, precision navigation, real-time full-motion video, and full human control of unmanned systems.

A core component of EMS operations is electronic intelligence (ELINT), which enables the detection, cataloguing, and

analysis of any and all adversary systems that emit electronic signals. The United States and several NATO allies retain relatively robust ELINT capabilities. However, these systems are not able to easily operate in contested environments and several of the platforms are reaching the end of their service lives. As with jamming platforms, there are programs slated to replace these capabilities, but they often rely on UAS, which may themselves be vulnerable to Russian EW systems. U.S. and allied ELINT capabilities are in high demand from other operations and it is unclear if the alliance has the capacity needed to meet steady-state ELINT requirements let alone surge capacity for a potential crisis situation. Given the centrality of ELINT collection for operations against a near peer competitor and the paucity of assets available, NATO should consider how to host ELINT sensors on additional airframes to add capacity.

Alliance Cooperation in the Electromagnetic Spectrum

A key challenge faced by the United States and NATO in the EMS domain is their limited ability to cooperate and coordinate on EW. In a crisis, the electromagnetic spectrum must be effectively managed to permit combined operations and collective action. This is particularly important as spectrum is a finite resource that is quickly sapped. Without effective EMS management, one ally's jamming equipment could inadvertently jam another ally's communications or weapons systems. For instance, during the Iraq War, U.S. forces using jamming equipment to disrupt insurgent IEDs would

inadvertently jam the communications of nearby Polish troops because both sides were not properly de-conflicting their frequencies.⁵⁸⁸ Organizationally, the alliance's EW doctrine is under the purview of the NATO Electronic Warfare Advisory Committee.⁵⁸⁹ Yet there is no real coherent concept or strategy guiding the development and employment of EW capabilities across the alliance.⁵⁹⁰ Devising a NATO-wide spectrum management capability is vital, but will be incredibly difficult. Even the U.S. military, for instance, finds EMS management across its various service branches and systems difficult.

In addition to managing EMS, the United States also faces considerable issues with coordinating offensive EW and ELINT operations with its allies. These capabilities are some of the most sensitive and classified in the entire U.S. arsenal. The United States is believed to only share operational data on some of these systems with a handful of countries, notably the United Kingdom and Norway due to their long-term partnership monitoring Russian naval forces in the North Sea and Barents Sea.⁵⁹¹ Due to the well-known problems in sharing intelligence across the alliance, cooperation on sensitive EW capabilities may have to remain restricted to small subsets of allies. This classification barrier, however, could dramatically constrain the ability of allied forces to operate collectively against an adversary with considerable EW capabilities.

The diversity of EW capabilities and systems using the EMS across the alliance could also become a major hindrance in a crisis. Allied cooperation could

be further taxed in a crisis because several allies operate similar or identical Soviet-era equipment as Russia. For example, the Polish Air Force operates Mig-29s that mount Russian radars. There may not be a feasible technical solution to such issues and therefore this may place operational restrictions on how certain NATO forces operate together.

Given these limitations and the difficulty of solving several of these issues with technical solutions, NATO should focus on developing combined EMS battle management that mitigates these issues to the greatest degree possible through the development of standardized EW tactics, techniques, and procedures. An integrated doctrine combined with realistic exercises could help to identify key EW vulnerabilities, develop mitigation strategies, and build interoperability between allied forces. This may require dedicated training areas focused on preparing NATO forces for operating together in a contested EMS environment. For instance, Russian forces have proven highly competent in directing massed artillery fires through ELINT in eastern Ukraine. Training troops to recognize and attribute adversary actions in the EMS is crucial. For example, troops without training in degraded EMS environments tend to blame equipment failures rather than recognize an adversary is jamming them. Another core component of such training should be a renewed emphasis on emissions control to prevent an adversary force from easily locating forces by their radio traffic or cell phones.

While systems are coming on-line in the next 5–10 years that will dramatically improve NATO's EW capabilities, they will not be sufficient by themselves to counter Russian investments. They will need to be paired with new tactics, an integrated EW doctrine, and potentially new electronic attack systems that are tailored toward Russian EW platforms.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Develop a combined EMS management framework:** There is an urgent need to develop basic interoperability in EMS operations across NATO forces. This should be a phased approach that would first coordinate and then manage operations in the EMS given the diverse range of EW capabilities fielded by NATO members.
- **Mandate EW training for Enhanced Forward Presence:** NATO plans to begin deploying multinational battalions to the Baltic States in early 2017. These operations will bring them into close contact with a wide array of relatively sophisticated Russian EW equipment that targets both military and commercial systems. As forces deploy, they should undergo comprehensive and realistic training on operations in a compromised EMS environment. Such training will allow these units to understand how Russian EW capabilities may impact their communications and sensing equipment. In the long term, this training evolution can form the nucleus of renewed NATO efforts to both understand the operational and tactical effects of Russian

EW advances and to develop a comprehensive training regime that extends beyond units selected for enhanced forward presence (eFP) activities.

- **Improve EMS resiliency:** NATO nations, especially the United States, are highly reliant upon network technologies in order to achieve military dominance. Russian investments are targeting key nodes of this system in order to weaken U.S. capabilities. In light of this, the United States and NATO must invest in both systems and techniques that reduce vulnerabilities to jamming and other nonkinetic effects. The most difficult area for the United States to build resiliency will be in its reliance upon high-bandwidth satellite communication. Operational level commanders will have to accept far less information than they have been accustomed to over the past 15 years.
- **Prioritize ground-based electronic attack:** Ground forces have largely focused their EW research and development efforts on countering a wide range of commercial systems employed by insurgents while letting high-end capabilities atrophy. NATO ground forces should prioritize the development of a family of EW capabilities focused on degrading Russian communications, unmanned aircraft, and artillery radar systems. This family of system should scale from the platoon to division level.
- **Counter EW:** The United States and key allies such as the United Kingdom should develop a next generation of modular electronic attack ca-

pabilities designed to target adversary EW systems. These systems should include disposable stand-in jamming munitions, modular EW payloads for a host of aerial platforms, and potentially targeted cyber capabilities. When employed as a system, a counter EW system of systems would permit the entire NATO force to dominate the EMS.

9 - Cyber

The cyber domain is an area of rising tension and competition between Russia and the United States. For the United States, the difficulty of dealing with the cyber challenge has little to do with a technological capability gap. The United States is believed to retain an extensive repertoire of cyber espionage and offensive cyber capabilities. The challenge rather lies in crafting a strategy that harnesses U.S. capabilities to effectively deter coercive Russian activities in cyberspace. Such a strategy will entail a combination of activities, including: defending government, military, and private computer networks; responding to various types of Russian computer network operations (CNO); correctly attributing attacks and discerning intent; conducting proportional offensive cyber operations; and building allied resilience to similar attacks. Among these, the United States has been most reticent in conducting offensive cyber operations.

The United States is thought to retain the world's most technically advanced cyber capabilities in terms of both cyber espionage as well as offensive cyberwarfare capabilities to be employed for military operations. U.S. cyber capabilities for

intelligence and military operations reside primarily within the National Security Agency (NSA) and its colocated military counterpart U.S. Cyber Command (CYBERCOM), which some have called to be elevated to a fully separate unified combatant command.⁵⁹² The secrecy surrounding U.S. cyber capabilities, however, means that little is publicly known. Other NATO allies, including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, are thought to retain fairly sophisticated cyber capabilities, while smaller allies such as Estonia have sought to specialize in cyberwarfare.

Demonstrating cyber capabilities as part of an effective deterrence strategy entails risks to the viability of the capabilities, as well as significant risk of unwanted escalation.⁵⁹³ There is no strategy that can defend or deter all cyberattacks in their various forms. Software will inevitably contain flaws and a sophisticated and determined state actor such as Russia will always find vulnerabilities. In 2015, the Department of Defense issued a strategy that sought to bring clarity to its missions, goals, and capabilities in cyberspace. The DoD Cyber Strategy outlined three strategic missions for itself in cyberspace including (1) defending DoD networks, systems, and information; (2) defending against and countering cyberattacks of “significant consequence” directed at the U.S. homeland and vital U.S. national interests; and (3) providing integrated cyber capabilities to support global U.S. military operations and contingency plans.⁵⁹⁴ While much of the DoD strategy was not necessarily new, it did for the first time acknowledge

and address the role of U.S. offensive cyber capabilities in deterring adversaries and responding to aggression. The strategy noted that U.S. military could “use cyber operations to terminate an ongoing conflict on U.S. terms, or to disrupt an adversary’s military systems to prevent the use of force against U.S. interests.”⁵⁹⁵ It also recognized a cross-domain role for U.S. cyber operations to deter or defeat other strategic threats. To carry out its strategy, CYBERCOM is in the midst of standing up the Cyber Mission Force, which is set to reach full operational capability in 2018 with 6,200 individuals and 133 teams.⁵⁹⁶

The United States possesses extensive offensive cyber capabilities that could be employed in direct support of its military operations, as well as offensive capabilities that could generate strategic effects in the cyber domain against adversaries. The Stuxnet attack against the Iranian nuclear program in 2009–2010, which caused physical damage to Iranian centrifuges, remains the most sophisticated cyberattack ever conducted, although it was undertaken as an act of sabotage.⁵⁹⁷ Moreover, U.S. officials were reported to have considered employing cyber weapons to disable Libyan and Syrian air defense systems amid internal U.S. deliberations over interventions in those countries.⁵⁹⁸ The United States is also thought to have an extensive number of “implants” in adversary computer networks generally used for espionage, but which could also be used as attack avenues to punish aggression as needed. Other delivery methods that could be used to target specific military capabilities include fifth-generation U.S. aircraft as

well as electronic warfare platforms that have the capability to transmit cyber payloads of malicious code against an adversary’s radar and into its air and missile defense system to disrupt or possibly disable its functionality.

Unlike conventional munitions, cyber weapons must be extensively tailored for specific military systems in order to cause disruption or damage and are extremely perishable. Once an adversary recognizes a cyber vulnerability, it could render an exquisitely designed cyber weapon unusable with fairly simple fixes. The United States and its allies have a major advantage in developing these types of cyber weapons through their considerable scientific and technical knowledge of Russian and Soviet-era military equipment. The United States and allies physically possess (and in some cases operate) many of the major Soviet-era combat systems that are still widely in use by the Russian armed forces today. For example, the United States purchased 21 MiG-29s from Moldova in 1997 (to prevent their sale to Iran) and then disassembled the aircraft bolt-by-bolt—presumably along with every line of code in their avionics and radars.⁵⁹⁹ NATO allies that were once members of the Warsaw Pact continue to operate Russian air defense equipment such as the S-300 (albeit somewhat modified export versions). These systems can provide valuable technical knowledge on potential vulnerabilities since many modern Russian systems are only incrementally changed from older models. While Russia and other state adversaries are known to have gained access to technical knowledge of U.S. and allied mil-

itary capabilities through cyber espionage and other means, they are not believed to have done so to anywhere near the same degree that the United States has been able to do vis-à-vis Russia. Indeed, actually possessing and operating Russian combat systems offers a major advantage for developing cyber weapons. These advantages, however, will diminish over time as Russia continues to upgrade and replace its equipment.

In addition to the role of the U.S. military and intelligence community in cyberspace, coordination and cooperation between U.S. departments and agencies are vital to effectively combat cyberattacks and protect critical U.S. infrastructure. Beyond increasing interagency cooperation, U.S. defense and security agencies should also improve information sharing and coordinating with the private sector and with NATO allies.

Like the United States, NATO has made progress in recent years at adapting to the growing threats in the cyber domain. It has taken steps toward bolstering the role of cyber defenses in the alliance's security framework, built some internal capacities to protect the alliance's institutional networks, and stood up mechanisms to help members defend their own national networks against cyberattacks. Notably, in 2014, NATO declared that a cyberattack could trigger a collective defense response under Article 5.

The alliance still has a way to go, however, to fully adapt to the cyber challenge. It has trended toward a highly circumscribed approach to date that focuses entirely on defensive measures to prevent, mitigate, and recov-

er from cyberattacks. Due to political differences over the role of cyber in military operations, the alliance has shied away from recognizing any role for offensive cyber operations to support collective defense and deter adversaries.⁶⁰⁰ CSIS scholar James Lewis describes NATO's purely defensive approach to cyber as "essentially a cyber Maginot Line," which "serves no one's interest."⁶⁰¹ NATO took an incremental step forward at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016 by recognizing cyberspace as a domain of operations and integrating cyber defense into alliance operational planning, though it still fell short of recognizing the importance of offensive cyber in collective defense and deterrence.⁶⁰²

Finally, the inherent connectedness of the digital world means that NATO cyber defenses are only as strong as their weakest links. While no computer network can ever be completely secured, there are significant disparities in cybersecurity standards and practices across NATO members' secure national government and military networks. Allied intelligence, military capabilities, operations, defense planning, and policies are likely to spill into individual members' internal networks, whether accidentally or not. Therefore, one ally's cyber vulnerabilities can pose an unforeseen risk to other allies as well as the wider alliance. While individual allies must ultimately take responsibility for their own cyber defenses, the cyber domain is an area where mechanisms for assistance should be better developed. There are several allies, such as Estonia, which prioritized nation-

al cyber defense after Russia's cyberattacks in 2007, that are well-placed to offer other allies advice on improving their network security and building resiliency to attacks.

Specific recommendations in this area include:

- **Craft a comprehensive, strengthened, and resourced cyber strategy.** The United States should rethink its cyber strategy in the wake of the unprecedented interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. In general, offensive tools should be more robustly integrated into the U.S. approach, alongside strengthening the defense of government, allied, and private networks. A new strategy should also entail, among other things, reinvestment in cyber capabilities in support of military operations; greater cyberattack recognition training for troops in the field; and more coordination and cooperation with allies and the private sector.
- **Encourage NATO and individual allies to build stronger cyber capabilities and recognize the role of offensive cyber.** NATO should continue to strengthen the defense of alliance networks. Highly capable allies should also offer advice and assistance to NATO's most vulnerable members and work to elevate the collective cyber sophistication of the alliance. NATO should also recognize the role of offensive cyber in military operations. While the sensitivity surrounding offensive cyber capabilities means members will likely retain tight national control (as they do with nuclear weapons), limit-

ing the alliance to a purely defense role in cyberspace weakens its deterrence potential.

Conclusion

This assessment of U.S. instruments of power, along with the previous chapter's survey of Russian instruments, offers a useful perspective on the comparative advantages that Washington and Moscow may seek to leverage in advancing and defending their national interests. The political, economic, and military tools available to the United States are extensive and far more powerful than those of any other nation. The U.S. and allied toolkit, however, has yet to be fully harnessed to meet the current situation with Russia. As previous discussions have demonstrated, Russia has revamped its own toolkit to exploit potential U.S. weaknesses and is increasingly willing and able to use coercive measures—including military force—to advance its interests.

There remain areas where U.S. and Russian interests converge, making cooperation not only possible but preferred. More and more, however, Russia is defining its security interests in zero-sum terms with the West. Given the high geopolitical stakes, prudence demands that the United States and its allies consider how to best shape and employ their political, economic, and military instruments over the long term to better contend with the challenges posed by Russia. The next and final chapter will offer a strategy framework that better leverages the available instruments of power to advance and defend U.S. interests.



CHAPTER

05



Responding to the Russia Challenge

"You probe with bayonets: if you find mush, you push. If you find steel, you withdraw."

—VLADIMIR LENIN

Since events in Ukraine in March 2014, the United States and its allies have struggled to adjust to the new reality shaping relations with Moscow—a reality few saw coming. Many had hoped that Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia was an anomaly, a notion reinforced by evidence of Georgia's own provocative actions preceding the crisis. Russia, the theory went, having asserted itself in the Caucasus, was likely to return to a state of grudging acceptance of the status quo, as our case studies show it had done with the United States-led intervention in Kosovo, successive rounds of NATO enlargement, and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. As incoming U.S. administrations have done in the past, the United States initiated an opti-

mistic relationship "reset" in 2009 that allowed Washington to "pick off the low-hanging fruit in terms of bilateral cooperation," including agreements on arms reductions under New START, Afghanistan lethal transit, and Iran sanctions.⁶⁰³ Following its annexation of Crimea, however, an irrefutable trend line has emerged that suggests an assertive and opportunistic Russian rebellion against Western-prescribed rules, norms, and values. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford has called the Russia challenge "the greatest threat to our national security."⁶⁰⁴ Neither the United States nor a critical mass of its European allies has adjusted its approach in ways that fully accept the real and long-term

security challenges posed by an increasingly aggressive Russia, nor summoned the political will and resources necessary to implement a meaningful strategy. Today, a variety of options are possible, though Russia's behavior to date makes it clear that the United States and its allies will be best served if they approach the Russia challenge from a position of unity, strength, and clearly established priorities.

To an extent, this is recognized. Senior U.S. government officials, legislators, and policy experts have repeatedly affirmed the importance of a unified, transatlantic, and deliberate response to the Russia challenge—though the change of administrations in Washington has revived fears

that this will no longer be the case. The collective actions taken by the West in the wake of Putin's adventurism have served to enhance deterrence along NATO's eastern flank and calm nervous allies. These steps were difficult to achieve and are a credit to the skilled diplomats who worked to overcome political differences. While laudable in their own right, these steps must, nevertheless, be judged in relation to their impact, and any self-congratulation must ultimately be tempered by a realistic accounting of the work that remains. Such an accounting reveals hard-fought battles over what—when put into proper perspective—amounts to relatively modest gains. While demonstrating unity, they have also exposed fissures. While showing capacity, they have underlined a reluctance to act. And clear and shared priorities remain absent. Success in this context cannot be measured by the West's ability to reach consensus, but rather by its ability to meet the requirements of a strategy that strengthens Western institutions, contests Russia's aggression, and pursues cooperation without degenerating into endless accommodation.

The hard truth remains that Russia's pattern of interference in Eastern Ukraine, its reckless brinkmanship along NATO's air, land, and sea borders, and its search for ways to weaken transatlantic unity continue unabated. Indeed, Moscow, finding more rhetoric than resolve in the West, appears to have been emboldened by the events of the last two years to greater activism. Aside from an escalated bombing campaign in Syria, Russia appears to have embarked on a program of unprecedented interference in foreign elections. As the discussions

in preceding chapters indicate, Russia's armed forces may remain well below the capabilities of the United States, but they are sufficient to Russia's preferred means of using them: smaller-scale operations with comparatively limited goals. Its political, cyber, and information tools, meanwhile, have proven more effective than even Moscow may have expected. Russia's incentives today appear to push it toward more activism, rather than less. While politically and financially inconvenient, the Russia challenge will not be resolved anytime soon. Unfortunately, almost every facet of the collective Western response—from its overly cautious tactics to its insufficiently realistic assumptions—remains far removed from what is required to adequately manage it.

U.S. and European Actions in Perspective

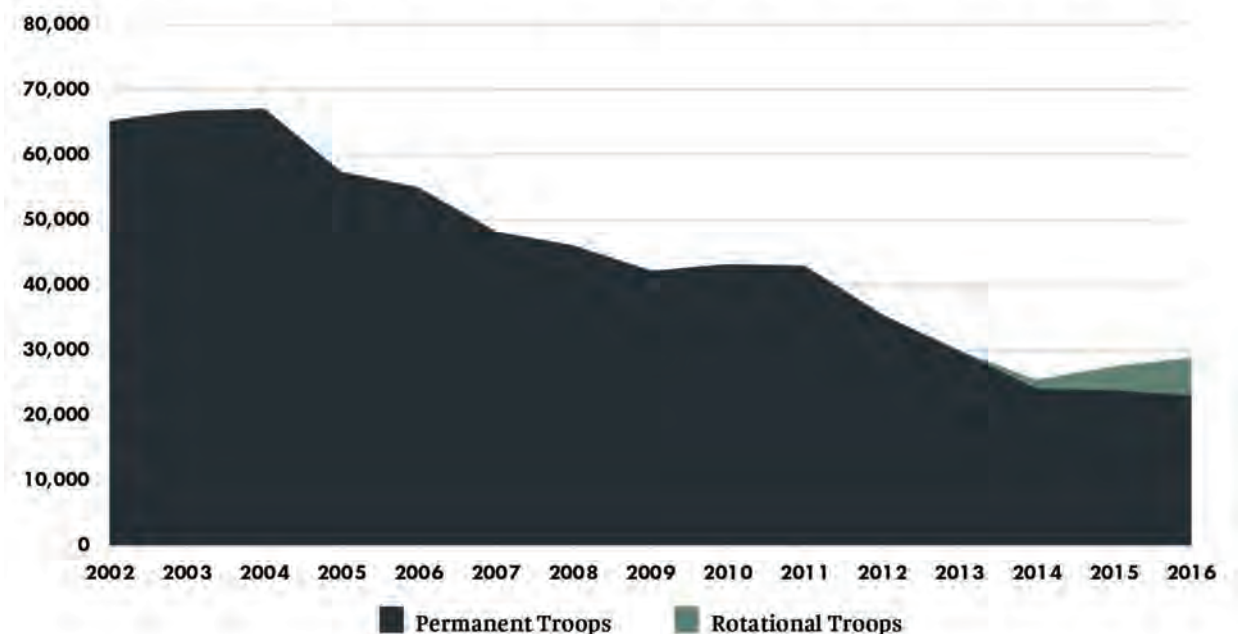
Moscow's blend of nuclear threats and conventional and nonconventional tactics, military and political, along with its demonstrated willingness to use force and violate international norms presents a substantial

RUSSIA'S ARMED FORCES MAY REMAIN WELL BELOW THE CAPABILITIES OF THE UNITED STATES, BUT THEY ARE SUFFICIENT TO RUSSIA'S PREFERRED MEANS OF USING THEM: SMALLER-SCALE OPERATIONS WITH COMPARATIVELY LIMITED GOALS.

challenge to U.S. interests and the current world order. In the face of that challenge, the response of the United States and many of its European allies has been inadequate, and NATO has likewise lacked sufficient urgency and ambition in responding to this new environment.

Despite rotational increases made possible through ERI, the U.S. Army combat presence in Europe is a full brigade-strength below what it was in 2012—prior to renewed tensions with Russia. Most allies similarly have smaller forces dedicated to NATO's territorial defense than they did even five years ago. And, while the assurance and adaptation measures agreed at the Wales and Warsaw Summits were positive developments, the debates surrounding them were disconcertingly contentious given a rapidly decaying security environment that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg deemed the “greatest challenge in a generation.”⁶⁰⁵ The Defense Investment

U.S. ARMY FORCES IN EUROPE 2002–2016



Pledge, for example, was touted as one of the major deliverables from the September 2014 Wales Summit, a summit that presumably should have arrived at relatively easy consensus given its concurrence with the Ukraine crisis. The difficulty in getting all 28 allied leaders to agree to spend more on their own defense even when confronted with the fact of Russia's invasion and annexation of its neighbor's territory demonstrates the reluctance among some to shift toward a stronger defense posture. The final language in the pledge—in which allies agreed to “aim to move toward” NATO's long-established defense spending target of 2 percent of GDP within a decade—reflects a watered-down compromise made at the insistence of a few nations that sought to strip anything nominally binding out of the pledge.

To be fair, 22 allies have since taken steps to reverse their downward trend in defense spending, with a 3 percent increase in real

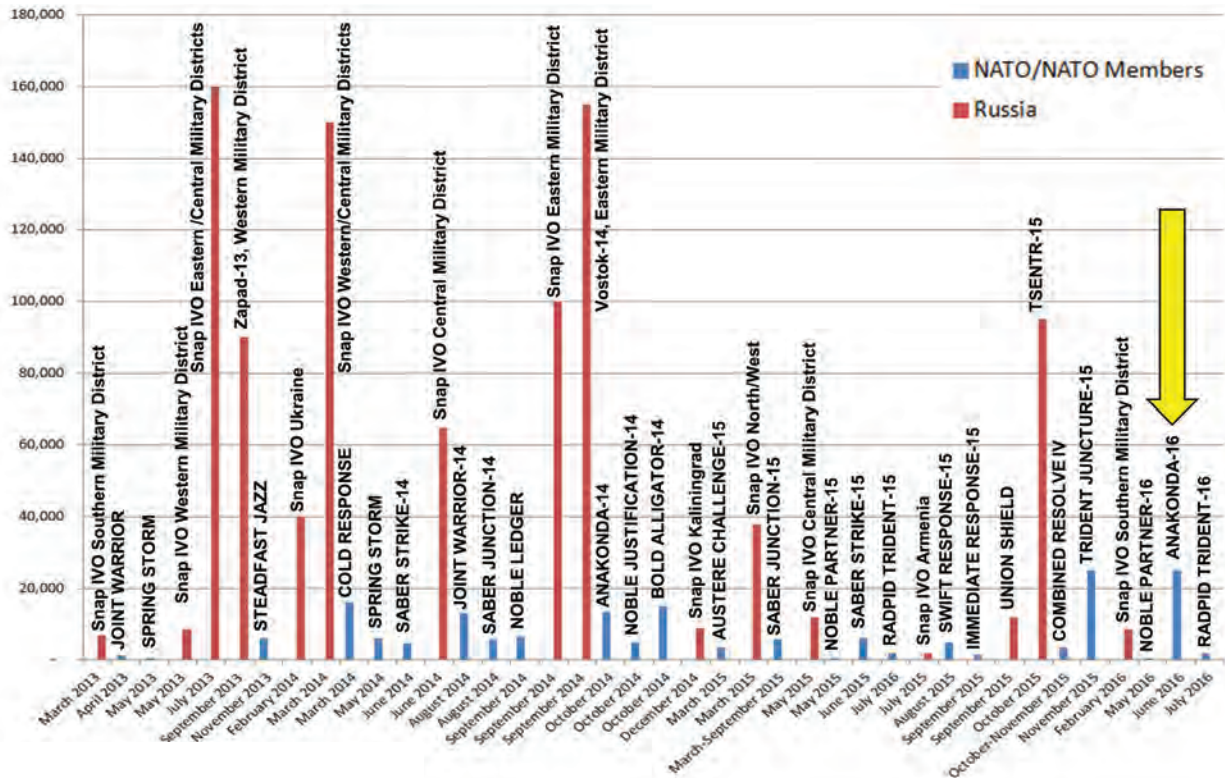
terms expected in 2016.⁶⁰⁶ NATO members have also committed to allocating 20 percent of their defense spending toward major equipment and new research and development, an encouraging signal of commitment. Although progress is occurring, the lingering degree of resistance is deeply concerning, even acknowledging the economic challenge many European nations face.

Political discord within the NATO alliance has at times undermined practical steps intended to send signals of readiness and resolve. Exercises, for instance, are an essential part of the effort to deter Russian aggression on NATO's eastern flank. Unfortunately, the alliance's internal bickering prior to the July 2016 Warsaw Summit over whether it would be too provocative to fly a NATO flag over Exercise Anakonda in Poland was allowed to sap precious alliance bandwidth that could have been dedicated to demonstrating allied unity instead of undercutting it.⁶⁰⁷ The criticism

by German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier of allied exercises as unnecessary “saber-rattling and warmongering” indicates fundamental divisions within the alliance and within the German coalition government—a message of irresolution that sows doubt about the commitment of a major ally to NATO's strategy.⁶⁰⁸ It is true that the Anakonda exercise—to which Steinmeier alluded—was the largest exercise of NATO allies in Eastern Europe since the end of the Cold War. However, in the context of unannounced Russian war games that occasionally reach well over 100,000 troops, along with Russia's “massive militarization” along NATO borders, the idea that holding a relatively moderately sized exercise on alliance territory constitutes provocation is questionable.⁶⁰⁹

The latest debate revealing continued fissures within NATO centers on delegated authorities, or decisionmaking powers that are granted to NATO's supreme allied

MAJOR RUSSIA AND NATO MILITARY EXERCISES 2013–2016



Sources: Courtesy U.S. Army Europe. Compiled with data from U.S. Army Europe and the Atlantic Council. See Ian Brzezinski and Nicholas Varangis, "The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap," Atlantic Council, February 23, 2015.

commander (SACEUR), currently General Curtis Scaparrotti, in order to ensure timely responses in an emergency. Delegated authorities are contentious because, while enabling responsiveness, they bypass the political approval phase that certain nations feel should accompany every force decision. As with the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) before it, NATO's enhanced forward presence (eFP) has met allied resistance to provide SACEUR the authority to guarantee rapid response in an emergency.

eFP was the prize deliverable from the Warsaw Summit, establishing four NATO battalions along the alliance's eastern flank (one in Poland and in each of the three Baltic States). Secretary General Stoltenberg refuted the Russian

portrayal of these battalions as provocative, stating, "NATO battalions numbering thousands of troops cannot be compared with Russian divisions numbering tens of thousands just across the border. Our response is defensive and proportionate. But it sends a clear and unmistakable message: an attack against one will be met by a response from all."⁶¹⁰ For the battalions to be credible in sending such a message, however, they must be empowered to fight in a contingency scenario. Then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced at a meeting of defense ministers in October 2016 that the United States would put its forces under the operational control of SACEUR and the tactical control of Poland, where the U.S. battalion is located, and "encourage[d] others to make the

same kind of command and control arrangements with NATO."⁶¹¹ Whether the other eFP framework nations—Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom—will follow the United States' lead will be the next small test of the alliance's unity.

The European Union has likewise taken steps that, while valuable, require constant political engagement to sustain. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the European Union's Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia have been more impactful than their U.S. equivalents given that Europe's trade with Russia in goods is 10 times larger than that of the United States.⁶¹² This also means that European economies have more deeply felt the effects of the sanctions, which must be renewed in the European Union

every six months. The sanctions have been renewed three times without serious challenge, but certain EU member states are growing more critical. The two leading presidential candidates for France's spring 2017 election have advocated lifting sanctions, as have voices within Germany's Social Democratic Party (the junior partner in Chancellor Merkel's coalition). Other EU heads of government have indicated a desire to get back to business as usual with Moscow. Because the sanctions are directly linked to implementation of the Minsk agreements, their removal would drastically weaken the West's leverage in managing the Ukraine crisis. Regardless, the changing political dynamics in Europe could reach a tipping point in the coming year, especially if there are changes of government or U.S. sanctions policy.

Sanctions policy is only one area in which Europe faces the challenge of balancing its economic interests with broader security requirements. Five major European energy companies signed the "Nord Stream 2" agreement with Russia's Gazprom in September 2015. The proposal aims to construct a new \$11 billion, 745-mile pipeline from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea, doubling the amount of gas traveling from Russia to Germany "to the equivalent of two-thirds of current Russian [gas] exports to Europe" and ostensibly turning Germany, the de facto leader of the European Union, into a "Russian gas transit hub."⁶¹³ Beyond violating the spirit of the EU sanctions, Nord Stream 2 would also undermine EU efforts to diversify away from Russian energy supplies, make Ukraine more vulnerable to gas cutoffs from Russia, and deny Kyiv the

transit fees that currently bring in billions of dollars in annual revenue.⁶¹⁴ While the project may have been successfully stalled by Polish antimonopoly regulations targeting Gazprom, and German or EU authorities may eventually weigh in to block the project, the fact that the German government failed to oppose it demonstrates the tension between security and economic imperatives that Russia is exploiting to its advantage.

Part and parcel with its political rapprochement with Russia—which includes cooperation in Syria with talks that exclude the United States—NATO ally Turkey has also renewed energy cooperation. Following a period of heightened tensions brought on by the downing of a Russian fighter jet along the Turkey-Syria border in November 2015, the two nations have mended ties and, in October 2016, Presi-

which fell through in 2014 due to EU objections amid the ongoing Ukraine crisis.⁶¹⁶ The construction of TurkStream would further undermine Eastern Europe's position as a gas distributor, as well as NATO's interest in diversifying away from Russian energy supplies. How much of the Turkish Stream project will be built, and how quickly, will depend on complicated Eurasian pipeline politics and whether Russia prioritizes it over Nord Stream 2 and the Russia-China "Power of Siberia" pipeline project.⁶¹⁷

Lastly, it is worth noting the European Commission's decision to green-light a no-bid, multibillion euro contract between Hungary and Russia's state-owned ROSATOM, which has been described as "one of the starkest examples of Moscow using energy diplomacy to rebuild its strategic influence in Europe" and has prompted an in-

THERE SHOULD BE NO DOUBT THAT RUSSIA IS BENEFITING FROM A WESTERN RELUCTANCE TO CONFRONT THE WORLD AS IT IS RATHER THAN IMAGINING THE WORLD IT WANTS.

dents Putin and Erdogan signed the "TurkStream" agreement to begin construction of a \$12.5 billion, 560-mile Black Sea natural gas pipeline.⁶¹⁵ The pipeline, stretching from Anapa, Russia, to Kiykoy, Turkey, would take the place of the failed South Stream pipeline agreement with Bulgaria,

investigation into whether Europe's competition laws were broken.⁶¹⁸ Under the agreement, Russia will provide 80 percent of the financing, or €10 billion, to expand Hungary's Paks nuclear power complex. Such robust collaboration could provide a fertile breeding ground for Russian political ma-

nipulation and corruption in Hungary, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Such agreements between Europe and Russia reflect the continued conflicting interests and half-hearted resolve that President Putin has come to expect across all areas—political, military, and economic—of the Western response to Russia. Working within a consensus-based alliance system creates challenges that do not similarly constrain lone authoritarian actors, such as Russia. Too often, in the absence of shared objectives and principled leadership, the lowest common denominator wins the day. There should be no doubt that Russia is benefiting from a Western reluctance to confront the world as it is rather than imagining the world it wants. This includes a blindness not only to Russia's motivations and actions, but also to the West's own internal vulnerabilities.

Confronting the Challenge We Face

As outlined in the previous chapter, the United States and its allies have a robust toolbox, including a wide array of coercive tools, at their disposal. But generally, they have been both overly hesitant and reactive in using them, providing Russia too free a hand in influencing alliance posture and actions. A CSIS report on U.S. Army force posture in Europe offered the following analysis of the West's internal debate over what constitutes credible deterrence versus escalatory provocation:

While it is legitimate and indeed necessary to consider possible Russian reactions to U.S. and allied actions, and

while these assessments must include a stark recognition of the dangers of miscalculation and accidental escalation, one can also err in being too cautious. Russia is in many ways looking for reasons to call NATO's actions provocative, and will do so regardless of what they are... This situation creates the worst of all worlds: strong deterrence rhetoric but diminished credibility and operational capability.⁶¹⁹

Considering the grim warnings from officials such as Dunford and Stoltenberg, continuing the misalignment between allied words and allied actions may well embolden an opportunistic Moscow to act with even greater impunity, threatening the shared Euro-Atlantic vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace and once again condemning the continent to an era of spheres of influence. Several leading national security experts argued in a February 2015 Atlantic Council report: "History makes clear that the only way to stop [Russian] aggression from precipitating a regional or even world-wide conflagration is to deter and defend against it as early as possible and not be fooled by protestations of innocent motives or lack of further ambitions."⁶²⁰ This means that while it is unquestionably necessary to work with Russia if true security is to be attained, the West also faces an imperative to stand up to Moscow when its core interests are threatened. Moving beyond its initial shock and uncertainty regarding Russia's intentions, the United States must now chart a clearer course in its Russia strategy, and take a bolder approach in its implementation.

As discussed in Chapter 1, critics of a stronger approach may point to the lack of self-awareness on the part of the West for the role it has played in creating and aggravating the current standoff with Russia, providing as examples such sore spots as NATO enlargement, U.S. installation of missile defense systems in Europe, Western policy during the Arab Spring, and democracy promotion that encouraged revolutions over the past 15 years. As mentioned, John Mearsheimer has gone farther, explicitly calling the Ukraine crisis the "West's fault."⁶²¹ The United States can also be held accountable for not always itself following the rules it now seeks to enforce vis-à-vis Russia.⁶²² If both sides acknowledge their respective roles in contributing to the current state of the relationship, the thought goes, then the West and Russia can begin to find common ground and deescalate tensions.

While it is valid to acknowledge the West's contribution to tensions, assigning blame neither changes how each side defines its security interests nor corrects the misalignment between them. Russia remains highly ambivalent about cooperation with the West. It retains a view that the NATO alliance exists to limit Moscow's power, and that Western efforts to engage both Russia and its neighbors threaten stability and security. It is also important to recognize that one reason Russia may be recalcitrant is that it is reaping benefits from the situation as it stands.

Despite a stagnant economy and falling oil prices, Putin remains extremely popular. Sanctions have proven a convenient scapegoat for greater structural problems within the economy, which,



Support from Russia and Iran has pulled the Assad regime back from the brink of collapse.

Moscow, Russia, October 20, 2015

Credit: Alexey Druzhinin/AFP/Getty Images

combined with low oil prices, bear far more responsibility for Russia's recession. Ukraine and Georgia's progress toward NATO membership appears indefinitely stalled, Russia now controls Crimea, and the Ukrainian state is severely handicapped. European and transatlantic cohesion is straining under the weight of growing political divisions and an ongoing migration crisis, revealing the fragility of NATO and EU cohesion. Russia and Iran have pulled Assad back from the brink of collapse. And Russia's status as an international power player has been renewed. Indeed, its standoff with the United States over Ukraine and Syria has fed its sense of importance beyond what cooperation would likely have yielded. To believe, therefore, that Russia is committed to risk reduction, transparency, and predictability is a dangerous starting point that will lead the West astray. Russia is playing a different game—one in which Western leadership and existing institutions are to be challenged and in which threats, ambiguity, and violence have emerged as effective, and thus preferred tools.

There should be no doubt that Russia is viewing its options through the lens of a security dilemma that defines U.S. strength as its own weakness, and vice versa. Russia is testing its tools of coercion, and finding them more effective than it might have thought. It does not want a war, but it is finding it can get a lot done without one by exploiting weak points in the Western systems. Even more dangerously, while it is clear that Russia has long been unhappy with current security arrangements, it has never put forward concrete positive alternatives or adaptations—to date, its behavior is only destructive, not constructive. The sooner that the West adjusts its assumptions to match this reality and begins imposing greater consequences in defense of its interests, the better able it will be to shape events vice fall victim to them. A clear-eyed approach, therefore, requires the West to deal with Russia as it is, and not as so many, including in Russia, wish it to be.

The United States and European nations must also recognize that their foundational security interest is the advancement of

a world order that operates according to Western democratic and free-market principles. If this order is not secured, it will be challenging, if not foolhardy, to advance other goals. Accordingly, the West must always weigh the potential consequences of deal-making against the risks such actions, either singularly or cumulatively, could pose to that order. Demonstrating that political decisions are not made by great powers for smaller powers; that borders cannot be redrawn by force; that liberal democratic values are defended against autocratic attempts to undermine them; and that the West still adheres to the international obligations underpinning this vision—the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, the Budapest Memorandum, and others—are key elements in upholding it.

If the United States and its allies do not seek to maintain and strengthen the international system that has existed since the end of World War II, then it behooves the United States, Russia, and European states to define a new security order. But, here, too, a position of strength would be

IT DOES NOT WANT A WAR, BUT IT IS FINDING IT CAN GET A LOT DONE WITHOUT ONE.

valuable. Any so-called grand bargain between the United States and Russia that carves up the European continent into spheres of influence, or allows the United States to withdraw from Europe, while appealing to some, will be difficult, if not impossible, to attain. First, any deals signed over the heads of European states will be unenforceable—particularly if the United States is no longer offering those states security and partnership. Second, and related, the United States' abdication of leadership in Europe would likely lead to renewed conflictual relations between European states that, if history is any teacher, would soon draw the United States back in. Thus, any bargain would need to be more multilateral, and more complicated, than one might want with a Washington-Moscow understanding. And, as noted above, Russia is not proposing any viable alternatives at this time—it is merely working to destroy what now exists.

Even if some components of the current order are insufficient, it would still make more sense to preserve and bolster those aspects of it that are working, rather than pursue a bargain that

dismantles the entire system with uncertain and potentially tragic consequences. Specifically, the relationship between the United States and its NATO allies has guaranteed transatlantic security since 1949. For the United States to cede it would be preemptive capitulation to Russia. It is logical to return, therefore, to the need to defend and bolster the system as it stands, and find ways to ensure that Russia accepts this reality.

It has been suggested that perhaps a middle path can be found, a path that cleverly balances the ability to uphold the system and Western principles—especially state sovereignty and the right to freely choose alliances—while also closing NATO's Open Door, thus removing a major impediment to a strong U.S.-Russia relationship. This, advocates say, could be accomplished by creating an alternative security structure for the so-called grey zone states along Russia's border that would "guarantee their sovereignty and security without NATO membership," and by securing a Russian guarantee to respect and uphold the "security of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and other states in the region."⁶²³

Closing NATO's open door is likely an expedient way to appease Russia, at least in the near term, but doing so would sacrifice core values that have formed the Western approach for decades and would be ineffective in securing the U.S. interest of a stable Europe. An alternative security architecture that is akin to NATO without including the United States and Europe's most capable and willing military forces would be destined to fail either because: (1) it is not credible and Russia will not respect it; or (2) it is credible and Russia will not ac-

cept it. Russia does not see NATO as a threat because of its name; it fears its military capability and power projection, along with the loss of Russian political influence on European neighbors. The notion that security guarantees from Russia would be effective is belied by recent history: Russia committed to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, and pledged in the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and Charter of Paris (1990) not to use force or change borders through force. This did not stop Russia from invading and annexing Ukrainian territory. There can, therefore, be no reasonable expectation that any new security agreements would succeed where others have failed. All that said, NATO must continue to insist that candidates fully meet the responsibilities and obligations of membership and contribute to security in the North Atlantic space. Indeed, it is imperative that NATO membership not be simply a matter of checking off a list of requirements: the other states in the alliance must see real benefit to expansion. Among other things, this means that countries cannot bring to the alliance more security liabilities than assets, and NATO must be able to credibly defend any new ally.

Defining Strategic Objectives

Responding to global challenges should always begin with clearly defined strategic objectives. Without this direction, policies can become unmoored from desired end states and implementation can drift away from leaders' intent. This report offers six stra-

tegic objectives to guide a new Russia strategy based upon the U.S. national interest in defending the global order—protecting the transatlantic relationship, and smartly managing tensions with Russia.

Defending the Global Order

Strategic Objective #1: Uphold the post-World War II order, international norms, agreements, and the rule of law

The rules-based, international system established by the United States and Europe to govern the interactions between nations was a response to two world wars within a few decades that killed millions and destroyed economies. States from around the world, working together under U.S. leadership, established and evolved a network of institutions, like the United Nations and what later became the World Trade Organization, which preserved a greater degree of peace, security, and prosperity.

The system is built around a community of like-minded nations that have agreed to work together to uphold liberal values, including democracy, freedom, and equality, and to push back against the “might makes right” philosophy espoused by would-be strongmen seeking conflict and spoils. It has restricted the spread of nuclear weapons and enabled collective action to address transborder threats ranging from terrorism to climate change. Because nations have agreed and, to a degree, codified their expectations of one another, punitive measures, such as sanctions, are able to be levied against those who would chal-

THE UNITED STATES WILL NEED TO CONTINUE TO PUSH ALLIES TO DO MORE AND FASTER, BUT REDUCING THE VALUE OF THE ALLIANCE TO TRANSACTIONAL OR FINANCIAL DETAILS FAILS TO ACCOUNT FOR ITS OTHER STRATEGIC BENEFITS.

lenge the rule of law or engage in activities that introduce unnecessary risk or irrationality into the system. Without such rules and enforcement mechanisms, the world would undoubtedly be a poorer, less free, and more dangerous place.

Protecting the Transatlantic Relationship

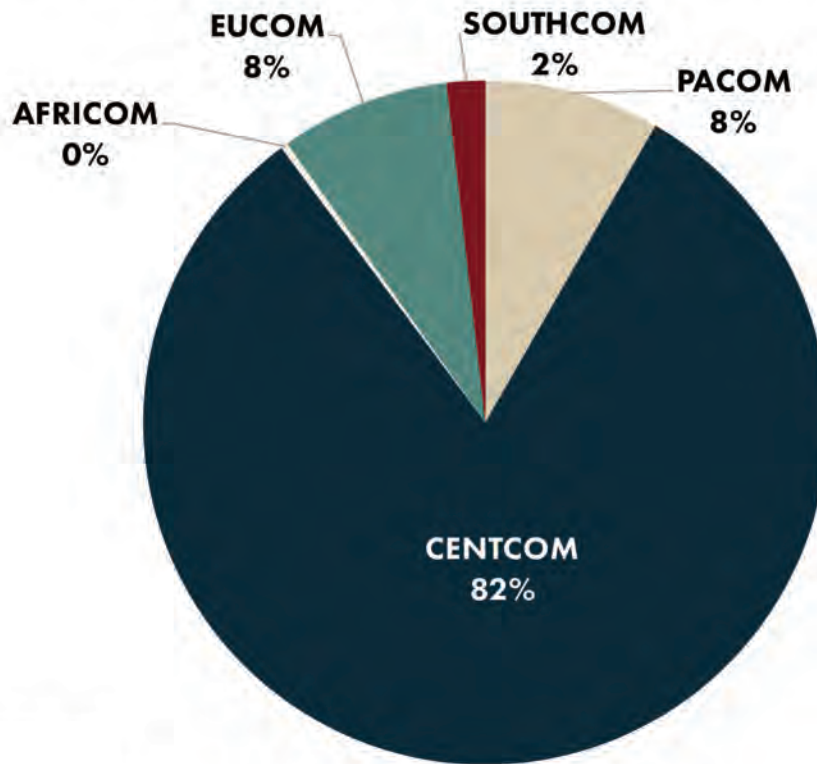
Strategic Objective #2: Maintain U.S. access to and influence in Europe and NATO

The U.S. interest in Europe extends beyond preserving the ideal of a just and stable global order. Practically speaking, the European Union is the United States’ largest and most important economic partner. The combined EU and U.S. economies account for nearly 50 percent of global GDP. In 2014 alone, the United States and the European Union traded over \$1 trillion in goods and services—trade that supports an estimated 2.6 mil-

lion U.S. jobs.⁶²⁴ Access to strong European markets is vital for continued U.S. economic prosperity. The need to cooperate on issues such as energy, the evolution of digital markets, environmental standards, and enforcement of global trade rules will only grow in the coming years.

History shows that European and U.S. paths are intertwined—that the United States cannot sit out Europe’s wars and that Europeans see U.S. security as their own. As a result, European and U.S. militaries have spent decades cultivating common doctrines; standardizing tactics, techniques, and procedures; and building the interoperability that allows them to fight “shoulder to shoulder.” Europe is home to the United States’ most capable and willing coalition partners, who have fought and died alongside the United States in every major combat operation since the turn of the twentieth century. As former SACEUR James Stavridis

MAJOR U.S. ARMS SALES IN 2016 BY GEOGRAPHIC COMBATANT COMMAND



Source: DSCA

observed, “For all the frustration we have with [NATO’s] cumbersome bureaucracy and decision making process, Europeans have generally been willing to fight alongside us.”⁶²⁵ In fact, over 1,000 non-U.S. NATO forces have been killed fighting in Afghanistan alongside U.S., Afghan, and other partner troops. Every NATO ally is also contributing in some way to the fight against the Islamic State.

Former president Obama, like presidents before him, bemoaned allied “free-riding.”⁶²⁶ President Trump’s harsh words for NATO and our allies are well documented. U.S. concerns over alliance burden sharing are bipartisan, long-standing, and legitimate, but they should not overshadow the fundamental

reality that NATO is good for U.S. and shared interests. The United States will need to continue to push allies to do more and faster, but reducing the value of the alliance to transactional or financial details fails to account for its other strategic benefits, in addition to discounting what European allies actually do spend on defense. Their collective defense budgets amount to \$300 billion annually, which is more than quadruple Russia’s defense budget and, as Stavridis points out, “still buy[s] an awful lot of hardware.”⁶²⁷

U.S. military bases in Germany and Italy, along with access to Europe’s logistical and communication networks, enable rapid global force projection in support of U.S. emergency response

plans in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Intelligence relationships with European allies multiply the United States’ ability to maintain visibility and awareness of common threats and increase the chances of being able to respond before they materialize. Beyond the obvious force-multiplier effect, joint action under NATO auspices also adds legitimacy and capability to U.S. interventions. “Remember,” Secretary of Defense Ash Carter replied when asked about NATO in a November 2016 interview, “we have a lot of people who [are] trying to attack all of us collectively and we’re much better at protecting ourselves if we can find a way to work together.”⁶²⁸

The United States’ close relationship with Europe also pro-

vides the United States with unique and powerful diplomatic influence that can shape allied decisionmaking in a way that is beneficial to U.S. political and policy imperatives, as well as to American business interests. According to the Defense Security and Cooperation Agency, European governments requested over \$4.9 billion worth of newly constructed, major weapons systems from United States contractors in 2016.⁶²⁹ This includes big-ticket purchases from the United Kingdom for nine Boeing-made P-8A Patrol Aircraft and up to 26 General Atomics-made Predator drones. Separately, Poland is in the final stages of negotiations for a \$5 billion Patriot Missile Defense System made by Raytheon.⁶³⁰ Countries decide to purchase U.S. defense products in part because they value the quality of our systems and the promise of greater interoperability with the United States, but also because they hope it will bring or cement a closer relationship through mutual reliance. Appeals for nations to “buy American” will have less resonance with allies that feel abandoned or threatened.

*Strategic Objective #3:
Enhance U.S. and European
political, financial, security,
and societal stability*

Political, financial, and security stability in Europe is a prerequisite for Europe’s continued global engagement, including support to U.S. military operations abroad. Should Europe once again become a security consumer rather than a security provider, the United States will not only stand to lose its most capable and willing partner in fighting extremism and enforc-

ing global rules and norms, but it will also face increased risks to the U.S. homeland. The United States depends on Europe maintaining and expanding its will and capacity to address common security challenges before those challenges reach U.S. shores.

A more stable and prosperous Europe means a more stable and prosperous United States. The symbiotic relationship between the United States and Europe means that the United States cannot insulate itself against the consequences of crises that occur in Europe, and vice versa. The United States must prioritize the preservation of European stability in executing its Russia strategy as the surest way to preclude the encroachment of instability westward. Moreover, the preservation of America’s stability, once unthinkable to mention as at risk, is a growing concern among our allies. If we are to continue being the partner of choice for deals that advance our interests, we must prove formidable as a society, remaining a nation of laws that is true to our constitutional values.

Managing Tensions with Russia

The fact that Russian actions in recent years have had a negative impact on European security means that whatever level of cooperation the West seeks with Moscow, it must simultaneously meet the requirement to disincentivize further adventurism on the part of the Kremlin. This means a strategy that avoids direct hostilities while creating an environment that makes aggressive action in Europe unappealing to Moscow. Such an approach should be pursued until Moscow

stops playing the spoiler and begins to work constructively with the United States and others to strengthen and develop security in Europe and the world. But the idea that Russia will simply accept Western leadership is naïve. The United States must, therefore, model strategic patience, knowing that Russia, while currently punching above its weight, is ultimately playing a losing hand. As a Heritage Foundation report from December 2015 assesses:

The fundamental reality is that time is not on Russia’s side. It has made a geopolitical splash for reasons that are as simple as they are fragile: Russia has many weak neighbors. It benefitted from the high price of oil. It faced little effective Western pushback, and as an autocracy it is capable of mobilizing force and subversion in ways that Western democracies find difficult... Russia is a declining power with feet of clay in every way except for the size and geopolitical centrality of its territory, its energy resources, its nuclear arsenal, the modern portion of its conventional armed forces, and above all its willingness to attack, subvert, and play the spoiler... It can play what is fundamentally a weak hand because it is regionally strong and acts stronger than it is, while the United States and Europe have cared little, done less, and shown less will. Russian weaknesses would come into play if the West pressed its advantages.⁶³¹

*Strategic Objective #4:
Avoid direct hostilities*

The stakes involved in fighting a war against Russia are nothing

short of existential; a conventional conflict could conceivably escalate into nuclear war and threaten the survival of both states. It is correct, then, to take extreme care to avoid moves that would cross the threshold into direct conflict. This caution should not, however, be allowed to paralyze the West from taking necessary actions to protect and advance its interests.

A bolder approach to Russia does not equate to warmongering or taking reckless action without concern for the consequences. It also does not mean challenging Russia at every opportunity. Given what we know about Russian motives, past reactions, instruments of power, and so-called redlines, however, it is logical to conclude there exists a wide gulf between the steps that have been taken to date and the steps that could be taken in the future to increase the West's leverage vis-à-vis Russia without sparking a conflict, or even coming close. This will entail lessening the West's sensitivity to Russia's reflexive protestations and false indignation.

Strategic Objective #5: Discourage Russia's incitement and abetment of instability in Europe and beyond

Discouraging further Russian attempts to “sow the seeds of global instability” will not only be important to promoting U.S. objectives vis-à-vis Europe, but also to protecting U.S. interests beyond Europe.⁶³² Russia is renewing its attempts to challenge the United States globally. Its support for the Assad regime has extended the civil war, complicated coalition strike planning, distracted from the fight against the Islamic State, and exacerbated human suffering. Its interest

THERE EXISTS A WIDE GULF BETWEEN THE STEPS THAT HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO DATE AND THE STEPS THAT COULD BE TAKEN IN THE FUTURE TO INCREASE THE WEST'S LEVERAGE VIS-À-VIS RUSSIA WITHOUT SPARKING A CONFLICT, OR EVEN COMING CLOSE.

in selling \$10 billion in arms—including T-90 tanks, artillery, planes, and helicopters—to Iran would increase the military capability of a state whose malign activities are already having significantly destabilizing effects across the Middle East.⁶³³ In Asia, Russia is building its military and energy cooperation with China and India, moves designed in equal parts to advance its interests and challenge the influence of the United States in the region. Similarly, in Latin America, Russia is seeking to revive Cold War-era ties and influence with increased commercial trade and major arms sales.

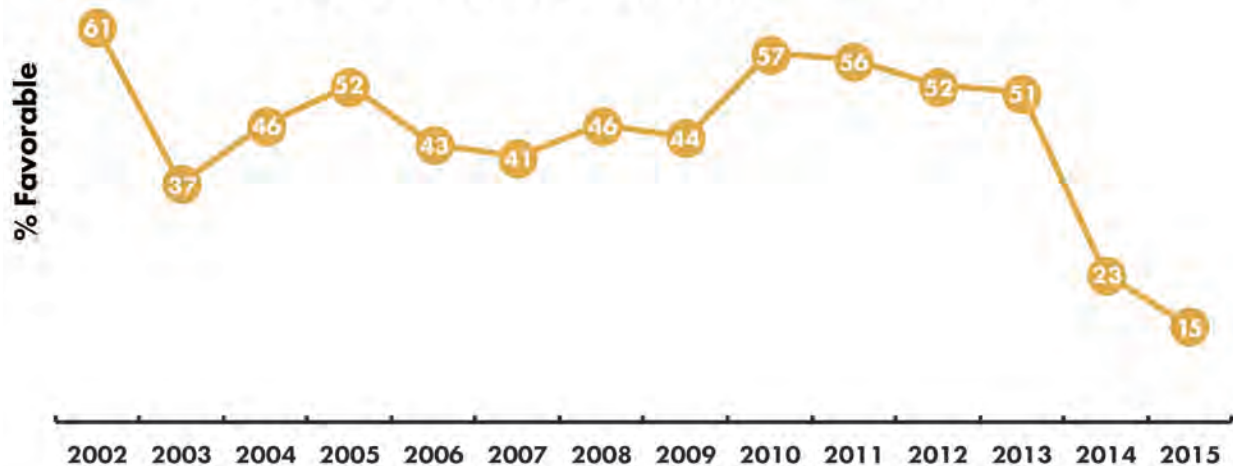
Russia's attempts to confront the United States in the cyber and space domains could have dangerous implications for how Americans live and fight, according to former U.S. director of national intelligence James Clapper.⁶³⁴ Its nuclear saber-rattling, likewise, raises worrying questions about Russia's commitment to strategic stability and to the norms that have preserved a certain degree of civility and caution in public discussions related to nuclear weapons. In these

areas and others where U.S. security interests are at stake, the United States will need to take the necessary steps to both build its capacity to resist Russia's actions, protect its alliances and global influence, and pursue options that disincentivize Russia's incitement and abetment of instability beyond its borders.

Strategic Objective #6: Build ties with the Russian people

It is not in the long-term interests of the United States to alienate or condemn the Russian people based on the decisions of the Russian political leadership. U.S. strategy should, therefore, take care to not be seen as anti-Russian, but rather as standing up against the Russian government's illegality, violence, and belligerence. A survey released jointly by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Analytical Center in October 2016 revealed that only 23 percent of Russians polled reported having a positive view of the United States, and that Americans' attitudes toward Russia have “sunk to levels seen only during the latter years of the Cold War.”⁶³⁵ The ties bind-

RUSSIAN PUBLIC OPINION OF THE UNITED STATES 2002–2015



Source: PEW Research Center

ing American and Russian people have been built over decades through education and cultural exchanges, trade, and travel, and should not be allowed to atrophy. The United States should, therefore, seek to preserve and rebuild these ties by making clear its respect for Russia's culture, history, and global contributions despite this period of political and military tension.

Maintaining connections with the Russian people will not be easy considering President Putin's efforts to promote anti-Western narratives, suppress free speech, and distance Russia from the international community, but doing so will help counteract Putin's efforts in small but important ways. Neither Russia nor the United States benefit from having younger generations that view their Russian or American counterparts as personal enemies. In its strategy, the United States should make clear that its fight is not with the Russia people and commit to doing what it can from afar to promote and defend human rights inside Russia.

The Trump administration has inherited a fraught and difficult dynamic in terms of U.S. support for democracy and human rights in Russia, both of which have been severely curtailed under Putin.⁶³⁶ Part of Russia's (and others') critique of U.S. democracy promotion and human rights policies is that these are deployed cynically and hypocritically. From this perspective, the United States uses these tools as a means to pressure states it seeks to coerce, but ignores even more blatant violations in countries such as Saudi Arabia. American societal divisions and injustices, real and perceived, further bolster resistance to an assertive U.S. human rights stance abroad.

Inconsistencies in the promotion of human rights and democracy indeed weaken the credibility of such policies. Moreover, while some dissidents and opposition groups will take whatever help they can get, many have found that Western assistance of certain sorts can end up doing more harm than good, as it leaves them open to attacks from their own government. Finally, there are

many reasons to raise questions about the effectiveness of democracy-promotion activities in countries that are hostile to these policies. For these reasons, democracy and human rights policies should not be used as a coercive mechanism, as this will certainly backfire and may hurt many of those the United States might seek to help. This, however, does not mean the United States cannot and should not play a role in supporting dissidents and promoting freedom and democracy.

The Ways and Means of a Strategy in Practice

In support of the six strategic objectives outlined above, the United States should pursue actions across three key pillars: strengthen, contest, and cooperate. Activities under each pillar should be pursued simultaneously, but can be dialed up or down in intensity as the U.S.-Russia relationship evolves. Attention should also be

paid to any potential opportunities for interaction between the pillars—particularly between the contest and cooperate pillars—that could create leverage for the United States as it seeks political concessions in its negotiations with Russia. To assist in identifying and executing such opportunities, a clear sense of national priorities and acceptable tradeoffs in the context of other global threats will be needed early. Equally important to the strategy's success in managing the current tensions will be credibility—both as it relates to promises made and threats issued. Securing U.S. interests will require us to confront Russian actions in word and in deed to demonstrate resolve and, where needed, restore interests, and to deter future threats.

Continued cooperation with allies and partners will likewise remain paramount. U.S. leadership in forging a common alliance approach will be essential, especially given the forces of populism and nationalism that are tearing at the political fabric of democracies on both sides of the Atlantic. The role of the United States within NATO, both as the strongest political and military force in the alliance, provides a unique platform to act as an honest broker in resolving disputes and driving the agenda. While it is crucial that European voices be at the center of European policy, at a time when threats are increasing from Europe's east and south, the United States must be prepared to push back against calls for greater isolationism and accommodation and rally allies to remain resolute in defending the rules-based liberal order.

This approach in some ways builds on the strategy of the Obama administration.⁶³⁷ How-

ever, it is neither reluctant in implementation nor averse to accepting some escalation risk (criticisms that have been levied against the Obama administration's strategy). It is decisive and forceful in nature and defined by the defense of U.S. interests. Now is the time for choosing a clear path that manifests a high U.S. priority on European and transatlantic security. This approach will speak to Putin's Russia in the language it best understands: power and resolve. At the same time, it seeks to avoid miscalculation and escalation by finding avenues for cooperation where possible and by adapting deterrence approaches to signal effectively across the full spectrum of Russian security threats.

The following subsections offer brief descriptions of each of the three pillars, along with a few examples of policies or actions that could be taken to operationalize them. These measures seek to present a better balance between coercive, defensive, and cooperative measures. The actions suggested under each pillar are by no means comprehensive, but are rather reflective of what may be the most relevant to the current security situation or the most indicative of the types of actions that should be considered. Given the complex nature of certain subject matter (e.g., sanctions, force posture), the study team sought to leverage recommendations offered by recent and complementary reports from CSIS and other experts that explored each area in greater depth. In some areas, moreover, we believe that more study is needed to develop effective ways forward.

Pillar #1 – Strengthen

The first pillar—“strengthen”—is dedicated to those activities the United States and its allies should proactively take to build the health of their democracies, institutions, and defenses. The weaknesses that have been revealed in the current system are bigger than just the Russia challenge, but are certainly a key component of what makes the West so vulnerable to it. Thus, the first order of business must be strengthening and rebuilding. This means shoring up our vulnerabilities not simply to Russian coercion, but to all that makes Russian coercion possible, including the tone and polarization of our politics, our susceptibility to false news, the disengagement and disenchantment of our publics (who have largely forgotten why NATO and the European Union were created), growing income inequality, the lack of transparency and corruption in our governments, Europe's divestment in defense, and the lack of clear and shared priorities. Much activity is already underway but should be continued and expanded. Such activities should include:

- **Practicing what we preach.** The United States and its allies will not be credible critics of Russian aggression if they do not provide a strong alternative example. This means working within the rules of the international order, including when it comes to use of force, continuing to invest in transparency, accountability, and press freedom in their own countries, building strong and fair economic foundations, and educating populations about the benefits of democ-



The North Atlantic Council meets at the level of heads of state and government at the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw.

Warsaw, Poland, July 8, 2016

Credit: Wojtek Radwanski/AFP/Getty Images

racy and liberal values. They must develop foreign policies that seek to advance global prosperity and security and stand by their agreements. This does not mean becoming a “global police force.” Rather, it means making judicious decisions based on the evidence of past policies, effective and ineffective, and learning from the lessons of history. Happily, this approach also contributes to our resilience.

- **Reinvesting in NATO.** Next to the strength of our constitutional democracy, our alliance structure is America’s greatest foreign policy advantage. It multiplies our common force and resource pool and confers leadership and legitimacy on the United States. The Trump administration should take an early interest in ensuring NATO remains both united and capable, under supportive U.S. leadership. The implementation of steps NATO has taken since the Wales and Warsaw Summits should continue to be prioritized, especially high-level pressure to expedite the alliance’s

collective defense spending, interoperability, readiness, and contingency planning. The United States must increase information sharing with NATO and European governments to better combat common threats. Robust bilateral relationships, including with Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, will remain important to achieving consensus within NATO and will need to be carefully tended by the new administration. Finally, the nationalist trends in both the United States and broader Europe demonstrate the need for governments to do more to draw a clearer link between the strength of NATO and the protection of their respective national interests—the memory of which has faded as the Cold War generation ages.

- **Prioritizing global commitments.** Two decades of unchallenged U.S. global leadership have enabled the United States to take action around the world without ruthlessly prioritizing its interests or always carefully evaluating the

tradeoffs in its policies. Russia’s ability to challenge that leadership results in part from the reality that these practices have spread the United States thin and left it pursuing nice-to-haves even at the cost of need-to-haves, while Russia has been able to concentrate its energies more narrowly. It behooves the United States to reevaluate its global interests and establish clear priorities, aligned with its global leadership role, so as to create a sustainable security strategy. Advancing our system of strong alliances, including NATO, should be a high global priority for the Trump administration.

- **Building resilience among allies and partners.** The United States should enhance its efforts to encourage and support European governments in building energy security, ensuring transparency and media independence so that Russian attempts at covert or corrupt influence are mitigated, and building capabilities in nondefense sectors (alongside defense investments) to resist

Russian influence. An October 2016 report written jointly by CSIS and the Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria explored Moscow's malign economic influence in Eastern Europe. The report recommends several steps European governments could take, including: (1) creating specific, high-level task forces within NATO and EU nations to focus solely on tracing and prosecuting illicit financial flows; (2) prioritizing enhanced EU-U.S. financial intelligence cooperation; (3) elevating anti-corruption by strengthening institutions as an element of NATO's Readiness Action Plan; and (4) revamping U.S. and EU assistance to Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, to combat Russian influence and strengthen governance.⁶³⁸

- **Fostering Russia expertise in the United States.** Following the end of the Cold War, the United States largely divested of the human capital it had built over decades of studying the Soviet Union, including Russian language, cultural, and historical knowledge. The United States, along with American universities, should reinvest in teaching and promoting Russian studies, create scholarship programs, and offer internships to students in the field. Growing positions for Russia specialists in our intelligence community and throughout our national security community will help create a sustainable talent pipeline.
- **Expanding NATO-EU cooperation.** Greater institutional cooperation between NATO and the European Union has

long been a part of the transatlantic conversation, though in practice has been more aspirational than operational. This is in large part due to the ongoing dispute between Turkey and Cyprus, which may be close to resolution and should be brought across the finish line. Managing the range of threats presented by Russia does not fit cleanly or comprehensively under either institutional framework. The two organizations agreed at the Warsaw Summit to deepen cooperation in areas including countering hybrid threats, enhancing resilience, defense capacity building, cyber defense, maritime security, and exercises.⁶³⁹ Concrete, urgent, and robust progress in these areas and others, such as countering terrorism, will be necessary to meet new threats.

- **Standing up for human rights and democracy in Russia and elsewhere.** To be effective and credible, the United States must maintain its moral authority by ensuring it is a model of democracy, transparency, and human rights, including press freedom, civil rights protection, and reforms of existing policies that limit these. The United States should also study the historical global experience with democracy development and human rights (including recent successes and failures) to improve its policies to promote and protect both. Finally, it should continue to monitor human rights and civil rights in Russia and elsewhere, including allied states, and report on the findings. If there are issues related to specific violations, it should raise them with foreign

officials. This can keep individuals alive and can be effective in changing policies.

- **Modernizing U.S. nuclear forces.** Irrespective of current U.S.-Russia tensions, the United States must continue to maintain a strong, safe, and secure nuclear capability through the modernization of its land, air, and sea delivery platforms, warheads, and command and control technology. While the Department of Defense is already moving forward with plans to modernize all three legs of the U.S. nuclear triad in the coming decades, the level of ambition, affordability, and specific requirements of that modernization effort remain core points of contention within the expert community and in Congress. The upcoming U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, mandated by the Trump administration in January 2017, is an opportunity to examine the specific types of capabilities that will be needed to ensure a robust and effective strategic deterrent. The United States should continue to encourage the United Kingdom—the only other ally underwriting NATO's nuclear deterrent (France remains outside of NATO's nuclear planning group)—to likewise maintain and modernize its nuclear capability through the construction of new Trident-equipped submarines, as authorized by the UK Parliament in July 2016.

Pillar #2 – Contest

The “contest” pillar is dedicated to a combination of more robust offensive and defensive measures vis-à-vis Russia. Great-

er offense is needed to bolster the current U.S. and European approaches, which have been overly weighted toward defense and assurance measures. To be clear, the United States should not go looking for a fight with the Kremlin, and should do everything possible to avoid one, but it should press its advantages where it has them. Russia's current practice of seeking to elevate its status by challenging the United States and the broader international order will not be constrained only by punitive measures imposed after the fact, but must also be shaped by the proactive imposition of a predictable set of policy statements and actions that makes clear the United States' boundaries and expectations. This means shaping a new relationship paradigm, together with our transatlantic partners, that puts more onus on Russia to comply with international norms rather than simply imposing consequences for breaching them. Likewise, an elevated defense is needed to bolster security and deterrence in Europe and in the homeland, block Moscow's attempts to destabilize U.S. allies and partners and build competing global alliance networks, and infiltrate U.S. space, communication, and cyber networks. A strong approach within this line of effort may include:

- **Creating a predictable schedule of progressing sanctions.** The United States and its allies should seek to strengthen Ukraine-related sanctions and individual asset freezes and travel bans over Russia's continuing violations of the September 2014 and February 2015 Minsk agreements,

rather than simply extending what is already in place until compliance is achieved or waiting for a significant deterioration of the security situation. This assumes, of course, that fulfillment of the Minsk agreements will be a continuing goal of the new administration's Ukraine policy. Either way, the same enforcement principle would apply to any new agreement related to Ukraine, and, for that matter, to any agreements made in different contexts that are tied to clear outcomes. The United States needs tools to incentivize Russian behavior, and it needs to communicate clear consequences for actions it opposes.

Possible options for strengthening sanctions against Russia were laid out in Chapter 4. Among these, the United States and its allies should seriously consider: (1) involving more third-party states either "cooperatively by diplomatic outreach, or coercively through the imposition of secondary sanctions to force third countries' government and firms to choose between EU and U.S. markets and Russia"; (2) expanding the number of Russian entities cut off from foreign financing and increasing borrowing restrictions; (3) blocking sanctions against specific Russian banks; and (4) additional sectoral sanctions.⁶⁴⁰ For the European Union, reducing the import of Russian oil would be another important step to imposing costs on the Russian economy, but is a long-term proposition as Russia supplies 29 percent of EU oil imports.⁶⁴¹ Sanctioning

Gazprom would be another big step, but also perilous for many in the European Union.

- **Conducting proportional offensive cyber activities against Russia.** Prior to confirmation by the director of national intelligence and the Department of Homeland Security that "only Russia's senior-most officials" could have authorized the hacking of Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails, then-president Obama publicly warned President Putin that the United States has "more [cyber] capacity than anybody, both offensively and defensively."⁶⁴² The United States should make use of its offensive capabilities in this regard to respond to and disincentivize Russia's active campaign of cyber surveillance, exposure, and denial-of-service attacks against European and American targets. In addition to bolstering the defense of national networks and sharing any lessons learned with allies and partners, offensive measures are needed. The specific range of offensive cyber options requires greater study, ideally in a classified environment. The long-term goal is to create a system of cyber deterrence: to ensure that Russian attacks are both ineffective and not worth the cost. The United States must continue to innovate in this area, while setting clear norms and avoiding unintended escalations. If Russia can be adaptive, surely the United States can be too.
- **Increasing and optimizing the U.S. conventional military presence in Europe.** Strengthening U.S. and NATO posture in key areas

of vulnerability will not only bolster defense and deterrence, but can also create an environment in which Russia is once again prepared to agree to transparency, predictability, and arms control measures in Europe that would increase European security. The clearest and most profound signal of NATO's post-Cold War desire for enduring positive relations with Russia was its dramatic multi-decade drawdown of military forces in Europe. As a consequence, the NATO force posture that existed prior to Russia's annexation of Crimea was largely designed for out-of-area operations. Even as subsequently augmented, NATO forces in Europe today are not adequate to deter Russian aggression at a remaining level of risk that should be acceptable to U.S. policymakers. This does not mean that the United States should return to the massive Cold War-era military presence it once kept in Europe. Threats and capabilities have evolved on both sides, and our strategic, conventional, and unconventional capabilities must evolve accordingly. It is clear, however, that the U.S. forward presence in Europe has been allowed to atrophy to levels too small to provide the baseline capability needed to deter a large power like Russia.

Additional U.S. forces are needed in Europe to provide a robust in-place tripwire and rapid-response capability, alongside allied forces. The starting point should be forward stationing an armored brigade combat team and ad-

ditional Army enabling units in Europe; retaining at least six fighter squadrons with the ability to rapidly flow in more aircraft as necessary; and ensuring a robust naval presence in and around European waters. A reinforcement-based, deterrence-by-punishment strategy requires investments in reinforcement capacity—including staging prepositioned equipment, forward stationing additional logistician units, and routinely practicing reinforcement to demonstrate the capability to the Kremlin.

NATO FORCES IN EUROPE TODAY ARE NOT ADEQUATE TO DETER RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AT A REMAINING LEVEL OF RISK THAT SHOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO U.S. POLICYMAKERS.

There is also a need to change how U.S. forces operate in Europe. While theater security cooperation and building interoperability with allies will remain important, credible deterrence must become the priority. The focus should, therefore, shift from small unit training spread across multi-

ple locations in Europe to larger and more complex exercises with allies that develop and demonstrate NATO's warfighting prowess. While these exercises would be less frequent, they would strengthen the cohesion of U.S. combat units, help U.S. and allied forces prepare for the complexities of a high-end fight, and improve their ability to rapidly respond to a contingency.

Lastly, the credibility of conventional deterrence hinges on U.S. and allied forces having capabilities that are adapted to

the threat and the operating environment and are able to punish and defeat aggression. The United States and its allies need to reinvest in and enhance their military capabilities in line with the recommendations made in Chapter 4.

- **Resourcing for strength.** The Trump administration and Congress must resolve the stalemate over defense spending caps, which have negatively impacted the budgetary process for years.

The uncertainty surrounding the Defense Department's budget hampers sound decision-making and planning related to force posture, capabilities, and readiness levels. Regardless of whether topline defense spending increases or decreases in the near term, returning to a normal budget process for



Russian information campaigns for foreign consumption rely on a combination of government-sponsored media, such as RT and Sputnik, official and unofficial social media, and orchestrated statements by Russian officials.

Moscow, Russia, June 11, 2013

Credit: Yuri Kochelkov/AFP/Getty Images

the military should be viewed as a necessary component of national security strategy. Additionally, the European Reassurance Initiative—or rather its successor, the European Deterrence Initiative, which is likely to total \$3.4 billion in fiscal year 2017—will need to continue to be funded at similar or slightly higher levels and should be codified in the Defense Department’s base budget, rather than be considered as part of the Overseas Contingency Operations account.

- **Combating Russian propaganda.** Chapter 3 discusses the Russian use of propaganda to advance its anti-Western agenda. Like cyber, the United States is not outmatched when it comes to information capabilities though it is constrained by the norms of democratic societies. In a statement as true today as it was when it was written in the eighteenth century, “Falsehood flies, and the truth comes

limping after it.”⁶⁴³ At present, Russia has a disinformation advantage. Greater study of what can be effective in the current environment is needed, relying on the experience of advertising and social media campaigns. A communications blitz under the auspices of a new engagement center for information operations, as authorized in the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, should be funded and empowered to rationalize and leverage every means at the U.S. government’s disposal to “lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts... to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interest.”⁶⁴⁴

Activities should span both overt measures—such as increased public diplomacy, re-investment in Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, foreign

journalism training, and the creation of Russian-language information platforms—and covert measures, such as Military Information Support Operations (MISO), which, though “repeatedly misunderstood and misrepresented... as a means of informing and influencing foreign audiences, remain as relevant in peace as in war and as vital to our nation’s defense as ever before.”⁶⁴⁵ To bolster and complement the efforts undertaken by U.S. embassy public affairs teams, Special Operations Forces should be authorized to conduct MISO, as described in Chapter 4, to combat Russian propaganda in Eastern Europe with truthful information about U.S. and allied activities and intentions. Counter-propaganda activities should also include direct outreach and educational exchanges with Russians living inside and outside of Russia.

- **Supporting non-NATO nations, including Ukraine, in the so-called grey zone.** The previously mentioned February 2015 Atlantic Council report argued for the provision of direct military assistance to Ukraine “in far larger amounts than provided to date and including lethal defensive arms” in order to raise the risks and costs to Russia for any continued aggression.⁶⁴⁶ “If confronted by a strong Western response [in Ukraine],” the report holds, “the Kremlin would be far less tempted to challenge the security and territorial integrity of other states.”⁶⁴⁷ The new administration should indeed consider expanded support to Ukraine—conditioned on its continued progress in implementing necessary anti-corruption and transparency reforms—across the spectrum of its security, economic, and governance needs. This does not necessarily require lethal aid, although the CSIS study team project directors support lethal aid, but it should include assistance that is geared to Ukraine’s requirements and capability gaps.⁶⁴⁸ Also needed is greater engagement with and support to the other vulnerable non-NATO partners in the Caucasus, Balkans, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe as a means to check Russia attempts to undermine their sovereignty and foment regional instability. Importantly, NATO’s door must remain open to nations that meet the requirements of membership—including, crucially, that their membership benefit the alliance. With this in mind, the United States should consider more deliberately courting states like Swe-

den and Finland, who bring robust capacity to the alliance and challenge Russian influence in the High North.

- **Pushing back against Russia’s nuclear saber-rattling.** In response to Russia’s irresponsible stewardship in the nuclear domain, NATO can take steps to signal strength through declarations in NATO summits, bolstering conventional defenses, revitalizing NATO exercises to include a nuclear component, and posturing effectively and modernizing the allied dual-capable aircraft (DCA) fleet. In addition, the United States should continue to hold itself to the highest possible standards for responsible nuclear behavior without resorting to brandishing its nuclear weapons or using them as a source of coercion or intimidation. The United States must press Russia to adopt a similar stance.

Pillar #3 – Cooperate

Engagement with Russia on areas of mutual interest is not only wise but necessary. Transborder threats such as climate change, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation demand cooperation among global powers. Cooperation has been successful in the past and can be again. As previously mentioned, the 2009 “reset” with President Medvedev produced some meaningful achievements. History has shown that it is possible to seek transparency and dialogue alongside increased competition and containment. Indeed, as previously mentioned, the more strongly the United States contests Russian attempts to reshape the security landscape, the greater the opportunities later to cooperate on acceptable terms

to increase transparency and predictability. In other words, escalate to negotiate. Engaging in a cooperative manner will, of course, require the United States, along with its European allies, to acknowledge that certain Russian security concerns are legitimate and to explore sensible compromises. Indeed, doing so is crucial to developing a more sustainable and secure Europe and world.

At the same time, the United States must hold firm to its core values, be clear about Russia’s motives, and understand the potential tradeoffs that deal-making with Russia might entail. Engagement that degenerates into endless accommodation does not serve U.S. or allied interests. In some cases, Russia has been able to use the West’s natural penchant for process and dialogue as a delay tactic with tragic consequences. In Syria, the diplomatic process, chaired by former secretary of state John Kerry for the United States and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov for Russia, failed to achieve a real or lasting cease-fire and has acted to provide Russia the diplomatic legitimacy it desires while continuing to prop up the Assad regime, attack civilians, and block meaningful action at the United Nations.

Amid renewed violence in Ukraine in late January 2017, new U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley made clear her intention to confront, contest, and cooperate with Russia as evidence of its intentions and actions warrant. Expressing her frustration over Russia’s continuing support for separatists in eastern Ukraine despite the Security Council’s call for a cease-fire just two days earlier, she stated:

IN TERMS OF ARMS CONTROL, VERY LITTLE CAN HAPPEN WITHOUT RUSSIA'S COOPERATION, GIVEN THAT THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA BETWEEN THEM HOLD ABOUT 95 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S NUCLEAR ARSENAL.

I consider it unfortunate that the occasion of my first appearance here is one in which I must condemn the aggressive actions of Russia. It is unfortunate because it is a replay of far too many instances over many years in which United States Representatives have needed to do that... Cooperation on this issue is possible. Earlier this week, both Russia and Ukraine supported this Council's unanimous call to return to a ceasefire... The United States expects that those who can influence the groups that are fighting—in particular, Russia—will do everything possible to support an end to this escalation of violence.⁶⁴⁹

The United States must approach engagement with Russia selectively, cautiously, and with firm limits. An over-eagerness to cooperate can inadvertently elevate and embolden Putin's outrageous demands; enhance Russia's diplomatic and political prestige;

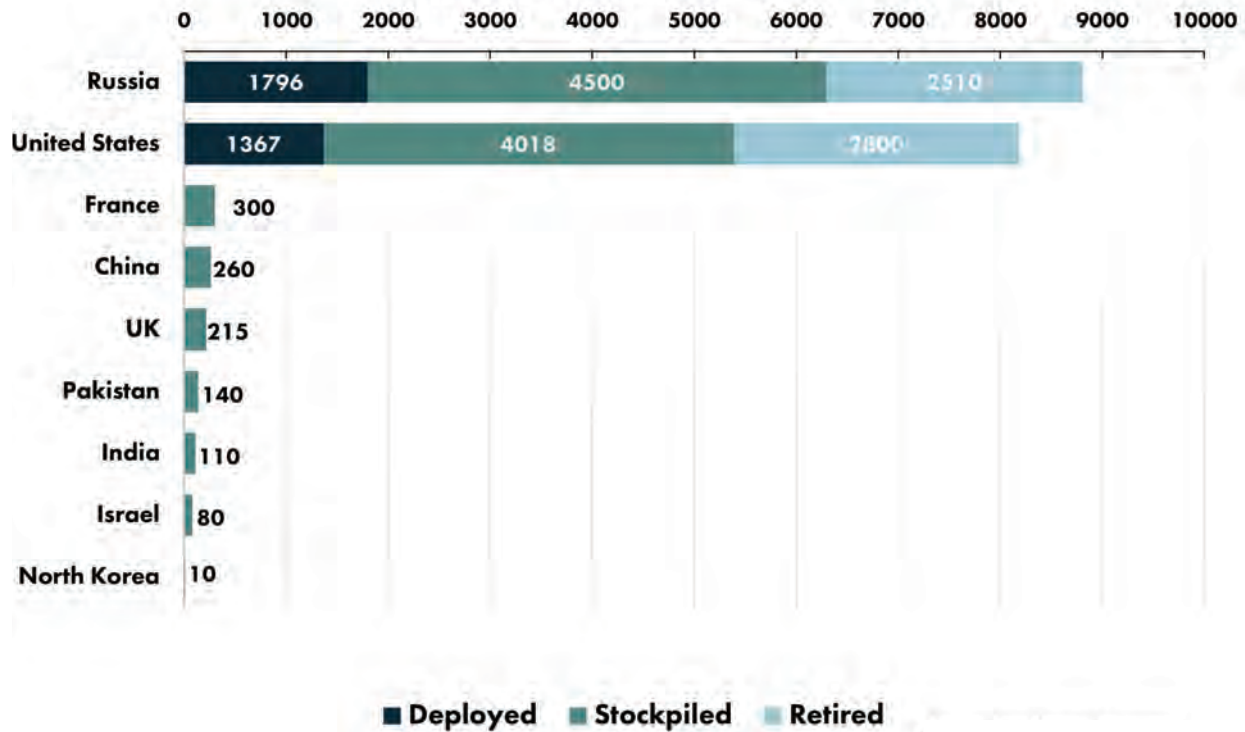
create false equivalencies in terms of mutual wrong-doing; provide a platform for stunts “replete with moralism and grandstanding”; and weaken the West's bargaining position by signaling that it cares more about compromising.⁶⁵⁰ As the U.S.-Russia relationship evolves, more areas for cooperation may emerge, to which the United States should remain open. For now, however, the United States may wish to focus on areas that are both critical and attainable. These include:

- **Improving crisis communications and transparency measures.** Russian conventional force deployments along the country's western border, violations of airspace, and frequent snap exercises are raising tensions with NATO allies and partners, who worry that the deployments could prefigure an aggressive move against them. The United States is likewise concerned that it is only a matter of time before Russia's increasingly reckless

encounters with allied air and sea assets result in injury or unintended escalation. At the same time, Russian leaders claim that additional deployments by NATO forces, such as those announced at the Warsaw summit, represent a threat to Russian security. Ensuring greater transparency about these deployments and maneuvers on both sides would help lower tensions, reassure allies, and ensure there is no disconnect between messages sent and messages received. The United States should push Russia to fully comply with transparency and monitoring measures under the Open Skies agreement and the Vienna Document, “with a view to lowering the threshold for notifications and observations.”⁶⁵¹ Despite Russia's withdrawal from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, Russia, the United States, and European countries may want to consider what is possible in regards to a new agreement controlling conventional force deployments and exercises, as part of building a more sustainable European security system.

- **Maintaining nuclear nonproliferation and arms control talks.** Russia and the United States have little choice but to work with each other to achieve progress on nuclear nonproliferation, which has been a venue for fairly productive cooperation over the last 20 years. Russia has a stake in containing the risks of North Korea's nuclear weapons arsenal, of South Asian strategic competition, and of terrorist access to weapons of mass destruction or their components. Russia is key on most nonpro-

ESTIMATED GLOBAL NUCLEAR WARHEAD INVENTORIES IN 2017



Source: Arms Control Association

liferation issues due to its role as a leading member of the International Atomic Energy Agency board, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and a participant in both the Iranian P5+1 talks and Six Party Talks with North Korea. Russia is also a potential source of sensitive materials and technology and a “traditional friend of countries of proliferation concern.”⁶⁵²

Likewise, in terms of arms control, very little can happen without Russia’s cooperation, given that the United States and Russia between them hold about 95 percent of the world’s nuclear arsenal.⁶⁵³ Arms control has also been an area of bilateral dialogue, even when U.S.-Russian relations ebbed in the past. Each country is the only one on Earth that can threaten the world with

obliteration. As signatories to the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT), both countries are committed to reducing their nuclear arsenals, and they have always been most successful at this task when working together.

Recent actions by Russia have raised concerns about its commitments to these goals. Specifically, Washington has accused Moscow of violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. In 2016, Russia withdrew from the Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement (PMDA) and the Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy. Russia, for its part, has long felt that the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty in 2002 weakened strategic stability.

Most urgently, the United States should pursue negotiations to bring Russia back into compliance with the INF Treaty. To do so, the United States will need to address Russia’s three countercharges of U.S. violations. This may entail agreeing on language that clarifies the “differences between permitted missile defense target missiles and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, differences between [unmanned aerial vehicles] and ground-launched cruise missiles, [and]... transparency measures regarding SM-3 [missile interceptors in Europe].”⁶⁵⁴ In exchange, Russia must end its deployment of intermediate-range missiles in violation of the treaty, coupled with rigorous transparency measures to confirm its compliance.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, U.S. and Russian strategic nu-

clear weapons are currently governed by the New START Treaty, which expires in 2021. If it is not renewed or superseded by a new treaty by that time, there will be no constraints on either country's further development of strategic nuclear weapons, other than their NPT commitments. Both states have benefited immensely from having an effective and verifiable treaty mechanism in place—it provides transparency into each other's systems; prevents runaway spending on weapons that neither needs; and ensures parity, which both have valued. Moreover, while treaty renewal would enable New START to continue, a new treaty could have further benefits, allowing the two sides to bring to the table issues that have concerned them in the past, whether they are determined in this agreement or in further talks. In Russia's case, this might include missile defenses and conventional strategic weapons. In the case of the United States, it might include nonstrategic systems. Deployments in Europe, and their ranges, could also be considered. Hypersonic weapons, now under development in a number of third-party countries, as well as in Russia and the United States, might also be included. Whether any of these topics are or are not included in a New START follow-on or another treaty, discussions are a critical first step toward resolving misunderstandings and mutual fears, particularly hazardous in the nuclear context. Indeed, as some of these issues also affect other states, multilateral discussions might be worth pursuing in some cases. Moreover, progress here will help

Russia and the United States rebuild a united front on nonproliferation under the NPT.

As noted above, conventional arms control treaties can also be pursued (the INF treaty, of course, covers both sorts of systems). But we reiterate that agreements that relate to conventional forces in Europe (or, indeed, most anywhere else) cannot be simply bilateral. Nor can they only comprise Russia and the NATO allies. Rather, they must include all European states. This creates challenges for negotiation, but there exists ways to finesse such challenges, if the commitment is there.

- **Working together in the Arctic.** U.S.-Russia cooperation in the Arctic, particularly within the Arctic Council, has remained at least partially insulated from the current tensions, and should remain so. The two nations share practical interests in environmental research on the impacts of climate change and the leakage of methane trapped in permafrost layers; search and rescue preparedness as Arctic tourism grows more popular; and oil spill rapid response measures, among other things. As the Arctic Sea warms and maritime traffic increases through the Bering Strait (which is only 44 nautical miles wide at its narrowest point), it will be important to seek collaboration to establish basic communication infrastructure and designated sea lanes.⁶⁵⁵ The melting of the Arctic also has important economic, energy, and territorial implications that, without robust cooperation, could become new sources of conflict. Maintaining an open dialogue on safety

and environmental issues may make discussion of the thornier issues, including Russia's military mobilization and modernization programs in the Arctic, a bit less challenging by gradually rebuilding trust and confidence. To this end, an August 2015 CSIS report on Russia's strategic interests in the Arctic recommended the creation of a U.S.-Russia joint working group within the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF) to focus on enhancing safety and improving maritime domain awareness in the Bering Strait, and for the eight Arctic Council states to begin to negotiate a "non-binding political statement to serve as a 'Declaration on Military Conduct in the Arctic' in line with the OSCE's confidence building measures."⁶⁵⁶

Conclusion

How the United States chooses to manage the Russia challenge will shape the geopolitical landscape for decades to come. U.S. allies, partners, and adversaries in the Middle East, Asia, and elsewhere will be watching to see how the United States responds to the evolving challenges posed by Russia and will calibrate their behavior accordingly. In the rush to make deals with Russia to secure lesser objectives, the United States may well find itself sacrificing a more fundamental goal: advancing a global order that benefits our people, our economy, and our constitutional values. Standing resolutely by our allies and our treaty commitments is central to upholding that order. We must meet Russia's efforts to challenge it with the steel of our determination rather than mush that cedes our hard-won gains.

U.S. STRATEGY TOWARD RUSSIA

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	PILLARS	SAMPLE ACTIONS	KEY CHARACTERISTICS
<p>Manage tensions with Russia in a way that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Upholds the post-WWII order, international norms, agreements, and the rule of law; 2. Maintains U.S. access and influence in Europe and NATO; 3. Enhances U.S. and European political, economic, security, and societal stability; 4. Avoids direct hostilities; 5. Discourages Russia's incitement and abetment of instability in Europe and beyond; and 6. Builds ties with the Russian people <p><u>Until</u> Russia stops playing the spoiler and begins to work constructively to strengthen and develop security in Europe and the world.</p>	<p>STRENGTHEN</p> <p>The health of our democracies, institutions, and defenses</p> <p>CONTEST</p> <p>Russian attempts to undermine U.S. interests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice what we preach. • Reinvest in NATO. • Prioritize global commitments. • Build resilience among allies and partners. • Foster Russia expertise in the United States. • Expand NATO-EU cooperation. • Stand up for human rights and democracy. • Modernize U.S. nuclear forces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater emphasis on strengthening and contesting than today. • Scalable in implementation as tensions increase or decrease. • Credible with threats and promises. No gap between words and actions.
<p><u>Until</u> Russia stops playing the spoiler and begins to work constructively to strengthen and develop security in Europe and the world.</p>	<p>CONTEST</p> <p>Russian attempts to undermine U.S. interests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create predictable schedule of progressing sanctions. • Conduct proportional offensive cyber activities. • Increase and optimize the U.S. conventional military presence in Europe. • Resource for strength. • Combat Russian propaganda. • Support non-NATO nations, including Ukraine, in the so-called grey zone. Keep NATO's door open. Push back against Russia's nuclear saber-rattling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive across non-conventional, conventional, nuclear threats and across geographic regions (not only Europe-focused). • Multilateral under strong U.S. leadership to maximize unity of effort. • Fully resourced but efficient, does not entail massive new defense investments. • Clear-eyed, avoids wishful thinking and cooperation that becomes accommodation. Reaffirms principled rules-based approach. • Patient and sustainable throughout the period of heightened tensions.
	<p>COOPERATE</p> <p>Where advantageous and feasible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve crisis communications and transparency measures. • Maintain nuclear nonproliferation and arms control talks. • Work together in the Arctic. 	

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