



# Russian Strategic Intentions

A Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) White Paper

May 2019

**Contributing Authors:** Dr. John Arquilla (Naval Postgraduate School), Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Dr. Belinda Bragg (NSI, Inc.), Mr. Pavel Devyatkin (The Arctic Institute), MAJ Adam Dyet (U.S. Army, J5-Policy USCENTCOM), Dr. R. Evan Ellis (U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute), Mr. Daniel J. Flynn (Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)), Dr. Daniel Goure (Lexington Institute), Ms. Abigail C. Kamp (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)), Dr. Roger Kangas (National Defense University), Dr. Mark N. Katz (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government), Dr. Barnett S. Koven (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)), Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux (Brigham Young University- Idaho), Dr. Marlene Laruelle (George Washington University), Dr. Christopher Marsh (Special Operations Research Association), Dr. Robert Person (United States Military Academy, West Point), Mr. Roman "Comrade" Pyatkov (HAF/A3K CHECKMATE), Dr. John Schindler (The Locarno Group), Ms. Malin Severin (UK Ministry of Defence Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC)), Dr. Thomas Sherlock (United States Military Academy, West Point), Dr. Joseph Siegle (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University), Dr. Robert Spalding III (U.S. Air Force), Dr. Richard Weitz (Center for Political-Military Analysis at the Hudson Institute), Mr. Jason Werchan (USEUCOM Strategy Division & Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI))

**Prefaces Provided By:** RDML Jeffrey J. Czerewko (Joint Staff, J39), Mr. Jason Werchan (USEUCOM Strategy Division & Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI))

**Editor:** Ms. Nicole Peterson (NSI, Inc.)

**Editorial Support:** Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI, Inc.), Ms. Sarah Canna (NSI, Inc.), Mr. Ali Jafri (NSI, Inc.), Mr. Thomas Rieger (NSI, Inc.), Dr. John Stevenson (NSI, Inc.), Ms. Mariah Yager (NSI, Inc.)

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

SMA White Papers and reports can be downloaded from <http://nsiteam.com/sma-publications/>

## **Disclaimers**

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

Mention of any commercial product in this paper does not imply Department of Defense (DoD) endorsement or recommendation for or against the use of any such product. No infringement on the rights of the holders of the registered trademarks is intended.

The appearance of external hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the United States DoD of the linked websites, or the information, products or services contained therein. The DoD does not exercise any editorial, security, or other control over the information you may find at these locations.

## JOINT STAFF PREFACE

### RDML Jeffrey J. Czerewko (Joint Staff, J39)

Understanding the future of global competition and conflict is now more important than ever before. In a dynamically changing world, the nature and character of warfare, deterrence, compellence, escalation management, and persuasion are key and essential in determining how the United States and its partners should:

- Strategize to defend their global interests against activities that are intended to undercut those interests across the spectrum of competition;
- Defend their interests against threats by regional competitors via ways and means complementary to strategies vis-à-vis China and Russia but do not undercut other interests; and
- Prepare US and partner forces to respond to unexpected and agile developments in global politics and technology by identifying areas for cooperation, mitigating the threat of activities short of armed conflict, and deterring armed conflict across multiple sources of national power (e.g., trade, diplomacy, security).

The National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and National Military Strategy all note that future confrontations between major powers may most often occur below the level of armed conflict. In this environment, economic competition, influence campaigns, paramilitary actions, cyber intrusions, and political warfare will likely become more prevalent. Such confrontations increase the risk of misperception and miscalculation, between powers with significant military strength, which may then increase the risk of armed conflict. In this context, the US capability to influence the outcomes of both global and regional events must be reconsidered. The growing divergence among great powers (i.e., the US, China, and Russia) regarding what constitutes legitimate or acceptable deterrence, compellence, and escalation management activities should be carefully examined.

To that end, this white paper reviews Russian activities across the globe to build an enhanced, fundamental understanding of the contemporary and future influence environment. Countering Russian provocative activities requires a comprehensive strategy and the NDS recognizes this fact in order to successfully counter Russian provocative activities; as a result, the US must collaboratively employ multiple instruments of national power in a synchronized manner. As white paper contributor Brig Gen (ret) Rob Spalding III suggests, “the US role with regard to Russia should be to continue to engage European allies to take the lead for balancing in Europe. The allies’ goal should be deterrence. At the same time, the US should bilaterally engage Russia to peel them away from China’s orbit. The US can work with Russia in ways that improve the US-Russia relationship without detracting from European efforts to balance and deter.”

The articles in this white paper provide government stakeholders—intelligence, law enforcement, military, and policy agencies—with valuable insights and analytic frameworks to assist the US, its allies, and partners in developing a comprehensive strategy to compete and defeat this Russian challenge. Significant observations include:

- Russia is adopting coercive strategies that involve the orchestrated employment of military and nonmilitary means to deter and compel the US, its allies and partners prior to and after the outbreak of hostilities. These strategies must be proactively confronted, or the threat of significant armed conflict may increase.
- Russia exhibits a deep-seated sense of geopolitical insecurity which motivates it to pursue strategic objectives that establish an uncontested sphere of influence in the post-Soviet region. Yet, Russians increasingly disagree with the Kremlin's assertions that the US is a looming external danger and a subversive force in Russian domestic politics.
- Russia's gray zone tactics are most effective when the target is deeply polarized or lacks the capacity to resist and respond effectively to Russian aggression. According to Russian strategic thought, deterrence and compellence are two sides of the same coin.

Only with a aligned and synchroized whole of government approach will the US compete and win against emerging powers like Russia and China. Such collaboration requires a common understanding of our competitors, their tactics and desired endstates and we intend that this white paper will achieve this critical objective.

RDML Jeffrey J. Czerewko  
Deputy Director for Global Operations  
Joint Staff, J39

## USEUCOM PREFACE

### Mr. Jason Werchan (USEUCOM Strategy Division & Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI))

Understanding Russia's broad strategy, goals, and capabilities in the gray zone is of critical importance to United States European Command (USEUCOM). Russia presents two primary challenges and tasked missions for the Command. The first, and USEUCOM's highest priority, is to deter Russian aggression against the Alliance (i.e. the fight we do not want). The second is to counter Russian malign influence and activities below the level of armed conflict (i.e. the fight we are currently in).

This White Paper directly supports this latter challenge, and highlights the global nature of the gray zone competition. It expounds upon the specific challenge of what the 2018 National Defense Strategy directs as 'Expanding the Competitive Space' with Russia. 'Competition' is a relative new mission for the Department of Defense. While the United States focused on executing the global war on terror, Russia actively pursued malign influence in all regions of the world to mitigate their inferior conventional capability. They are executing active and at times aggressive foreign and security policies in their self-proclaimed near aboard, Afghanistan, and Syria. Russia has a growing and demonstrated capacity and willingness to exercise malign influence in Europe and abroad, including in the United States.

As the designated Coordinating Authority for the Russia Problem Set, USEUCOM is leading the Department's execution of a global campaign plan designed to achieve the two primary objectives of deterring Russian aggression and competing below the level of armed conflict. However, countering Russian gray zone efforts are not specific to just the Command or the Department, but must be part of a whole of US Government effort that leverages all elements of national power. It must address areas to compete globally and challenge Russia where they are perceived to have asymmetric advantages. It must also identify and develop the specific and niche tools needed to successfully expand the competitive space. This white paper provides a comprehensive deep dive with respect to the Russian Federation and addresses the challenges and opportunities for the United States and its network of alliances to succeed in the fight we are in.

Jason Werchan  
Strategy Program Manager  
Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI)  
USEUCOM Strategy Division

## OPENING REMARKS: NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE

### Dr. John Arquilla (Naval Postgraduate School)

In the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville was the first to predict that Russia and the United States would become global powers. At the end of the first part of his *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville mused: “Their starting-point is different, and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.”

The “starting point” for our own strategic thinking about Russia today should be a recognition of the validity of Tocqueville’s prediction. By any measure, Russia is and will remain a significant shaper of world events—particularly in areas close to its locus of continental power (e.g., Crimea, Donetsk, Abkhazia, and other regions considered its “near abroad”). Needless to say, NATO expansion has infringed on Russia’s perceived natural sphere of interest and serves as a cause of friction between it and the US.

Farther afield, Russia will retain strategic interests that will inform and guide its policies. Its intervention in Syria speaks to a centuries-long interest in attaining some sort of geostrategic Mediterranean foothold. Support for the flagging socialist government in Venezuela can be understood in terms of a small-scale investment in encouraging a sustained “pink tide” in Latin America that provides a valuable distraction for the Americans—right in their traditional back yard.

In terms of nuclear matters, it is clear that a fresh round of arms racing threatens. The United States can either embrace this, hoping to outpace the Russians, or try to head off such a costly competition with a rededicated arms control/reduction policy. Given that this competition is no longer bilateral, it makes better sense for Washington and Moscow to work together to corral the others who are now making dangerous progress with intermediate and other—including long-range—weapons. Revisiting Ronald Reagan’s offer to Russia, made back in the ‘80s, to share research on ballistic missile defense, would be an adroit move as well.

A last point: We should think about potential “shocks,” the most troubling of which would be if Putin performed a “reverse Nixon” and played his own version of the “China card.” The world system, and American influence in it, would be completely upended if Moscow and Beijing aligned more closely. Perhaps a good American strategy would be to play a “Russia card” first. Obama tried to do so with his “reset.” Trump wanted to do this, but he was derailed by the electioneering apparently orchestrated by Moscow. Still it is not too late for such a move. After all, the United States works closely with Russia on space operations. Is it a bridge too far to hope for more cooperation at the terrestrial level?

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Ms. Nicole Peterson (NSI, Inc.)

This white paper was prepared as part of the Strategic Multilayer Assessment, entitled *The Future of Global Competition and Conflict*. Twenty-three expert contributors contributed to this white paper and provided wide-ranging assessments of Russia's global interests and objectives, as well as the activities—gray or otherwise—that it conducts to achieve them. This white paper is divided into five sections and twenty-five chapters, as described below. This summary reports some of the white paper's high-level findings, but it is no substitute for a careful read of the individual contributions.

There is broad consensus among the contributors that Russian President Vladimir Putin is indeed adhering to a global grand strategy, which aims to achieve the following goals:

- Reclaim and secure Russia's influence over former Soviet nations
- Regain worldwide recognition as a "great power"
- Portray itself as a reliable actor, a key regional powerbroker, and a successful mediator (Katz; Borshchevskaya) in order to gain economic, military, and political influence over nations worldwide and to refine the liberalist rules and norms that currently govern the world order (Lamoreaux)

According to Dr. Robert Person, these goals are motivated by Russia's deep-seated geopolitical insecurity. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has struggled to find its place in the global community, which has left the leadership with a lingering desire to regain the influence and power that it once had. In particular, Russia seeks to regain its influence over former Soviet states, which it claims are in its rightful "sphere of influence" (Lamoreaux; Person; Marsh). As a result, one of the United States' core goals, namely promoting and protecting the international liberal order, comes into contention with the goals of Russia's grand strategy. This underpins the Kremlin's belief that it must contain and constrain US influence and activities in Europe and elsewhere across the globe. As Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya's contribution suggests, the Russian leadership's worldview is zero-sum; it believes that in order for Russia to win, the US must lose. However, Dr. Christopher Marsh's contribution suggests that this world view is not necessarily shared by the Russian population or its elite.

As evidenced by the range of "gray zone" activities it engages in, a number of the expert contributors argue that the Russian leadership sees itself as at war with the US and the West as a whole. From a Russian perspective, this war is not total, but rather, it is fundamental (Goure)—a type of "war" that is at odds with the general US understanding of warfare. Russia believes that there is no unacceptable or illegitimate form of deterrence, compellence, or escalation management (Goure). It also does not believe in the continuum of conflict that the US has constructed. Like Russia's perception of its competition with the US, its perception of conflict is dichotomous: one is either at war or not at war. To fight and win this war, Russia believes that the successful integration of all instruments of state power (Goure), as well as the orchestrated employment of non-military and military means to deter and compel (Flynn), are paramount. Furthermore, Russian military concepts include options for employing preemptive force to induce shock and dissuade an adversary from conducting military operations and to compel a de-escalation of hostilities (Flynn). The authors observe that Russia's strategies are continuously evolving and expect that the discrepancy between the Russian and the US

understanding of “conflict” and “war” will continue to grow, leading to a higher risk of escalation in future situations involving both nations.

Overall, Russia’s influence abroad is growing, and the Kremlin has mastered the use of “hybrid warfare” in driving Russia’s foreign policy (Lamoreaux). Russia utilizes a variety of gray zone tactics around the globe. These include the use of paramilitary forces and other proxies, interference in political processes, economic and energy exploitation (particularly in Africa), espionage, and media and propaganda manipulation. Putin is also adept at blending military and civilian elements for maximum impact (Weitz).

The specific tactics of hybrid warfare that Russia uses vary by region. In Europe, for example, Russia has utilized propaganda, an increasing dependence on external energy resources, and political manipulation to achieve its primary goals (Schindler; Lamoreaux). In contrast, in the Middle East and Africa—important sources of minerals and other natural resources from a Russian perspective<sup>1</sup>—Russia has primarily utilized economic exploitation tools (Katz; Borshchevskaya; Severin). In Central Asia, Russia maintains a much more limited presence, due to China’s geographic proximity and the current levels of economic and security engagement by other regional actors (Kangas). Nevertheless, Russia does retain influence in the Central Asia, as a result of its historical, linguistic, and cultural connections to the region (Laruelle; Dyet). Likewise, in Latin America, Russia lacks a sufficient amount of deployable resources to fully implement its strategy or to extend its influence very far (Ellis). However, as Dr. Barnett S. Koven and Ms. Abigail C. Kamp observe, Russia makes up for its shortcomings by engaging in episodic and reactive endeavors to disrupt US influence in the region.

Although Russian tactics vary significantly, in all regions of the world energy has been a key source of Russian power and influence (Weitz; Lamoreaux; Borshchevskaya; Devyatkin; Pyatkov; Werchan). Globally, many countries have developed a strong relationship with Russia when it comes to energy. Russia’s energy priorities extend worldwide, and European nations in particular have become dependent on Russia for access to these resources. Africa and the Arctic have also become significant as Russia looks to exploit opportunities for energy-related commerce.

Despite the strength of Russia’s growing influence abroad and the diverse array of gray zone tactics it uses to achieve its strategic goals, the US can still limit the results of this grand strategy. There is broad consensus among the contributors that countering Russian provocations will require the use of *all* instruments of national power. In particular, US success will be reliant both on its ability to influence populations, states, and non-state actors, and on its ability to minimize Russia’s influence on these actors (Bragg). Creating effective narratives in each of the regions covered in this white paper will be critical for achieving this goal (Kangas; Bragg). Furthermore, the US can counter specific Russian gray zone activities, such as diversifying energy sources to reduce European nations’ dependence on Russia (Pyatkov; Werchan) and counteracting propaganda by creating both resilient democratic institutions and populations abroad, particularly in Europe (Pyatkov). Finally, it is imperative that the US establishes a consensus definition of “gray zone” (Bragg) and reevaluates old paradigms defining war and peace, as we enter a “new era of international politics which is defined by shades of gray” (Weitz). Once defined, a federal agency dedicated to gray zone activities may be required in order to implement a true whole of government approach to combatting Russian influence activities abroad (Werchan).

---

<sup>1</sup> Russia has military, geostrategic, cultural, and political interests and objectives in these regions as well.



## Report Overview

This white paper has been separated into five parts:

**Part I** analyzes the key sources of motivation or interests that drive Russian global competitive activities and strategy. This part also addresses the fundamental issues being contested and how these issues impact enduring US national interests.

**Part II** examines, from a Russian perspective, what constitutes legitimate or acceptable deterrence, compellence, and/or escalation management. Part II also evaluates how Russia perceives the continuum of conflict, as well as how it plans for, operates within, and manages risk within the gray zone. Lastly, Part II assesses the implications of the differences between US and Russian thinking for senior political and military decision makers.

**Part III** identifies actions the Russians are undertaking in the Gray Zone across the following regions: a) Europe, b) Central Asia and China, c) the Middle East, d) Africa, e) Latin America, and f) the Arctic.

**Part IV** identifies potential actions that the US could employ either proactively or in response to provocative Russian activities in the gray zone across the following regions: a) Europe, b) Central Asia and China, c) the Middle East, d) Africa, e) Latin America, and f) the Arctic.

**Part V** highlights capabilities that the US requires to effectively respond to actions the Russians are undertaking in the gray zone.

### Part I. What Drives Russia's Global Interests and Strategy?

**Chapter 1: Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux** identifies three motivations underpinning Russian grand strategy: (1) for the country to be recognized as a great power with its own distinct sphere of influence; (2) the Russian elite perception that Russia has a moral right to predominance within "its" sphere of influence; and (3) the desire to see US global influence curbed and, if possible, scaled back.

**Chapter 2:** Using the military's traditional understanding of "strategy" as the coordinated integration of ends, ways, and means, **Dr. Robert Person** explicates Russian grand strategy. The main "end" of Russian grand strategy in the 21st century is establishing a "Yalta 2.0," in which Russia enjoys an uncontested sphere of influence in the post-Soviet region, broadcasts Russian voice and influence globally, and establishes reliable constraints on American globe-trotting and regime-change activities. Russia's ways can be described as one of "asymmetric balancing" through gray zone challenges to prevent uncontested US influence from setting the global agenda. Russia's means, Person argues, expanded with the oil boom, allowing critical investments and increases in defense spending to be made.

**Chapter 3:** Using survey data, **Dr. Thomas Sherlock** shows that neither the Russian mass public, nor Russia elites, believe that the West, particularly the United States, poses a critical military or political danger to the Russian state or regime. While both elites and members of the mass public are supportive of restoring Russia's great power status, they often define a great power and its priorities more in terms of domestic socio-economic development than in the production and demonstration of hard power. These perspectives increasingly come into conflict with those of Kremlin.

**Chapter 4: Dr. Richard Weitz** explores key motivations and interests driving Russian global competitive activities and strategies. He discusses how Russian strategists adeptly select gray zone

tools optimized to their objectives. These tools often include paramilitary forces, economic and energy exploitation, and media and propaganda manipulation. He suggests that Washington must reevaluate old paradigms between war and peace to maintain strategic primacy in this new era of international politics that is defined by shades of gray.

**Chapter 5: Dr. Christopher Marsh** takes on one of the most significant questions surrounding Russian foreign policy: whether president Vladimir Putin has an overarching strategy. In his paper, he describes Putin's grand strategy for Russia and the world. He also analyzes each of Russia's interests and to what degree they pose a threat to vital US national interests.

## Part II. How Does Russia Perceive Deterrence, Compellence, Escalation Management, and the Continuum of Conflict?

**Chapter 6: Dr. Daniel Goure** argues that according to Russian strategic thought, Russia is already at war with the West. There is no separate concept of gray zone: war is not total, but it is fundamental to the Russian perspective. It follows that Russia's ability to manage risk in the so-called gray zone is a function of its successful integration of all the instruments of state power.

**Chapter 7: Mr. Daniel J. Flynn** describes Russian coercive strategies involving the orchestrated employment of nonmilitary and military means to deter and compel the United States prior to and after any outbreak of hostilities. The risk to the US is that these strategies increase the risk of miscalculation and escalation during a future crisis involving the United States.

## Part III. What Gray Zone Actions Are Russia Undertaking Across the Globe?

**Chapter 8: Dr. John Schindler** identifies Russian activities in Europe within a historical and ideological framework. In doing so, he identifies key similarities and differences between the Putin regime and Tsarist Russia, as well as the regime and the Soviet Union. Present day Russian institutions and religious discourse are examined, and Dr. Schindler predicts that the Kremlin will act aggressively in a number of domains, including the few in which it holds an advantage against the United States and its allies. He suggests that a near-term future of "Special War" (i.e. low-level operations that fall below the threshold of declared war) will be the Russian modus operandi and cautions US and allied policymakers to guard against such actions.

**Chapter 9: Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux** explains that the list of Russian activities in Europe remains long and complex, and the means that the Kremlin uses to sow instability span geopolitics, economics, diplomacy, and military domains. In this chapter, Dr. Lamoreaux pays special attention to Russia's ability to propagate societal discord, particularly through Russian-linked populations in the Baltic States. These populations, whether active or passive participants in a campaign, are vulnerable to Russian actions aimed at weakening social cohesion in these states. Short of each side grudgingly accepting the other's claims on the continent (which is improbable), Russia and the West are likely to be locked in at some level of competition for the near future.

**Chapter 10: Dr. Marlene Laruelle** states that, despite a more crowded field of large states vying for influence in Central Asia, Russia still retains a prime position as "first among equals," due to its historical, linguistic, and cultural connections to states in the region. To wit, Russia can exercise remunerative, punitive, and ideological power over the states within the bloc. It has tried to develop its diplomatic, economic, and military relationships with states in the region, with varying degrees of success. Even though the space for great powers to exert influence has become more crowded,

because of relatively recent overtures by China and the United States, this region is not necessarily a site of zero-sum statist competition, due to shared objectives by these great powers.

**Chapter 11: Dr. Mark N. Katz** explains that, although the United States and Russia share a number of objectives in the Middle East, the means by which Russia seeks to achieve these objectives will likely continue to bring it into conflict with the United States. The Kremlin has purported itself as a reliable interlocutor and partner to Middle Eastern nations, some of whom fear wavering commitment by the United States recently. Animated largely by fears of a restive Muslim population that could end up within his borders, in addition to economic and prestige concerns, Vladimir Putin has been conducting deft diplomacy within the region. However, his strategy is vulnerable to shocks to the system and may not be able to withstand Arab Spring/Color Revolution-style uprisings within the region.

**Chapter 12: Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya** highlights Russia's series of multi-faceted outreach initiatives in Africa. Through economic, military, and other means, Russia is creating an intentional dependence among North Africa's military, political leaders and businessmen on continuous Russian support. For more autocratic regimes, Russia's support is intended to provide a shield against Western influence in the area through forming alliances with the country's strongmen, while serving as an intermediary for local conflict resolution. Russia's key interests include gaining and protecting access to the Mediterranean coast, while exploiting opportunities for energy and trade. The intent of these efforts is increased political leverage, rather than a genuine resolution for the people of North Africa.

**Chapter 13: Ms. Malin Severin** argues that Russia believes that it is currently engaged in a multi-faceted conflict with the West, and is constrained by Western policies and actions. As such, Russia has established several footholds in Africa. The Russian presence goes beyond seeking natural resources; Russia has placed private military contractors and advisors into several African regimes, including the Central African Republic, among others. These actions reflect a strategy similar to that revealed through Russian activities in the Ukraine and Syria, and involvement is likely to increase as the US potentially takes steps to limit Western presence in Africa.

**Chapter 14: Dr. R. Evan Ellis** explains that Russian activity in Latin America, while constrained by resources and geopolitical events, has been historically focused on the Cuban, Venezuelan, and Nicaraguan regimes, although it is not limited solely to those regimes. By attempting to create both economic and military footholds, Russia seeks opportunities to expand its influence in the region. Despite setbacks due to regional events, Russia is likely to continue to explore ways to leverage and exploit opportunities for increasing both its military and economic presence in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Chapter 15: Mr. Pavel Devyatkin** writes that Russia's activities in the Arctic have included more multilateral cooperation, and have been focused on securing access for northern shipping routes and energy extraction. The formation of the Arctic Council between Russia and other Arctic countries has enabled cooperation on resolution of territorial claims, as well as oil spill and search-and-rescue operations. Strategically, the Arctic region plays a significant role in Russia's energy, economic, and defense priorities, as evidenced by the size and activities of the Northern Fleet, as well as frequent mention in Russian published doctrine.

## Part IV. How Should the US Counteract Russian Gray Zone Activities Across the Globe?

**Chapter 16: Mr. Roman “Comrade” Pyatkov** discusses potential global actions to counter provocative Russian activities. The US National Defense Strategy (NDS) calls out Russian actions to undermine NATO and modify European and Middle Eastern security and economic organizations in its favor (National Defense Strategy summary, p. 2). Countering Russian provocations requires all instruments of national power, and US responses can be both proactive and reactive. Proactively, the United States can strengthen its allies’ and partners’ democratic systems of governance, while reducing their dependence on Russian energy through diversification of energy sources. To counter Russian military proxies, the United States can increase the capabilities of allies and partners. Meanwhile, Russian threats to use force can be mitigated by demonstrating US resolve and capability to deter and defeat Russian aggression.

**Chapter 17: Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux** focuses on countering Russian influence in the Baltic States. He writes that Russian influence in Europe happens primarily through “hybrid warfare” techniques. To counter this, the United States ought to take steps to strengthen economic, political, and societal liberalism across Europe. Economic and political liberalism both create strong states, capable of providing the institutions necessary for societal liberalism. Societal liberalism, when it is upheld by the rule of law, helps create a more diverse, yet united, populace that is more committed to the state and its basic institutions, and less likely to be influenced by outside sources (in this case, Russia).

**Chapter 18: Dr. Roger Kangas** recommends a US approach to Russian activities across Central Asia. He begins by discussing the particular difficulties of Central Asia, geopolitically. Among the sub-regions of the world, the area of Central Asia is one of the more difficult regions to outline clear actions for the US, simply because of the advantages that other large powers have, due to geographic proximity and current rates of economic and security engagement. Given this geopolitical reality in Central Asia, the US has a limited role to play. If the “tools of engagement” are exercised consistently and clearly, the US can have a positive influence in the region. The countries collectively chafe at that notion they are part of a “Russian Near Abroad.” Officials and analysts from the region repeatedly discuss the need to choose their future paths of engagement, whether in terms of multi-vectored security relations or diversifying trade and export/import routes. These signals can be addressed by US policies and actions. The refrain from needing the US to act as a “balancer” is heard from such actors, as well as many in the Washington, DC think tank community that focus on Central Asia. To do this, the US must be able to shape its own narrative in the region, combatting a rather vitriolic Russian message that paints the US in a negative light.

**Chapter 19: Dr. Robert Spalding III** discusses how the US role with regard to Russia should be to continue to engage European allies to take the lead for balancing in Europe. The allies’ goal should be deterrence. At the same time, the US should bilaterally engage Russia to peel them away from China’s orbit. The US can work with Russia in ways that improve the US-Russia relationship without detracting from European efforts to balance and deter. This can be applied by engaging with Russia in other regional or functional domains that do not detract from European efforts to deter.

**Chapter 20: MAJ Adam Dyet** argues that, while the breakup of the Soviet Union presented the US with new engagement opportunities in Central Asia, options to expand US influence in the area remain limited. He argues that despite Central Asian ire at Russian activities in Ukraine, Russian influence in the area remains high, and US policy makers should take a carefully moderated approach to engagement in Central Asia. Suggestions of diplomatic, security, and economic activities that the US could undertake are offered, as are cautions about treading over long-standing Russian red lines.

**Chapter 21: MAJ Adam Dyet** discusses a variety of ways in which the United States can respond to Russian gray zone activities in the Middle East—the balance of which, he argues, are directly tied to Russian strategic culture and a worldview based in a history of invasion and military encirclement.

**Chapter 22: Dr. Joseph Siegle** discusses Russian interests in Africa, namely access to natural resources and new markets for Russian goods, including weapons. He argues that, as a result, Russia has tended to support autocratic or uninclusive regimes, giving the US an opportunity to distinguish itself in Africa by pursuing an assertive policy against individual corrupt leaders and positive engagement, while also supporting democratic reforms.

**Chapter 23: Dr. Barnett S. Koven and Ms. Abigail C. Kamp** explain that Russia’s activities in Latin America have largely been an extension of its efforts to operate within the gray zone between overt military conflict and normal peacetime operations. In Latin America, the Kremlin has engaged in electoral meddling and targeted disinformation campaigns in order to impose costs on adversaries. In Mexico, Russian media had vocally supported a chosen candidate, and observers noted activity by bots and trolls in support of that candidate’s agenda. In Colombia, Russia had long supplied arms to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a leftist insurgency, but since the group’s recent peace deal with the Colombian government, the Kremlin may need to change tactics in order to maintain influence therein. Colombia’s complex political dynamics, nevertheless, provides a fertile ground for Russian activities, spanning electoral meddling, mass media disinformation, and hardliners within the FARC.

## **Part V. What Capabilities Does the US Need to Effectively Respond to Russian Gray Zone Activities?**

**Chapter 24: Dr. Belinda Bragg** provides a summary of findings from an SMA project on gray zone conflict, noting the importance of honing a clear definition of the “competitive zone” within which gray activities occur. She also notes that an effective US response to these activities requires added capabilities to both influence foreign populations and block the efforts of others to manipulate popular sentiment.

**Chapter 25: Mr. Jason Werchan** argues that Russia’s form of governance gives it “significant flexibility” and an advantage over the US when it comes to gray zone activities. The US needs a true whole-of-government approach to counter Russia in this area. Werchan suggests that the US government should identify a lead federal agency for US activities in the gray zone. He also encourages the development of the US’s “capability to effectively foster distrust and unease between the Russia Federation and China,” as well as US efforts to reduce European dependence on Russian energy resources.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Joint Staff Preface	i
RDML Jeffrey J. Czerewko (Joint Staff, J39)	
USEUCOM Preface	iii
Mr. Jason Werchan (USEUCOM Strategy Division & Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI))	
Opening Remarks: Naval Postgraduate School Perspective	iv
Dr. John Arquilla (Naval Postgraduate School)	
Executive Summary	v
<b><u>PART I. WHAT DRIVES RUSSIA’S GLOBAL INTERESTS AND STRATEGY?</u></b>	<b>1</b>
Chapter 1. The Three Motivations for an Assertive Russian Grand Strategy	1
Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux (Brigham Young University- Idaho)	
Chapter 2. Russian Grand Strategy in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	7
Dr. Robert Person (United States Military Academy, West Point)	
Chapter 3. Russian Public Opinion as a Potential Obstacle to Aggressive External Behavior by the Kremlin	14
Dr. Thomas Sherlock (United States Military Academy, West Point)	
Chapter 4. Moscow’s Gray Zone Toolkit	21
Dr. Richard Weitz (Center for Political-Military Analysis at the Hudson Institute)	
Chapter 5. Putin’s Grand Strategy and US National Interests	26
Dr. Christopher Marsh (Special Operations Research Association)	
<b><u>Part II: HOW DOES RUSSIA PERCEIVE DETERRENCE, COMPELLENCE, ESCALATION MANAGEMENT, AND THE CONTINUUM OF CONFLICT?</u></b>	<b>32</b>
Chapter 6. Russian Strategic Interests	32
Dr. Daniel Goure (Lexington Institute)	
Chapter 7. Russia’s Evolving Approach to Deterrence	37
Mr. Daniel J. Flynn (Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI))	
<b><u>PART III. WHAT GRAY ZONE ACTIONS ARE RUSSIANS UNDERTAKING ACROSS THE GLOBE?</u></b>	<b>43</b>
<i>EUROPE</i>	
Chapter 8. Russian Activities Across Europe (A Contrarian Assessment)	43
Dr. John Schindler (The Locarno Group)	
Chapter 9. Russian Activities in Europe	49
Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux (Brigham Young University- Idaho)	
<i>CENTRAL ASIA</i>	
Chapter 10. Russian Activities in Central Asia	53
Dr. Marlene Laruelle (George Washington University)	

<i>THE MIDDLE EAST</i>	
Chapter 11. Russian Activities in the Middle East	58
Dr. Mark N. Katz (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)	
<i>AFRICA</i>	
Chapter 12. Russian Activities in Africa	62
Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy)	
Chapter 13. Russian Activities in Africa (Continued)	70
Ms. Malin Severin (UK Ministry of Defence Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC))	
<i>LATIN AMERICA</i>	
Chapter 14. Russian Activities in Latin America	76
Dr. R. Evan Ellis (U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute)	
<i>THE ARCTIC</i>	
Chapter 15. Russian Activities in the Arctic	82
Mr. Pavel Devyatkin (The Arctic Institute)	
<b>PART IV. HOW SHOULD THE US COUNTERACT RUSSIAN GRAY ZONE ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE GLOBE?</b>	<b>91</b>
<hr/>	
<i>OVERVIEW</i>	
Chapter 16. Potential Global Actions to Counter Provocative Russian Activities	91
Mr. Roman “Comrade” Pyatkov (HAF/A3K CHECKMATE)	
<i>EUROPE</i>	
Chapter 17. Countering Russian Influence in the Baltic States	95
Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux (Brigham Young University- Idaho)	
<i>CENTRAL ASIA</i>	
Chapter 18. Recommended US Response to Russian Activities Across Central Asia	99
Dr. Roger Kangas (National Defense University, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies)	
Chapter 19. Responding to Russian Gray Zone Activity in Central Asia	104
MAJ Adam Dyet (U.S. Army, J5-Policy USCENTCOM)	
<i>CHINA</i>	
Chapter 20. Rebalancing in Europe to Reduce Russian-Chinese Ties	108
Dr. Robert Spalding III (U.S. Air Force)	
<i>THE MIDDLE EAST</i>	
Chapter 21. Responding to Russian Gray Zone Activity in the Middle East	111
MAJ Adam Dyet (U.S. Army, J5-Policy USCENTCOM)	
<i>AFRICA</i>	
Chapter 22. US Response to Russian Activities in Africa	117
Dr. Joseph Siegle (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University)	
<i>LATIN AMERICA</i>	
Chapter 23. Weaponizing Peace: Colombia’s Demobilized FARC as a Leveler of Russian Influence	123

Dr. Barnett Koven (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)) and Ms. Abigail C. Kamp (START)

<b>PART V. WHAT CAPABILITIES DOES THE US NEED TO EFFECTIVELY RESPOND TO RUSSIAN GRAY ZONE ACTIVITIES?</b>	<b>129</b>
Chapter 24. Defining the Competitive Zone to Aid Identification of Critical Capabilities Dr. Belinda Bragg (NSI, Inc.)	129
Chapter 25. Required US Capabilities for Combatting Russian Activities Abroad Mr. Jason Werchan (USEUCOM Strategy Division & Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI))	135
Biographies	138



## PART I. WHAT DRIVES RUSSIA'S GLOBAL INTERESTS AND STRATEGY?

### Chapter 1. The Three Motivations for an Assertive Russian Grand Strategy

Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux  
Brigham Young University - Idaho  
[lamoreauxj@byui.edu](mailto:lamoreauxj@byui.edu)

#### Abstract

The US's agenda in Europe, as it has been for the better part of 80 years, is to promote and protect an international liberal order, including political, economic and societal liberalization. Spreading this agenda to Eastern Europe has proved challenging as Russia's own political, economic and societal agenda within the region often opposes the Western ideal. One of the most significant sources of conflict (potential and real) between Russia and the US in Europe is the differing perceptions of how the global international system *ought* to be. The US sees Europe, Western, Central and Eastern, as part of the US-led liberal international order in which political, economic and societal liberalism promote a vibrant, dynamic and open system. Russia's perception, however, is that the global international system ought to be a balance of powers where differing powers live and let live, where one power does not force its ideologies on the other. In this accounting, Eastern Europe (and even parts of Central Europe) were part of Russia's sphere of influence and still ought to be. Russia has given every indication that they do not intend to back down in what was once their sphere of influence, and uses these differences as justification for its annexation of Crimea, support for separatists in Donbass, and continued support for frozen conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, and between Azerbaijan and Armenia. As such, the US faces the challenge of promoting its own agenda within Europe while not provoking Russia. This paper looks at potential road blocks to engaging Russia constructively, as well as potential avenues moving forward.

#### Russia's Grand Strategy and Its Impact on US National Interests

The primary focus of this analysis is Eastern Europe, specifically the Baltic States as the only members of the EU and NATO that are also former Soviet states. Arguably, this region is where the US-Russia tensions in Europe come to a head. The analysis also indirectly touches on Western Europe, as well as non-EU/NATO countries in Eastern Europe such as Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

#### Three Drivers of Russia's Competitive Activities and Strategy

Of the various motivations driving Russia's global activities and strategy, three of them are particularly important for understanding Russia's general strategic aims: the desire shared by the Russian elite for Russia to be recognized as a great power, the desire to protect Russian identity and a broader Slavic identity, and the desire to see the US global power limited. The analysis address each of these in turn.

The first motivation shared among Russia's elite, is for the country to be recognized as a great power with its own distinct sphere of influence (Petro, 2018; Sergunin, 2017).

Russia still sees the global system as a great power/balance of power system with distinct spheres of influence for each great power. However, one is hard pressed to label the current system a “great power” system particularly because any claims to a global balance of power is misleading. The US is currently the dominant global actor militarily, economically, and (arguably) even ideologically. While some actors can rival the US influence on one, or even two, of these measurements (for example, the EU on economic and ideological influence), no other actors can rival the US across all these measurements. Indeed, even if the EU is considered as a potential balancer to US economic dominance, the concept of liberal internationalism is still the predominant “global” political-economic ideology, an ideology that both the US and the EU share. Even would-be rivals such as China are not blind to the liberal nature of the global economy. Nor is Russia. Russia certainly wants to be a great power, and are increasing their military spending accordingly, but in all three above-mentioned metrics, they are still far behind the US (Kuhrt & Feklyunina, 2017).

The desire to be a great power stems not only from a perception of the world as a great power system, but also from a shared perception among Russian elite of a Russian sphere of influence. Historically, of course, Russia was not only a global great power, but the predominant power within Eurasia, with predominance even extending as far west as Poland, as far east as Japan, and as far south as Azerbaijan. As Russia’s elite sees things, most of this still should constitutes their sphere of influence. There are two self-serving justifications for the beliefs the elite hold. The first reason is the 300-year history of Russian political domination in these areas. Second, and even more important (and more difficult to counter), is the perception of a divine mandate to control any place where ethnic Slavs (historically, “*Rus*”) are a predominant ethnicity. (This is discussed more in depth in the following section.)

Granted, the Kremlin elite recognize that their influence in Eastern Europe is currently limited. And, they recognize that the Soviet Union no longer exists, de jure (though, its collapse was called one the greatest geopolitical disaster of the past century by Vladimir Putin). These inconveinces, however, do not change the fact that, according to the Kremlin, all these regions still ought to be their sphere of influence. Russian elite desires for control and order mean that for order to be restored, Russia must again be recognized in its rightful place as a great power and be allowed to control their own sphere of influence.

The second motivation driving Russia’s foreign policy is the Russian elite perception that Russia has a moral right to predominance within “its” sphere of influence.

This argument, that Russia has the right to regional dominance for divine and ethnic purposes, stems from more than 1000 years previous when Prince Vladimir was baptized in 988 (Petro, 2018). When he converted to Christianity, specifically Russian Orthodoxy, he brought with him his people, the ‘*Rus*’ who, more than 1000 years later, comprise Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and quite possibly Moldovans, Kazakhstanis, and other Slavic ethnicities (Suslov, 2015). Throughout the following 1000 years, the political and religious elite in the region developed stronger ties to the extent that, at present, they lend each other legitimacy and support each other ideologically and monetarily. Importantly, the conversion happened in what is present-day Crimea, currently under Kremlin control. Consequently, for geopolitical and spiritual reasons, The Kremlin (in coordination with the Russian Orthodox Church) claims the right and duty of protecting the spiritual and temporal wellbeing of “*Rus*”, not all of whom live in Russia (Kelly, 2018).

The third motivation driving Russian foreign policy (and, stemming from the first motivation for great-power recognition and a global balance of power) is the desire to see US global influence curbed and, if possible, scaled back. It makes sense that a globally dominant US does not portend well for a

balance of great powers or for distinct spheres of influence. It is deviant from the acceptable norms in the great power system. This is reflected in US involvement in the Middle East, Asia and, most damning, the spread of NATO across eastern Europe and even the former Soviet Baltic States, all areas where Russia sees themselves as having a rightful claim to influence instead of the US.

Furthermore, according to the Kremlin view, the US supports regime change in less-democratic countries through democratizing revolutions across the Middle East and in Ukraine and Georgia, and through supporting pro-democracy protests in Russia in 2011-2012. To make matters even worse, in Russia's eyes, the very nature of democracy is unstable (it does nothing to further control and order within a society, but facilitates just the opposite), and irregular results over the past few years (Trump's election, Brexit, rise of nationalist parties in Europe, and the spate of election-tampering allegations...ironically, many directly against Russia...) illustrate just how unstable, and even hypocritical, democracies can be (Taylor, 2018).

The bottom line is that Russia wants global order, specifically in the form of a balance of power, which would leave them free to exercise, and enforce, control within "their" sphere of influence. For that to happen, the influence of the US must be curbed, at least, and scaled back if possible.

### Contested Issues

The primary fundamental issue being contested is whether the global system is a balance-of-power system wherein nation-state are still the primary actors, or whether we've transitioned to a US-led international liberal order. The reality seems to be somewhere in between. If the international system is a liberal order, any state has a right to participate including those states that the Kremlin views as in their sphere of influence. This rankles Russian policy makers.

If, however, the we are in a balance-of-power system, the question becomes who has preeminence in Eastern Europe. According to one perspective, there are three different potential great-powers for that area: the US (with NATO as an important tool), a non-NATO Western Europe in the form of the EU, and Russia (Oliver, 2016). Unfortunately, there is no simple answer as all three "great powers" wield a certain level of influence. At a deeper level, however, are three sub-issues. First, who has the "right" to influence in Eastern Europe? Second, who has the right to dictate policy vis-à-vis ethnic Russians and ethnic Slavs more broadly? Third, what are appropriate tools for influence?

As regards the first sub-issue, all three actors claim a "right" to have influence in Eastern Europe. On Russia's part, much of Eastern Europe belonged to them at some point in history and, according to historical precedent, they claim a historical prerogative to influence there (Roberts, 2017). Furthermore, they share a common culture (in large part because of a shared history) with many of the ethnic and linguistic groups in Eastern Europe. This includes not only those groups who share a similar language or ethnicity, but also the large Russian diaspora spread across Eastern Europe. Additionally, as Eastern Orthodoxy is quite prevalent across much of Eastern Europe, Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) continue to claim a religious/moral right to influence in the region as a protectors of orthodox Christianity (Ziegler, 2016).

Western Europe claims a "right" to influence in Eastern Europe for some reasons similar to Russia's: a shared history and a shared culture (Jakniūnaitė, 2017). They even claim something of a moral "right", though somewhat more removed from openly religious-based moralism emanating from the Kremlin and the ROC. Rather, Western Europe's moral claim to influence in Eastern Europe stems partly from a shared Christian history, but even more so from the guilt many in Western Europe feel for "abandoning" eastern Europe to Soviet control following World War II (Mälksoo, 2009).

Importantly, though, this guilt does not unite European elites nearly to the extent Orthodoxy (even if not practiced) unites Russia's elites. Furthermore, Western Europe's moral inclination to help Eastern Europe also stems from the belief that the International Liberal Order (ILO: political and economic liberalization) really does benefit those it reaches.

The US "right" to influence in Eastern Europe mirrors the latter part of Western Europe's justification: partial guilt for abandoning Eastern Europe, and partial belief in the moral benefits of liberalization. But, this last point about the moral benefits of liberalization also draw something of a distinction between the US and Western European approaches. The US tends to see things in black and white while Western Europe (and even Russia) sees a lot more gray. Specifically, Western Europe, while still quite skeptical of Russia's interests in Eastern Europe, does not believe that Eastern Europe must side with Russia *or* the West: rather, there is room for cooperation, a view also held by Russia, as long as these countries do not leave Russia's sphere of influence (Molchanov, 2017).

The US, on the other hand, tends to see Russian influence in Eastern Europe as largely negative because it disrupts the spread of liberalism (Taylor, 2018). Consequently, the US is not only willing to have influence in Eastern Europe, but also willing (and, arguably, eager) to inhibit Russia's influence there. As the "protector" of political and economic liberalism globally, the US has the "right" to protect those liberalisms in Eastern Europe, especially in the face of perceived Russian opposition to those trends. In other words, the US sees the world through a lens similar to that of Russia, something of a sphere of influence. But, where Russia sees geographical/historical/moral spheres of influence, the US sees geopolitical and ideological spheres of influence.

The second sub-issue (who has a right to influence ethnic Russians and those who share a similar identity) is not much different from the first, though the focus narrows significantly from Eastern Europe in general, to Russians and those who share a common identity more specifically. In narrowing down, it makes the discussion all the more volatile. Russia not only claims the right to protect Russians on political and economic grounds, but also on religious grounds. And, this protection extends to others traditionally known as "Rus", as well as other Eastern Orthodox believers. Russia's claims to influence in Eastern Europe for historical, cultural and religious reasons is already a strong claim. Add ethnic Russians to the mix, and the claim becomes divine with a healthy dose of nationalism. Under this combination, it becomes virtually impossible to dissuade Russia from insisting on a significant say in Eastern Europe (Coyer, 2015).

The third issue, tool appropriateness, is as much about effectiveness as about *jus in bello* (or, the justice of tactics within conflict). For much of Eastern Europe, they are already institutionally tied with the West both through the EU and NATO. From the perspective of the US and Western Europe, this is a very effective way both to spread liberalism and to alleviate the guilt associated with the Cold War. It answers both the "effective" question, and the "just" question. However, Russia's tools are equally effective and, from their perspective, just. They have tried formal political and economic approaches (including inviting various eastern European states into formal institutions such as the CSTO and the EEA) but their official influence is still quite limited. However, their ability to influence countries through other methods is impressive. Their influence through trade policy, media (both social and traditional), election manipulation, saber rattling, and outright invasions and annexations have proved very effective in keeping many elites in the US, and Western and Eastern Europe, uneasy and unsure how to proceed (Conley, Mina, Stefanov, & Vladimirov, 2016).

## Impact on US National Interests

The US benefits globally from the spread of liberalism (Ravenhill, 2017). The ILO means that the US can maintain its global influence and, more importantly, its entire domestic political and economic system. Not only that, but there is a strong belief shared by political and societal elites within the US that the spread of liberalism truly does make for a better life for people, wherever they may be. So, when liberalism spreads and catches on, our interests are met internationally and domestically. This, in theory, creates something of a panacea for the United States.

Western Europe represents the strongest allies the US has in protecting and promoting liberalism. Without Europe, the US is the arguably the last powerful protagonist of liberalism. The US needs a strong, liberal Western Europe. To that end, however, we need a stable Eastern Europe wherein is imbedded liberal ideals just like those in Western Europe. They provide something of a buffer, a front line, between Western European liberalism and Russian illiberalism. In short, you have the US interest in spreading liberalism butting up against Russia's interest in promoting great power politics and spheres of influence, and Eastern Europe is caught in both cross-hairs.

The sources of friction between Russian and liberalist perspectives are that neither views the other as compatible. If the international liberal order is to succeed, states ought to be allowed to participate to the extent they wish. Russia's dominance of a specific region prevents this. However, if powers are to be balanced, one powers ideologies (and, thus, influence) should be considerably limited. Consequently, the US sees Russia preventing the spread of international liberalism, and Russia sees the US as interfering outside of its rightful sphere of influence.

However, despite friction, these two perspectives do not, necessarily need to be mutually exclusive. As as been evinced in across the Asian Tigers, in China, and even (at times) in Russia, international liberalism does not have to happen all at once. States do not need to embrace political, economic and societal liberalism all at once (in fact, the Washington Consensus failures seem to indicate that attempting all three at once does not work). Rather, the US pushing economic liberalism may be the best way forward, specifically without pushing political liberalism. In regions already somewhat liberal, the US is right to push societal liberalism and even more political liberalism. However, where neither societal nor political liberalism have roots, economic liberalism is a potentially consensus way forward.

## References

- Conley, H. A., Mina, J., Stefanov, R., & Vladimirov, M. (2016). *The Kremlin playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in central and eastern Europe*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Coyer, P. (2015). (Un)holy alliance: Vladimir Putin, the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian exceptionalism. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2015/05/21/unholy-alliance-vladimir-putin-and-the-russian-orthodox-church/#6d66ab7e27d5>
- Jakniūnaitė, D. (2017). Invested in Ukraine: The struggle of Lithuania against Russia over the future of Europe. In G. Besier, & K. Stokłosa (Eds.), *Neighbourhood perceptions of the Ukraine crisis: From the Soviet Union into Eurasia?* (pp. 116-129). New York: Routledge.

- Kelly, J. ". M. (2018). Searching for spiritual security: The tangled relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian state and religious freedom. *University of Miami International and Comparative Law Review*, 25, 263-297.
- Kuhr, N., & Feklyunina, V. (Eds.). (2017). *Assessing Russia's power: A report*. King's College London and Newcastle University.
- Mälksoo, M. (2009). The memory politics of becoming European: The east European subalterns and the collective memory of Europe. *European Journal of International Relations*, 15(4), 653-680. doi:10.1177/1354066109345049
- Molchanov, M. A. (2017). A squeezed country: Ukraine between Europe and Eurasia. In G. Besier, & K. Stokłosa (Eds.), *Neighbourhood perceptions of the Ukraine crisis: From Soviet Union to Eurasia?* (pp. 69-82). New York: Routledge.
- Oliver, T. (2016). Goodbye Britannia? the international implications of Britain's vote to leave the EU. *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, (2)
- Petro, N. N. (2018). The Russian Orthodox Church. In A. P. Tsygankov (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian foreign policy* (pp. 217-232). London: Routledge.
- Ravenhill, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Global political economy* (5th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, K. (2017). Understanding Putin: The politics of identity and geopolitics in Russian foreign policy discourse. *International Journal*, 72(1), 28-55.
- Sergunin, A. (2017). Russian perceptions of the Ukrainian crisis: From confrontation to damage limitation? In G. Besier, & K. Stokłosa (Eds.), *Neighbourhood perceptions of the Ukraine crisis: From Soviet Union to Eurasia?* (pp. 41-68). New York: Routledge.
- Suslov, M. D. (2015). "Holy rus": The geopolitical imagination in the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church. *Russian Social Science Review*, 56(3), 43-62. doi:10.1080/10611428.2015.1070631
- Taylor, B. D. (2018). *The code of Putinism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ziegler, C. E. (2016). Russia as a nationalizing state: Rejecting the western liberal order. *International Politics*, 53(5), 555-573.

## Chapter 2. Russian Grand Strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Dr. Robert Person  
United States Military Academy, West Point  
[robert.person@westpoint.edu](mailto:robert.person@westpoint.edu)

### Abstract

What are the main characteristics of Russian grand strategy in the 21st century? This paper argues that a deep-seated sense of geopolitical insecurity motivates Russia to pursue strategic objectives to establish an uncontested sphere of influence within the post-Soviet region, secure for Russia a seat at the table of other great powers in critical regions outside its sphere, and contain and constrain America's unilateral and multilateral pursuit of its own interests globally. Since 2007, it has developed a sophisticated set of gray zone tactics of "asymmetric balancing" through which Russia pursues its strategic ends within relatively limited means.

### Russian Grand Strategy

Though definitions of "strategy" (grand or otherwise) abound, for the sake of clarity this paper will adopt the military's traditional understanding of "strategy" as the coordinated integration of ends, ways, and means (Lykke, 2001). *Grand strategy* can be understood as "the collection of plans and policies that comprise the states deliberate effort harness political military, diplomatic, and economic tools together to advance that state's national interest. Grand strategy is the art of reconciling ends and means. It involves purposive action" (Feaver, 2009). Thus, what makes such a strategy "grand" is the focus on high-level matters of national interest, as well as the comprehensive use of military, political, economic, diplomatic, and even social tools to advance the national interests.

### The "Ends" of Russian Grand Strategy

What are the core interests and overarching objectives of the Russian Federation in the international system – the "ends" that Russian grand strategy seeks to achieve? It is perhaps an uncontroversial claim that Russia's most fundamental interest is to secure both the Russian state and the Putin regime against foreign and domestic threats. Of course, any sensible observer would note that this is the objective of any state operating in the anarchic international system. Indeed regime and territorial "security" as the core national interest sits at the foundation of most realist theories of international relations (Waltz, 2010; Mearsheimer, 2001). But how states understand security, how they perceive threats, and how they respond to such threats is very much subject to national-level factors (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 2016). As the following discussion shows, Russia's conception of its security environment, the threats to that security, and its methods of achieving security take on very Russian flavors. These flavors—and the grand strategy that they season—are the result of a wide array of forces ranging from geography, history, domestic politics, culture, and of course, rivalry among other great powers.

If "national interest as security" is too general to be of practical use, we can disaggregate that broad national interest into three key objectives that sum to a grand strategy that I term "Yalta 2.0" due to its similarity of the grand strategic vision that Joseph Stalin tried to attain at the Yalta conference in February 1945. First, Russia seeks to ensure its military, political, and economic security through an uncontested and exclusive sphere of influence in the territory that once formed the Soviet Union (Graham, 2016). Essentially a supercharged "Monroe Doctrine" for Russia in the post-Soviet space,

this vision would give Russia a privileged position of influence in the foreign and domestic affairs of the countries in Russia's sphere. Equally important, Yalta 2.0 denies other great powers from pursuing interests and influence within Russia's exclusive sphere of influence. It should be noted that establishing a sphere of influence is not synonymous with the reconstruction of the Soviet Union or the annexation by Russia of the former Soviet republics. Though this has been claimed as Russia's objective in recent years, it fundamentally misreads Russia's true objective, which is to enjoy the benefits of uncontested influence without bearing the cost of administering new territory and populations (Hill, 2015). Second, the vision of Yalta 2.0 seeks for Russia a seat at the table and decisive voice on issues in regions where a regional great power is absent (such as the Middle East), or where there are multiple great powers in the region (such as the Arctic). In other words, it positions Russia as a global player with global influence.

It should come as little surprise that the first two pillars of Yalta 2.0 are likely to generate significant friction with the United States, which also seeks influence in the post-Soviet region and throughout the entire globe. This brings us to the third pillar: In order to achieve its grand strategic objectives, Russia seeks to contain and constrain the United States' unopposed unilateral pursuit of its interests globally. This mandate is most urgent in the post-Soviet region. In order to carve out its sphere of influence, Russia must push the United States out of the region. Similarly, Russia must muscle its way into a seat at the table in other regions where it seeks influence, often by limiting or complicating what may have previously been uncontested American pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Finally, Russia must pursue a general strategy of complicating matters for the United States and raising the cost of action, even in regions where Russia lacks a direct interest. By throwing sand (or worse) in the United States' gears wherever it can, it makes it more difficult for the US to carry out its policy agenda in general. Importantly, most of the tactics used to pursue this objective of American constraint are not those of traditional military balancing. Rather, they are tactics of "asymmetric balancing," which I will discuss at greater length below.

These three pillars of "Yalta 2.0" —uncontested sphere of influence in the post-Soviet region, Russian voice and influence globally, and constraint of the United States—are the main "ends" of Russian grand strategy in the 21st century.

### The "Means" of Russian Grand Strategy

In a moment we will turn our attention to a broad overview of the "ways" of Russian grand strategy—the policies that Moscow has implemented in order to achieve its objectives—and how those ways have evolved over the last 19 years. But first it is worth making brief mention of the material means that have enabled those ways. Of particular consequence in this discussion is the fact that Russia's growing financial resources since 2000 have allowed it to pursue ever more assertive ways in pursuing its ends. After a traumatic decade of economic contraction in the 1990s, the 2000s witnessed a period of major economic growth in Russia. Indeed, only the global financial crisis of 2008-9 and the collapse of oil prices and post-Crimea sanctions in 2014 curtailed Russian economic growth in the Putin era (World Bank, GDP per capita, 2019).

Between 2000 and 2013, Russian GDP per capita increased by nearly nine times. The most common explanation for Russia's economic expansion is Vladimir Putin's strong hand on Russia provided the stabilization that fueled Russia's economic growth (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, 2008, p. 68). In actuality, Russia's recovery in the 2000s can largely be attributed to the rising price of oil, on which the Russian economy—and federal budget—are dependent (p. 80). But regardless of who deserves credit, there is no disputing the fact that throughout the 2000s, the resources which Russia could apply toward its grand strategic objectives increased tremendously, such as a major military



modernization project in the aftermath of 2008 war with Georgia.. Data on Russian military expenditures as percentage of GDP from 2000-2016 showed that a broader economic expansion fueled expanded military spending: Larger defense expenditures (in absolute terms) were the consequence of rising GDP and rising defense spending rates (World Bank, Military expenditure, 2019). To be sure, Russia's pursuit of its grand strategic objectives goes well beyond military expenditures, but it is clear that Russia's resources necessary to pursue the "ways" of grand strategy have increased immensely since 2000. And these increased resources, I argue in the next section, have had a profound impact on the nature of the ways in which Russia has pursued its grand strategy.

### The "Ways" of Russian Grand Strategy

Though the strategic objectives of Russia in the 21st have remained relatively stable over the last 17 years, the policies associated with those objectives—the "ways" of grand strategy—have undergone an important evolution throughout that period. Generally speaking, we can identify several distinct periods of Russian foreign policy approaches since Putin's ascension to the presidency in 2000. The period of "pragmatic accommodation" lasted from 2000-2003, during which time Putin pursued a pragmatic and accommodating foreign policy toward the United States in the hope of gaining concessions on key Russian interests such as preserving the anti-ballistic missile treaty and preventing eastward NATO expansion (Kuchins, 2016). This approach was replaced by a policy of "soft balancing" from 2003-2007 (Pape, 2005). Since 2007, Russia's foreign policy approach can be described as one of "asymmetric balancing" that—with the exception of a thaw during the Obama-Medvedev "reset" —has hardened considerably since 2014. Due to space constraints, I will limit my focus in this paper on the period of "asymmetric balancing" that has lasted from 2007 to the present.

#### Asymmetric balancing – 2007-2019

The period of "soft balancing" came to an end in 2007-8 with three foreign policy actions that demonstrated that Russia had the means and the will to go well beyond soft balancing tactics to promote its grand strategic interests. I label this period one of "asymmetric balancing," in a nod to the asymmetric or "gray zone" methods of hybrid warfare that would become an increasingly prominent part of Russia's foreign policy toolkit (Person, 2018). We can conceive of asymmetric balancing as a strategy that lies somewhere between soft balancing tactics (diplomatic maneuvering) and hard balancing tactics, like rearmament and alliance formation. Or, more accurately, asymmetric balancing utilizes a spectrum of tactics that range from soft to hard, though kinetic military operations are used rarely. Asymmetric balancing takes place in the military, political, economic, and social realms using a variety of overt and covert measures to exert influence and shape outcomes. However, the purpose of asymmetric balancing is not necessarily military action or territorial conquest (which may be the objective of hybrid war). Rather, the purpose of asymmetric balancing is to more forcefully counterbalance an adversary while remaining below the level of hard military alliances or open warfare.

The April 2007 cyberattack against Estonia, a massive denial of service attack executed from within the Russian Federation, marks the beginning of the asymmetric balancing period (Richards, 2009). Though technical experts were unable to find direct evidence that the cyberattack was carried out by agents of the Russian government, several scholars and defense officials have noted that the scale of the attack would have required an advanced level of centralized coordination unlikely to have originated with a truly autonomous network of Russian-speaking hackers (Herzog, 2011, p. 53). Furthermore, the manipulative disinformation campaign waged by the Russian government and Russian media following the Estonian government's relocation of a Soviet-era WWII monument in Tallinn was characteristic of asymmetric balancing. A report by the Center for European Policy

Analysis notes that the Russian Embassy in Tallinn helped establish an organization named “Night Watch” to defend the monument (Lucas and Pomeranzev, 2016, p. 22). Members not only led protests against the monument’s removal but also spread misinformation in the Russian-language media about the monument’s removal in order to incite further destabilizing protests in Tallinn (p. 23). Thus, even if it can’t be proven that the Kremlin’s fingers were on the keyboard that launched the cyberattack, its fingerprints were all over the propaganda campaign inciting Russian speakers in Estonia into the streets.

The second jolting event marking the onset of the asymmetric balancing period was, somewhat ironically, a conventional war. While the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia was in many respects a conventional—if poorly executed—war, it featured several elements of what is now described as hybrid warfare. Furthermore, the Russian government and military derived several lessons from the experience, making crucial reforms to its conventional military while simultaneously developing more refined gray zone methods that would be utilized against Ukraine in 2014. The 2008 war is interesting in its own respect and is covered in the detail it warrants elsewhere in this report. But for the purpose of this paper, the elements of hybrid warfare are of less interest than the balancing aspects of Russia’s invasion of Georgia. If the Georgian war was about asymmetric balancing, against whom was Russia balancing?

In Bucharest in April 2008 lies the answer. It was here at the 20th NATO Summit that the alliance declared that “NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO” (NATO, 2008). Though Ukraine and Georgia had hoped for a membership action plan (MAP) that would have formally placed them on the path to NATO membership, such a plan was not forthcoming. However, even the definitive (if open ended) statement that NATO membership would happen one day was enough to cross a crucial red line for Russia. Already forced to watch impotently as NATO expanded into the Baltic States, Russia made clear on several occasions that it would not tolerate NATO countries on its southern and western borders. The conflict allowed Russia the opportunity to ensure that Georgia’s frozen conflicts would continue to smolder. By securing perpetual border disputes between Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, Russia managed in a few short days to postpone Georgian NATO membership indefinitely since such disputes disqualify new members. In short, there is a case to be made that the 2008 war was about balancing against NATO just as much as it was a political dispute between Moscow and Tbilisi.

Perhaps serving as evidence that individual personalities do matter in foreign policy, there was a brief warming of relations between the United States and Russia during the Medvedev presidency from 2008-2012. Known as the “reset” following the rupture over Georgia in 2008, the period felt reminiscent of the earlier era of pragmatic accommodation. The sides found areas of mutual interest and cooperation, downplayed disagreements in other areas, and even managed to sign a major arms control agreement, the new START treaty. Though official bilateral relations improved, behind the scenes Russia continued its military modernization program and further sharpening of gray zone capabilities, making the Medvedev interregnum a period of hidden asymmetric balancing rather than paused balancing (Bryce-Rogers, 2013).

The return of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2012 amid the largest mass protests in Russia since the early 1990s brought the cooperative pragmatism of the Medvedev-Obama “reset” to an abrupt halt. More importantly, those protests against Putin’s stage-managed return to power, reinforced his fears of externally-supported opposition as a threat to his rule. A domestic crackdown ensued, with Putin tightening the screws across a wide array of perceived political threats (Person, 2017).

Putin's return to the Kremlin marked the return of more forceful methods of asymmetric balancing, which began to manifest themselves in late 2013. Faced with the prospect that neighboring Ukraine was about to sign an association agreement with the European Union—an essential first step to possible EU membership—Russia responded with a counter-proposal for Ukrainian membership in its Eurasian Customs Union. Put into an unenviable position, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich ultimately accepted the Russian proposal, touching off the massive protests that would culminate in the Maidan Revolution that swept him from office in February 2014.

The Russian occupation of Crimea and proxy invasion of eastern Ukraine that ensued afforded Russia a rare opportunity to achieve several key objectives simultaneously, much like the Georgian war six years prior. Military intervention into eastern Ukraine secured both Russian military objectives and further its geopolitical objective of asymmetric balancing against NATO and the United States through the use of gray zone methods. By destabilizing Ukraine domestically through intervention and keeping the conflict in the Donbas simmering, Moscow has simultaneously ensured that NATO membership is off the table for Kyiv while heightening the likelihood of regime change in Ukraine. Similarly, Russia's implied threat of escalating the war in the Donbas deterred the Obama administration from providing lethal weaponry to the Ukrainian military during the critical early years of the conflict. And yet, the Ukrainian gambit cannot be taken as an unmitigated success in the pursuit of Yalta 2.0: Poroshenko's government in Kyiv still stands, American military advisors continue to assist Ukraine in its efforts to reform, and the Trump administration has since provided crucial defensive arms to Ukraine. In fact, the effort to pull Ukraine back into Russia's orbit likely backfired in the final analysis, as Russia's actions over the last 5 years have firmly galvanized the once-divided Ukrainian population in opposition to Russia's occupation (Kulyk, 2016).

The same could be said in other regions. Russian attempts at asymmetric balancing in the Baltic states have kept those—and their NATO allies—on high alert. Provocative flights into NATO airspace and major military exercises near the Baltic borders are properly seen not as prelude to hybrid war per se, but as a case of asymmetric balancing meant to challenge and complicate NATO operations. Moreover, the efforts to sow discord among the allies and within the domestic populations of the Baltic States have come up short. Once again, these efforts have produced a counter-balancing response from the United States and NATO in the form of significant troop buildups in the region (NATO, 2018).

Similarly, the Russian military campaign in Syria in support of the Assad regime can be seen through the lens of asymmetric balancing in pursuit of the Yalta 2.0 strategy. Though this case is one of very hard military methods, it is not clear that Russia is pursuing a clear military interest in Syria. Rather, it is a way to ensure Russia has a say in whatever end comes of the war, and at times it appears as though Russia has the dominant voice in the conversation.

Finally, the most stunning example of asymmetric balancing may very well be the Russian intervention in the US presidential election of 2016. It is perhaps fitting that the era of asymmetric balancing begins with the 2007 cyberattack against Estonia reaches its apex with the massive cyber operations in 2016 against the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton. It was a bold—and ultimately reckless—strategy, but one that fits perfectly within the arsenal of the asymmetric balancer and the Yalta 2.0 grand strategic objectives of containing American interests through nontraditional means.

## Conclusion

Disturbing as Russia's episodes of asymmetric balancing over the last few years may be, the epilogues of each of those episodes reminds us that in the great game of great power politics, every action produces a reaction. Or, in the words of Kenneth Waltz, "power begs to be balanced" (Waltz, 2012, p. 2). The counterbalancing and other unintended consequences arising in reaction to Russia's most aggressive methods of advancing its grand strategy suggest that Moscow has overreached in its efforts to achieve its grand strategic vision of a multipolar world defined by exclusive spheres of influence. Though the ways and means of Russian grand strategy have expanded in pursuit of the ends, it is far from clear that Russia is any closer to achieving those ends than it was in 2000 when Vladimir Putin began.

## References

- Bryce-Rogers, A. (2013). Russian military reform in the aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War. *Demokratizatsiya*, 21(3).
- Feaver, P. (2009). What is grand strategy and why do we need it. *Foreign Policy*. April 8. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/08/what-is-grand-strategy-and-why-do-we-need-it/>
- Graham, Thomas (2016). The Sources of Russian Conduct. *The National Interest*. August 24. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-sources-russian-conduct-17462>
- Herzog, S. (2011). Revisiting the Estonian cyber attacks: Digital threats and multinational responses. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(2), 49-60.
- Hill, Fiona. (2015). This is What Putin Really Wants. *The National Interest*. February 24. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-putin-really-wants-12311>
- Kuchins, Andrew. (2016). That brief U.S.-Russia strategic partnership 15 years ago? New interviews reveal why it derailed. *The Washington Post*. September 23. [https://wapo.st/2cxfvNy?tid=ss\\_tw&utm\\_term=.00b1e3e6ad7d](https://wapo.st/2cxfvNy?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.00b1e3e6ad7d)
- Kulyk, Volodymyr. (2016). National identity in Ukraine: impact of Euromaidan and the war. *Europe-Asia Studies* 68(4): 588-608.
- Lucas, Edward and Pomeranzev, Peter. (2016). Winning the information war: techniques and counter-strategies to Russian propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe. Center for European Policy Analysis. August. <http://infowar.cepa.org/Winning-the-Information-War>
- Lykke, Arthur. (2001). Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy. In **Joseph R. Cerami James F. Holcomb, Jr., editors**, *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*. Strategic Studies Institute. <http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/pub362.pdf>
- McFaul, M., and Stoner-Weiss, K. (2008). The Myth of the Authoritarian Model-How Putin's Crackdown Holds Russia Back. *Foreign Affairs* 87(1), 68-84.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. WW Norton & Company.

- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2008). Bucharest Summit Declaration. April 3.  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm)
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2018). NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence.  
[https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2018\\_12/20181205\\_1812-factsheet\\_efp\\_en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_12/20181205_1812-factsheet_efp_en.pdf)
- Pape, R. (2005). Soft balancing against the United States. *International Security* 30(1).
- Person, R. (2017). Balance of threat: The domestic insecurity of Vladimir Putin. *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 8( 1), 44-59.
- Richards, J. (2009). Denial-of-Service: The Estonian Cyberwar and its implications for U.S. national security. *International Affairs Review* 18(2). <http://www.iar-gwu.org/node/65>
- Ripsman, Norrin , Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell. 2016. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Waltz, K. 2010. *Theory of international politics*. Waveland Press.
- Waltz, K. (2012). Why Iran should get the bomb: Nuclear balancing would mean stability. *Foreign Affairs* 91(4): 2-5.
- World Bank, World Development Indicators (2019). GDP per capita (current US\$)[Data file].  
<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=RU>
- World Bank, World Development Indicators (2019). Military expenditure (% of GDP)[Data file].  
<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=2017&locations=RU&start=2000>

## Chapter 3. Russian Public Opinion as a Potential Obstacle to Aggressive External Behavior by the Kremlin

Dr. Thomas Sherlock  
United States Military Academy, West Point  
[thomas.sherlock@westpoint.edu](mailto:thomas.sherlock@westpoint.edu)

### Abstract

Most Russians applaud the official narrative that Russia has re-emerged as a great power under Vladimir Putin, particularly with the annexation of Crimea, and also agree with the claims of the Russian state that America is an unfriendly power. Yet they increasingly disagree with the assertions of the Kremlin that the United States is a looming external danger and a subversive force in Russian domestic politics. In line with these opinions, many Russians are unwilling to bear the economic burden of an escalating confrontation with the West, demonstrating the initially limited, and now waning, political significance of the “Crimea euphoria” (or “Crimea effect”) and the “rally ‘round the flag” phenomena generated by the annexation of 2014 and ensuing tensions with the West.

Russian elites often differ from the general public in their stronger backing for a more assertive foreign posture. Nevertheless, such preferences are often moderated by a preoccupation with socio-economic problems at home and by the apprehension that Russia will neglect domestic modernization indefinitely if its foreign policy is confrontational. Like Russian mass publics, Russian elites often view the external environment as dangerous, a perception that is cultivated by the Kremlin to help produce patriotic “rally” sentiments. Yet this “rally” effect is dulled by the belief among elites and masses that the greatest threats to Russia are rooted in its social and economic underdevelopment.

Russian society often finds domestic problems much more worrisome than US military power or a “color revolution” fomented by the West, both of which the Kremlin has framed as important threats in its efforts to mobilize domestic supporters and isolate opponents. Drawing extensively on opinion surveys in Russia, the paper concludes that a majority of Russians are likely to believe that the Kremlin should not emphasize costly policies intended to counter US military power or other potential American threats.

### Introduction and Context

Most Russians embrace the official narrative that Russia has re-emerged as a great power under Vladimir Putin and also agree with the claims of the Russian state that America is a hostile power (Gerber and Zavisca, 2016). Yet, they increasingly disagree with the assertions of the Kremlin that the United States is a looming external danger and a subversive force in Russian domestic politics (Sherlock, 2019). In line with these opinions, many Russians are unwilling to shoulder the economic burden of an escalating confrontation with the West, demonstrating the limited political significance of the “Crimea euphoria” (or “Crimea effect”) produced by the annexation as well as the “rally ‘round the flag” phenomenon generated by ensuing tensions with the West.

The “Crimea effect” strengthened Putin’s authority by some measures but was less successful in providing durable support for Russia’s socio-economic and political institutions and policies. Belief among Russians that the country was headed in the right direction increased from 40% in November 2013 to 64% in August 2014 (five months after the annexation of Crimea), but then dropped to 44%

by March 2019 (Levada, March 2019). Even Putin's approval numbers have suffered significant decline, due in part to an unpopular government proposal in mid-2018 to raise the retirement age.

Although a modest majority of Russians (54% in October 2018) still approve "on the whole" the Kremlin's foreign policy, they are increasingly preoccupied with problems at home (VTsIOM, "Otsenka vlastei," 2018). Survey data reveal relatively weak approval among the public for a forceful external posture, including intervention in the "near abroad" to check American power or protect Russian-speakers from perceived discrimination. Similarly, a large majority of Russians do not favor the creation of an empire reminiscent of the Soviet Union or tsarist Russia.

Russia's elites, unlike its mass publics, often advocate the projection of state power, including the creation of a sphere of influence in Eurasia which experts in the West often identify as a central goal of the Kremlin's foreign policy (Kotkin, 2016). Nevertheless, many, perhaps most, of these elites (like mass society) want their government to emphasize domestic socio-economic development, not the production and demonstration of hard power.

Lev Gudkov, the Russian sociologist and director of the independent Levada Center, a public opinion and sociological research organization that is highly respected in the West, provided a similar assessment in mid-2018. Gudkov observed a waning "Crimea effect"—popular approval of Russia's foreign policy as a reemerging great power—among Russians who increasingly believe that the Kremlin's pursuit of its geopolitical goals comes "at the [social and economic] expense of the population" (BBC, *Russkaia sluzhba*, 2018). The low quality of health care and government social programs, as well as limited employment opportunities, are fundamental concerns of the general population; elites are also concerned with Russia's stalled socio-economic and political modernization (Sherlock, 2019).

Other experts and scholars underscore why these conditions pose a serious problem for the Kremlin. Dmitri Trenin, the head of the Carnegie Center in Moscow, observes that Putin and his ruling circle understand that Russia's future, and their own, "depends mostly on how ordinary citizens feel... Russia is an autocracy, but it is an autocracy with the consent of the governed" (Trenin, 2016). Trenin echoes Hans Morgenthau, who identified "national morale," or the "degree of determination" with which society approves its government's foreign policy, as a core element of state power. For Morgenthau, morale is expressed in the form of public opinion, "without whose support [i.e., consent] no government, democratic or autocratic, is able to pursue its policies with full effectiveness, if it is able to pursue them at all" (Morgenthau, 1967). While most Russians currently back, if often cautiously, the Kremlin's foreign policy, a costly and unpredictable escalation of conflict with the West in the context of Russian socio-economic stagnation or decline could undermine "consent" with uncertain political consequences.

This argument is developed in two sections and a brief conclusion. The first part examines the attitudes of the general public in Russia on issues with implications for Russian foreign policy. The second section addresses these topics from the perspectives of segments of the Russian elite. The conclusion provides a summary and identifies important limits to the influence of elite and mass opinion on Russian foreign policy. Empirical support for the argument draws on a broad selection of mass opinion surveys and focus groups conducted in Russia, particularly those by the Levada Center (see Sherlock, 2019 for the complete list).

## Russian Mass Attitudes: Aversion to Aggressive Foreign Policies

A question in the March 2017 Levada survey focused on one of the Kremlin's justifications for the the annexation of Crimea in 2014: *Should Moscow protect Russian speakers in the countries of the "near abroad" (other than Ukraine) if they experienced serious discrimination* (Levada, March 2017)? The survey question asked: "If the rights of ethnic Russians in neighboring countries (apart from Ukraine) are seriously violated, what should Russia do?" 35.8% selected the response "Russia should work toward a peaceful settlement of the problem" while 29.8% believed that Russia should not become involved in such disputes. 28.1% of the respondents felt that "all means" (including military force) should be used to protect Russian-speakers who might be mistreated in the region.

That each of the three possible responses garnered roughly equivalent levels of support underscores the divisions within Russian society on this central issue—and the domestic political risk for the Kremlin in fomenting aggression of the sort feared by the Baltic states. It is noteworthy that the villages, towns, and small cities in Russia's "heartland" that the Kremlin moved to activate as conservative counterweights after the political protests in 2011 and 2012 exhibited only modest levels of approval for the "right to protect" Russians in border countries. These population centers were slightly above or below the national average of 29.8% in advocating non-intervention. Respondents in Moscow were least willing to approve direct involvement by Russia in ethno-nationalist disputes. 41.2% of Muscovites felt that intervention would be an unjustified intrusion into the "internal affairs of other countries." This number marked a 22% increase over the percentage of responses (19%) among Muscovites to the same question administered two years earlier, in the July 2015 Levada survey (Levada, 2015).

A question in the March 2017 Levada survey also probed how Russians would react to Ukraine's possible acceptance of an invitation to join western political, economic, and security institutions. 37.7% of respondents overall thought that Russia should allow Ukraine to join either the European Union or NATO, despite that country's strong historical, cultural, socio-economic, and strategic importance to Russia. Close to 48% of Muscovites supported this position as did 37% of respondents from Russia's villages and towns. Opposition to Ukraine's entry into NATO, but not the EU, was expressed by 27.8% of survey participants. Just under 18% of respondents felt that Russia should "block any decision by Ukraine to join either the EU or NATO."

Surveys on attitudes toward Ukraine reveal an important distinction in how Russians evaluate possible external threats: a majority is less troubled by the risk of foreign attack and more concerned about Russia being drawn into a conflict in a bordering country like Ukraine. Despite significant public sympathy for the insurgency in eastern Ukraine, only 13% of respondents in a late 2014 Levada survey (at the height of patriotic and expansionist enthusiasm in Russia) would approve a son joining the pro-Russia militias (Levada, November 2014). Just 3% of respondents in a February 2015 survey would "definitely" (22% would "probably") support the introduction of Russian troops into the conflict (Levada, *Ezhegodnik*, 2015). Another survey by Levada in October 2014 found that a majority approved the efforts of independent Russian NGOs to compile lists of active duty soldiers of the Russian Army killed or wounded in the Kremlin's clandestine war in eastern Ukraine (Levada, *Ezhegodnik*, 2014).

Mass perceptions of economic vulnerability help explain why many Russians do not support an aggressive foreign policy even if they are strong supporters of Putin. Russians of all demographic categories are often reluctant to risk greater economic difficulties for the sake of the state and its foreign policy, reflecting the limitations of what Russian sociologists refer to as "practical patriotism" (Gorshkov and Tikhonova, 90). According to surveys administered by the Institute of Sociology, only



8% of respondents were “absolutely” willing to approve policies designed to restore Russia’s international power and defensive capacity “even if these measures were linked to a significant decline in their standard of living,” while 30% were “somewhat willing” to endure such costs, for a total of 38% (Gorshkov and Tikhonova, 90, 96). 23% of respondents were “absolutely” unwilling to do so, and 39% were “more unwilling than not” to engage in such self-sacrifice (for a “willing/unwilling” ratio of 38:62). For respondents who approved “the activities of V. Putin in the post of President of Russia,” the ratio, at 45:55, demonstrates that approval of Putin’s foreign policy is very often conditional even among his devoted followers; the ratio’s imbalance grew to 30:70 for those who supported Putin’s presidency only “in part” ((Gorshkov and Tikhonova, 100).

### The Dimension of Elites: Approaches to Threats, Power, and Identity

To what extent do the opinions of Russian elites resemble the preferences of mass publics examined above? Do Russia’s elites support an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy? Are they concerned that the external environment poses significant threats to the Russian state that require militarization? Do they emphasize hard or soft power as the foundation of a resurgent Russia? Although detailed and reliable information about the attitudes of Russia’s elites (political, economic, security, and cultural) after the annexation of Crimea is much more scarce than data on the views of the general public, a few important sources are available for analysis. One is particularly relevant: *The Russian Elite 2016* analyzes the latest wave of the *Survey of Russian Elites*, the long-term study of the attitudes of Russian elites on foreign and domestic conditions and policies (Rivera, 2016). The respondents are leaders from political and bureaucratic institutions (the legislature, federal administration, etc.), private and state-owned enterprises, the security services (including the military), the media, and academic research institutions.

In line with the March 2017 Levada survey and other polls of the Russian public, most of the elites in *The Russian Elite 2016* did not perceive America to be a grave or immediate military or political menace. The survey asked respondents to evaluate several potential dangers to Russia on a five-point scale, with five representing an “utmost threat.” A plurality of respondents (32.1%) thought that the “inability to solve domestic problems” was an “utmost threat” (36.7% selected this response in the 2012 wave of the survey) while 22.2% considered “terrorism” in the same light. The “growth of the US military vis-à-vis the Russian military” trailed far behind, with only 7.4% of respondents selecting this factor as an “utmost threat” – the lowest level since the 1993 wave (7.1%). Earning even lower percentages were “border conflicts in the CIS countries” (4.5%), “ethnic (domestic) tensions” (3.3%), “information war conducted by the West” (2.5%) and “color revolution” (2.2%).

It is noteworthy that the participants in different waves of this survey of elites found domestic problems much more worrisome than US military power, American information warfare, or a “color revolution” fomented by the West. Each of these challenges the Kremlin has framed as important threats in its efforts to mobilize domestic supporters and isolate opponents. These results and other data suggest that a significant number of Russia’s elites did not believe the Kremlin should emphasize costly policies designed to offset US military power or other potential American threats.

Russia’s Institute of Sociology conducted a survey in late 2015 which offers additional insight into the political attitudes and policy preferences of key segments of the Russian elite (Institut sotsiologii, 2015). In its report based on the survey, the Institute analyzed the views of an occupational cross-section of influentials similar to that of the *Survey of Russian Elites* project, including 154 leaders (94 in Moscow and 60 in different regions) in the following categories: government, business, the “third sector” (NGOs, civil society), mass media, and science. The stated purpose of the survey was to elicit

assessments of the health of Russia's society and political system as well as views on the prospects for national development over the next five years.

Gathered during the patriotic upsurge of 2015, the results of the survey challenge the claim that Russia now enjoys significantly greater solidarity within society, and between society and the state. At issue is the strength of the mobilizing the Sochi Olympics, the annexation of Crimea, the ensuing conflict with Ukraine, and particularly the subsequent confrontation with the West. While these events buoyed the standing of the president and the armed forces, and also bolstered pride in Russian identity, their positive effect on how elites evaluate the socio-political system appears limited. The survey confirms that diverse Russian elites often remain more preoccupied with domestic problems than with threats from the external environment or with Russia's status as a great power.

Using a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), the first question of the survey asks respondents to "evaluate the current condition of Russian society" according to "important characteristics" that might be found in any country. A list of 13 items, such as the "level of inter-ethnic tensions" and the "level of tolerance," was given to the participants. The only item to receive a score of "8" (relatively high) was the "level of social stratification" in Russia and society's unequal access to resources.

At a time (2015) when one might expect to find robust evidence of the "Crimea effect," the "level of patriotism" scored only 5.8 on the 10 point scale. Respondents placed the "physical and psychological health" of society at a relatively low 4.3, while the "moral condition of society" registered 4.2. The degree of trust in government was scored at 3.9, and interpersonal trust in society at 3.5. Confidence in Russia's "democratic values and institutions" (elections, parties, etc.) came in last at 2.9.

The answers to other questions in the survey reveal the policy priorities of many elites and their evaluation of foreign and domestic threats. In their assessment of external dangers, respondents identified the dependence of the Russian budget on international oil and gas markets as the greatest threat (8.3) among the 13 items on the list, a reference to the vulnerabilities of Russia's economic model. The prospect of Russia being drawn into a broader conflict in Ukraine was next (8.1), followed by capital flight and the decline in foreign and domestic investment (7.6). Although respondents were fearful of a new Cold War accompanied by an arms race with harmful effects on Russian development (7.2), they placed the "information-psychological warfare" of the West, as well as the threat of a "fifth column," last on the list, at 5.0.

## Conclusion

*The Russian Elite 2016*, the Institute of Sociology survey and other data demonstrate that while Russia's elites are sensitive to international threats, a significant number do not believe that the West, particularly the United States, poses a critical military or political danger to the Russian state or regime. Numerous large-N surveys of the Russian public reveal similar perspectives. Such attitudes challenge the Kremlin's core narrative of Russia as a resurgent great power threatened by the United States and its fifth columnists (Sherlock, 2019).

Analysis of the views of elites and mass publics also suggests that a majority of Russians define a great power and its priorities more in terms of domestic socio-economic development than in the production and demonstration of hard power. From this standpoint, Russians often view the pathologies of their country's developmental and political model as the most important threat to Russia's international influence and domestic well-being.

As the plausibility of the Kremlin's meta-narrative weakens (and as the "Crimea effect" decays) an important question is whether (or to what extent) the perspectives of much of Russian society and its elites will influence the Kremlin's domestic and foreign policy. While several other factors clearly push in the opposite direction, toward an aggressive foreign policy, it remains true that public opinion matters to the Kremlin and that much of Russian society at the mass and elite level values restraint in foreign policy and greater attention to domestic socio-economic development.

To read the more detailed, published paper on which this submission is based, please visit <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10758216.2018.1561190>.

## References

- BBC *Russkaia sluzhba* (August 2, 2018). "Sotsiologii zafiksirovali...." Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-45036599>; and <https://www.levada.ru/2018/08/02/sotsiologi-zafiksirovali-nailuchshee-otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-ssha-i-es-so-vremen-anneksii-kryma/>
- Gerber, Theodore and Jane Zavisca (2016). "Does Russian Propaganda Work?" *The Washington Quarterly*, 39 (2), 79-98.
- Gorshkov, M.K., and N.E. Tikhonova, eds. (2016). *Rossiiskoe obshchestvo i vyzovy vremeni*, vol. 3. Moscow: Ves Mir. Chapter 4, "Ot chego gotovy otkazat'siia rossiiane radi svoei strany."
- Institut sotsiologii (2015). *Rossiiskoe obshchestvo – 2020. Ekspertnyi obraz budushchego. Analiticheskii otchet po itogam ekspertnogo oprosa*. Retrieved from [http://www.zircon.ru/upload/iblock/0f6/ESPM-2015\\_Rossiyskoe\\_obshestvo-2020%20ekspertniy\\_obraz\\_budushego\\_ov2.2c.pdf](http://www.zircon.ru/upload/iblock/0f6/ESPM-2015_Rossiyskoe_obshestvo-2020%20ekspertniy_obraz_budushego_ov2.2c.pdf)
- Kotkin, Stephen (2016). "Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics." *Foreign Affairs*, 95 (3), 2-9.
- Levada Center (November 13, 2014). "Volunteer Fighters." Retrieved from <http://www.levada.ru/eng/volunteer-fighters>.
- Levada Center (2014). *Obshchestvennoe mnenie. Ezhegodnik*, (print version) (table 22.107), 192.
- Levada Center (2015). *Obshchestvennoe mnenie. Ezhegodnik*, (print version) (table 24.41), 232.
- Levada Center (July 2015). Unpublished survey. Please contact the author for this data.
- Levada Center (March 2017). Unpublished survey. Please contact the author for this data.
- Levada Center (March 2019). "Polozhenie del v strane." Retrieved from <https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/polozhenie-del-v-strane/>
- Morgenthau, Hans (1967). *Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Knopf.
- Rivera, Sharon Werning, et al. (2016). *The Russian Elite 2016. Hamilton College Levitt Poll*. Retrieved from <https://www.hamilton.edu/documents/russianelite2016final.pdf>

Sherlock, Thomas (2019). "Russian Society and Foreign Policy: Mass and Elite Orientations After Crimea." *Problems of Post-Communism*. DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2018.1561190>

Trenin, Dmitri (2016). "The Revival of the Russian Military." *Foreign Affairs*, 95 (3). Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/system/files/pdf/articles/2016/95304.pdf>

VTsIOM (September 2018). "Otsenka vlastei." Retrieved from [https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/ocenka\\_vlastej/](https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/ocenka_vlastej/)

## Chapter 4. Moscow's Gray Zone Toolkit

Dr. Richard Weitz  
Center for Political-Military Analysis at the Hudson Institute  
[weitz@hudson.org](mailto:weitz@hudson.org)

### Abstract

Russian strategists are adept in selecting gray zone tools optimized to their target. The Kremlin's gray zone portfolio includes paramilitary forces and other proxies, economic and energy exploitation, media and propaganda manipulation, and additional assets. Russia's hybrid warfare approach blends military and civilian elements to have maximum impact on the target. Hybrid tactics are most effective when the target entity is deeply polarized or lacks the capacity to resist and respond effectively to Russian aggression. Conversely, countries that are resilient against attempts to divide their populace, apply economic coercion, and wield proxy forces can better handle sub-conventional threats from Russia. Washington must reevaluate old paradigms between war and peace to maintain strategic primacy in this new era of international politics that is defined by shades of gray.

### Tools of Power

#### Paramilitary and Other Proxies

Moscow has a variety of military, paramilitary, and non-military assets available for use in hybrid operations. These elements include Russian special operations units, paramilitary militia groups associated with the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Russian military intelligence (GRU), hybrid businesses that are connected to the Russian political-economic elite, and Kremlin-friendly media conglomerates. Financial support and propaganda can be useful in mobilizing a disenfranchised group abroad, while deploying auxiliary forces like local volunteer militia or coordination with intelligence offices can provide additional tools. Russia has demonstrated in the recent Crimean conflict that civilian sympathizers may be employed to block military installations. Furthermore, businesses can be called upon by the state to execute military-political roles as instructed by the Kremlin. These hybrid businesses are led by Kremlin-friendly directors who conduct legal business operations while also employing their resources at the state's direction.

Russian Special Forces, the FSB, and the GRU often support this endeavor. The intelligence agencies are powerful force multipliers to establish preconditions for successful overt or semi-overt operations. They can mislead the adversary, shape public opinions, and pursue other forms of subterfuge. In the case of the Crimean Peninsula, the FSB and GRU helped reconnoiter the battlespace and disrupt Ukrainian command and control to impede a timely response. The main value of covert and ambiguous forces is to exploit weaknesses in the target nation. However, mercenaries, independent nationalists, warlords, and other proxies are motivated by their own interests and their actions could impact Russia in a negative way. For example, the Malaysian Airliner MH17 was downed by Russian-supported local militias, which were perhaps not acting under Moscow's orders.

#### Information and Influence Operations

The main goals of Russian information and influence operations include exploiting divisions in targeted states to achieve Russian foreign policy aims, ensuring continued domestic support for the regime, maintaining compliant governments in other states, keeping unfriendly governments weak

and off balance, and influencing international perceptions of Russian actions while excluding Western sway from Moscow's sphere of influence.

Russia's information strategy is similar to that of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Soviet strategy of *maskirovka*, or military deception, involved misleading the Soviet Union's enemies regarding its military tactics, timing, and technology. Soviet information warfare was closely related to the concept of Reflexive Control, which has been defined by Timothy Thomas as "a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action."

Contemporary Russian hybrid warfare employs a similar strategy, though it has evolved as technology has developed. The new approach has taken the traditional emphasis on psychological warfare found in Soviet conceptualizations of propaganda and adapted it to use across the new media environment. Faster communication speeds, the quickening of the news cycle, and the highly globalized nature of the 21st century information ecosystem increased the effectiveness of Russian propaganda. These advances have made it easier for the Russian government to influence global public opinion through the Internet, social media, 24-hour news agencies, and other platforms.

Russian media activity focuses both on disinformation and enhancing Russia's image abroad. Falsified information is meant to confuse target audiences by presenting them with biased information that promotes pro-Russian perspectives about Russian foreign policy goals. To achieve this end, the Russian government has employed Russian state-controlled media and online trolls. These latter actors post pro-Russian comments and information on social media to obscure or falsify information to engender suspicion and fear. Russian information operations adhere to four main principles: taking a small truth and stretching it, using propaganda to elicit an emotional response from its intended audience, sending conflicting messages to create myths and chaos, and ensuring its narratives remain in the information ecosystem for extended periods.

Foreign influence operations also play a vital role in Russian hybrid operations. One tactic Russia has used is its covert support for both right- and left-wing opposition groups. Internationally, Russia has sought to develop relations with leftist governments and ties with prominent European leaders. Russia also employs cultural organizations like the Russkiy Mir Foundation and the Russian Orthodox Church to influence ethnic Russians or Russian speakers residing abroad. Within some nearby countries, Moscow can resort to more explicit subversive tactics such as the provision of financial support to pro-Russian political parties and economic bans of certain foreign imports purported to be contaminated or unsafe for domestic use or consumption. Russia also habitually funds pro-Russian domestic parties in other states and takes other measures to infiltrate both European politics and businesses.

### Economics and Energy

Russia's energy and economic assets—comprising oil and gas sales, other trade and investment, embargoes and cutoffs, remittances, and tariff and currency manipulation—provide important weapons in Moscow's hybrid toolkit. These economic assets can be employed alone, or in concert with other economic, military, and political tools such as military force, arms sales, and economic coercion. Russia's energy policy is closely aligned with its national security strategy given the state's high dependency on energy exports for government revenues. In particular, Russia has regularly manipulated energy chains to exert economic pressure and territorial influence.

Russia has shown a proclivity to use energy contracts, proposed pipelines, and supply manipulation to influence post-Soviet countries. For instance, after invading Ukraine, the Russian government quickly seized all Ukrainian energy production and storage facilities. This seizure's purpose was to deprive Kyiv of revenues generated from the transit of energy through the country and, therefore, pressure it into accepting a more pro-Russian disposition. In addition, Russia was able to gain vast tracts of maritime zones and land to locate more natural gas. Moscow is still trying to isolate Ukraine from other European sources of energy and render it wholly dependent on Russian gas and oil. Furthermore, the energy coercion has been accompanied by a campaign of economic warfare against Ukraine that includes high tariffs, embargos, and delays of imports designed to shape other Ukrainian policies to Moscow's benefit. Moscow also can also manipulate remittances of foreign workers working in Russia as well as the threat to expose foreign corruption.

## Recommendations

Hybrid tactics are most effective when the target state has lost the will or capacity to resist. Conversely, countries that do not have these vulnerabilities face little threat from Russian adventurism short of full-scale war. The most prevalent indicators or "signposts" that an entity is vulnerable to Russian hybrid actions include political and social turmoil, large Russian investments in its key capabilities, and weak security structures.

Fundamentally, the United States must reevaluate old paradigms that separate war and peace in the wake of current international conflicts. Institutional and analytical changes are essential for enhanced strategic awareness. Strengthening Western institutions and civil society to build resilience against hybrid threats is imperative.

US responses should prioritize robust cyber defenses, situational awareness, flexibility, and deterrence at the strategic, operational, and even tactical levels. The United States must adjust quickly to the changing strategies of Russian information operations, specifically the study of Russian Reflexive Control techniques. Western governments should raise standards for transparency and integrity in research, advocacy, lobby groups, and "Track II" diplomacy; encourage Western groups to expose and challenge Russian propaganda and disinformation, whether conducted by the Russian government overtly or through intermediary institutions; and assist Western institutions to sustain dialogue and collaborative research with free-thinking Russians in ways that do not make them vulnerable to Russian internal security laws. Counterstrategies against Russian influence and information operations used in the Cold War may prove effective if modernized. Western responses must strive to be as extensive and multifaceted as Russian soft power initiatives.

In terms of preventing Russian subversion, preemptive "target hardening" through political, social, and economic measures can make it more difficult for Moscow to undermine a state. Bolstering governance and legitimacy can deprive Moscow of soft targets and opportunities for subversion. Western governments and international organizations can share best practices for eliminating corruption, reducing ethnic tensions, increasing cyber defenses, and resisting information warfare.

Other specific policy recommendations include:

- taking a tough line on intelligence activity in target states, including expelling suspected spies regardless of a likely tit-for-tat response, to deter penetration and control by Russian intelligence services and prevent easy access to local political elites and/or local socio-economic assets;

- maintaining potent intelligence services and police forces and providing them with the training, guidance, and purview to empower them to meet hybrid force challenges, yet in measured and appropriate ways that will not worsen local dissatisfaction or provide Russia with a pretext for action;
- developing and implementing effective legislation and corresponding enforcement agencies, especially where financial monitoring and media licensing are concerned;
- demonstrating strong and unified national and international political will to stand up to Russia publicly; and
- showing a will and capacity to fight hybrid attacks with defense and deterrence measures—rather than adopting the Russian playbook directly, this means leveraging Western strengths in areas such as finance, soft power in third nations, intelligence gathering, and even cyberwarfare.

## References

- Galeotti, M. (7 July 2014). Putin's secret weapon. *Foreign Policy Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/07/putins-secret-weapon>
- Galeotti, M. (2 November 2014). Crime And Crimea: Criminals as allies and agents. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Retrieved from <http://www.rferl.org/content/crimea-crime-criminals-as-allies/26671923.html>
- Galeotti, M. (December 2014). Behind enemy lines: The rising influence of Russian special forces. *Jane's Intelligence Review*.
- Galeotti, M. (30 July 2015). Time to think about 'hybrid defense.' *War On The Rocks*. <http://warontherocks.com/2015/07/time-to-think-about-hybrid-defense>
- Galeotti, M. (2015). 'Hybrid war' and 'little green men': How it works, and how it doesn't. In Pikulicka-Wilczewska, A. & Sakwa, R. (Eds.), *Ukraine and Russia: People, politics, propaganda and perspectives* (pp. 156-164). Retrieved from <http://www.e-ir.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ukraine-and-Russia-E-IR.pdf>
- Galeotti, M. (5 April 2016). Moscow's Mercenaries in Syria. *War On The Rocks*. Retrieved from <http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/moscows-mercenaries-in-syria>
- Kofman, M. & Rojansky, M. (April 2015). *A closer look at Russia's 'hybrid war.'* Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center. Retrieved from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no7-closer-look-russias-hybrid-war>
- Kofman, M. (11 March 2016). Russian hybrid warfare and other dark arts. *War on the Rocks*, Retrieved from <http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts>
- Laruelle, M. (April 2019). *Russia's Militia Groups and their Use at Home and Abroad*. Paris: Institut



français des relations internationales. Retrieved from  
[https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle\\_russia\\_militia\\_groups\\_2019.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3YLHJ0r94F\\_xY0e6N3r3MZ8G0uB00pZuLkRDLbqCwqP86KckP809\\_LpNU](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle_russia_militia_groups_2019.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3YLHJ0r94F_xY0e6N3r3MZ8G0uB00pZuLkRDLbqCwqP86KckP809_LpNU)

Thomas, T.L. (2004). Russia's reflexive control theory and the military. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 17, 237-256. Retrieved from [https://www.rit.edu/~w-cmmc/literature/Thomas\\_2004.pdf](https://www.rit.edu/~w-cmmc/literature/Thomas_2004.pdf)

Thomas, T.L. (2015). Russia's military strategy and Ukraine: Indirect, asymmetric—and Putin led. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 28, 445-461. Retrieved from <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Putin's-Russia/Russia's%20Military%20Strategy%20and%20Ukraine%20article%20slavic%20military%20studies.pdf>

Understanding Russian “Hybrid Warfare” and What Can be Done About It: Armed Services Committee. House of Representatives. 105<sup>th</sup> Congress (28 March 2017) (Testimony of Christopher S. Chivvis). Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT468/RAND\\_CT468.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT468/RAND_CT468.pdf)

## Chapter 5. Putin's Grand Strategy and US National Interests

Dr. Christopher Marsh  
Special Operations Research Association  
[christopher.marsh5@gmail.com](mailto:christopher.marsh5@gmail.com)

### Abstract

One of the most significant questions surrounding Russian foreign policy is whether or not Russian president Vladimir Putin has an overarching strategy. This white paper argues that Putin, in fact, is a serious strategist and that he has a grand strategy for Russia and, indeed, the world. It summarizes the debate over whether or not Putin has a grand strategy before examining the key interests driving it. Finally, it examines the threat Russia's strategy poses to vital US national interests. These assertions can be summarized in the points below.

- Russian President Vladimir Putin has a grand strategy that he is following.
- The threads of this strategy can be seen at the theater/operational level and join together at the grand strategic level.
- Russia seeks a veto power over its near abroad and considers the area part of its exclusive sphere of influence.
- Russia has entered into a strong alliance with China, one that is mutually beneficial.
- Russian recidivism is a threat to US national interests, particularly to NATO and its new members.

### Motivations Driving Russian Globale Competitive Activities and Strategy

One of the most significant questions surrounding Russian foreign policy in general and US-Russian relations in particular is whether or not Russian president Vladimir Putin has an overarching strategy or if he is merely reacting to international events as they unfold, simply taking advantage of opportunities as they are presented to him by the international system. If he does have an overarching strategy, what key interests are driving this strategy? And finally, what threat does Russia pose to vital US national interests?

This white paper argues that Putin in fact is a serious strategist and that he has a grand strategy for Russia and, indeed, the world. While he may in fact react to opportunities as they are presented to him by the international environment, these lines of effort combine into a coherent global foreign policy agenda that seeks to reposition Russia as a great power in the emerging world order.

Just what is this vision of Russia's place in the world and its relations with its neighbors? It is one in which Moscow is one of several centers of power, perhaps as US hegemony gives way to, if not a multipolar world order, perhaps a Chinese-centric world. It is a world in which Russia is perhaps distant from European values, but not so distant from European political and economic processes and institutions. In this world, Eastern as well as Western Europe are forced to "play nice" with Russia as a major energy source and political and military power. The same holds true for East Asia—particularly China. While Russia is not about to copy a Chinese model of economic or political

development (Marsh, 2006), it seeks to position itself in such a way as to embrace China in a soft alliance (Lukin, 2018; Lo, 2008), one in which Moscow can maintain a position of sovereignty and independence as its eastern flank becomes home to the world's largest economy, most populace state, and perhaps the next global hegemon.

Where does this leave Russia vis-à-vis the United States? Russia is likely to counter the US where it can do so at acceptable cost, as Putin weighs the punitive damages associated with its actions (for instance in Ukraine or meddling in US elections) against the advancement of its foreign policy objectives (as in Syria, where Russia seeks to be a significant actor in the settlement of Middle Eastern affairs). Moscow will seek to counter US action simply because it resents American global hegemony, and it can do so because the US political system's dysfunctionality (by the design of the Founding Fathers) tempers its response while its alliance system, too, leads to the imposition of costs that do not outweigh the benefit of Moscow's perceived gains.

In response to Russia being named as a target in the Pentagon's 2018 *National Defense Strategy*, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stated that he "regrets that instead of having a normal dialogue" the US "seeks to prove its leadership through such confrontational concepts" and stressed that Russia is still "ready for dialogue" (Bovdunov, 2018). Despite such proclamations, Russia has no real interest in a "reset" in US-Russia relations in the near term (Gvosdev & Marsh, 2014, pp. 92-95). In fact, it welcomes (and seeks to contribute to) the weakening of the American political system and the relative decline of Washington's influence in the world. Indeed, it seeks to further such decline, as its interference in the 2016 US presidential elections attests.

The purpose of this white paper is to map out the contours of Putin's grand strategy. It does so through an analysis of Russian foreign policy, its written documents related to strategy, and Putin's own actions. It is thus both a paper about Russian foreign policy and national security, but one that takes seriously Putin's global agenda. At the center of the paper is a review of the debate over whether or not Putin is a strategist or opportunist, arguing strongly in favor of the former over the latter. It then concludes with a restatement of the paper's argument regarding Russia's grand strategy and how that strategy runs counter to US national interests.

### Putin: Strategist, Opportunist, or Fool?

As Posner (2014) points out, some Russia-watchers have engaged in "loopy speculation about Putin's motives, much of it based on conjectures about his psychological makeup," with some people thinking he is irrational or psychologically unstable. Posner also identifies those that think Putin simply "acts tactically in response to short-term opportunities [and] has no strategic vision." Anne Applebaum (2015) is an excellent example. While she clearly identifies Putin's tactic of sowing "organized chaos" where he can, she concludes, "The only point in doing that is to create the impression of crisis to make people nervous and have NATO members question NATO's commitment to them and to create this impression of uncertainty." This organized chaos includes "flying in British airspace, camping out near the borders of Baltic states and kidnapping foreign military officers," which she states is a "strange strategy," but it "keeps the Russian people reliant on him. It also serves as an effective distraction to keep his illegitimate rise to power an afterthought." But Applebaum concluded that it "sounds odd to call it a grand strategy, and there's a way in which it really isn't even about geopolitics." "What we're watching," Applebaum concludes, "is someone trying to stay in power by changing the narrative, changing the story and making sure the revolution he fears doesn't take place."

Incidentally, this interpretation of Russian grand strategy does not differ much from that of Michael McFaul who in 2003—more than a decade and a half ago—said that Putin’s grand strategy was simply to stay in power. As McFaul put it, Putin’s strategic plan was to put in place a regime that was “neither accountable to the people nor constrained by autonomous political actors.” As early as 2004, the future US Ambassador to Russia saw this plan, unfortunately, as succeeding, while others in the West did not even recognize it because each “stage of the plan’s realization has been clouded with controversy, subject to conflicting interpretations, its actors decked in gray rather than black and white.” But to be sure, McFaul saw a “systematic plan to roll back democracy.”

Writing only a few years later, Celeste Wallander (2007) sees Putin’s grand strategy as less than grand, and is in agreement with McFaul that domestic issues are at the center of Putin’s problems. But whereas McFaul sees Putin’s grand plan as rolling back democracy, Wallander sees the failure of democratization as a hindrance to Putin being able to carry through a real grand strategy. In her analysis of Russia’s strategic environment, national interests, and the type of state and economy that Putin believes is needed to secure them, Wallander concludes that Russian grand strategy is “neither grand, nor strategic, nor sustainable” (p. 140). She leaves open, however, the question of whether or not Russia will survive as a great power in the 21st century, as the source of its power—the state and economy—are also the main sources of its weakness.

S. Frederick Starr and Svante Cornell have commented on those many Russian and foreign observers “who hypothesized that all these diverse initiatives on Putin’s part arose from a single strategy,” but that they “failed to make their case in a convincing manner” (2014, pp. 6-7). That may be true, but the pair do an excellent job in arguing their point that the Eurasian Union is part of Putin’s overall grand strategy and his actions vis-à-vis the former Soviet states is a well-orchestrated attempt to establish a “new kind of union comprised of former Soviet republics and headed by Russia itself” (p. 7). As they argue, events between the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the armed seizure of Crimea in 2014 have forced policy makers and Russia-watchers to acknowledge the “possibility that the Russian Republic under Vladimir Putin has reorganized its entire foreign and domestic policy in order to pursue” this single strategic objective.

One observer who is in strong agreement with such an interpretation of Russian foreign policy is Michel Gurfinkiel, who argues that the Soviet “deep state” survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and that Russia’s “primary strategic goal [today] is to bring together all the Russian-speaking peoples into a single nation-state” (2018). Additionally, Gurfinkiel sees the reestablishment of a single geopolitical unity, if not a single state, for the “Eurasian community, with Russia as first among equals.” This is perhaps more pernicious of an interpretation than Starr and Cornell foresee, but it has strong parallels.

But Putin’s ambitions reach beyond Russia’s near abroad and to the international system itself, in which it seeks to regain and retain its position as a great power. Gurfinkiel also sees this and identifies the weakening or elimination of rival power centers in Europe as part of Moscow’s plan (e.g., NATO and the EU). Finally, he foresees Moscow pursuing a world power role “by reactivating support for former Soviet client regimes like Baathist Syria and Cuba” (2018).

British scholar Andrew Monaghan’s (2013) assessment of whether or not Putin has a grand strategy focuses on the cascade of new concepts, strategies, and doctrines that attempt to frame plans in a long-term horizon, to 2020 and beyond, that Moscow has been publishing over the past decade. Following Putin’s 2012 reelection, a series of presidential instructions and new plans have been published to update this overhaul. Monaghan examines this commitment to strategic planning and seeks to determine whether or not it is tantamount to a grand strategy. While he suggests that

Moscow has shaped a broad horizon and made some progress towards achieving the goals it has set out, Monaghan rightly argues that a grand strategy is more than simply formulating plans. He thus concludes by exploring the difficulties Moscow faces including the evolving and competitive international environment and a slew of domestic troubles (and his article was written *before* the annexation of Crimea and the resulting international sanctions). “Taken all together,” Monaghan concludes, while “Moscow is committed to strategic planning, a grand strategy remains a work in progress” (p. 1236).

Indeed, strategic planning may be becoming confused with strategy and grand strategy itself. In an excellent piece on Russia’s Strategy–2020 (published in 2012), Julian Cooper (2012) is also looking at such documents as the ones Monaghan does, but Cooper focuses specifically on the process and planning that went into developing Strategy – 2020. But planning does not equate to strategy, though as Eisenhower said, “plans are worthless, but planning is everything” (Wall Street Journal, 1957, p. 14).

Along with Beijing, Moscow seeks a multipolar world in which US hegemony comes to an end. As Alexander Lukin recently pointed out, the “common ideal of a multipolar world [has] played a significant role in the rapprochement between Russia and China” (2018, p. 78). As Gregory Karasin put it over twenty years ago, during the Yeltsin years, the support of the two great powers for a multipolar world was “particularly important” at that time “when the international community still face[d] the inertia of the way of thinking that characterized the Cold War, claims to exclusive leadership, and attempts to reduce the development of international relations to unipolarity” (1997, p. 16). This is even more so the case today, some twenty years later, when Russia has recovered significantly from the post-Soviet glut it found itself in during the 1990s while China has continued to grow steadily and modernize its military.

### In the Crosshairs

Russia and China were explicitly mentioned in the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* as the great powers with which the US is in competition. Both Russia and China have come a long way since the 1990s, and the “friendship” that emerged in the immediate post-Tiananmen period and continued to grow over the years now today appears to be one of the strongest bilateral alliances on the planet (Allison, 2019). Not only does the alliance provide each country with a secure rear flank, technology transfers and weapons sales support each other’s military-industrial complexes and military modernization. While Russia is still ahead of China in certain areas, including maritime, aviation, and weapons systems, the Kremlin knows that this edge will likely give way in the next 10-20 years, as China emerges as the more advanced and powerful of the pair. Hence the focus of acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan on “China, China, China”—for all indications are that, in the long term, China will dwarf Russian military power and present the greatest threat to US interests and national security.

Together, Russia’s tentacles on its former Soviet neighbors and Moscow’s strategic alliance with Beijing in pursuit of a multipolar world (in which the US is no longer the global hegemon) form the two main pillars upon which Putin’s grand strategy rests. All other aspects of its foreign policy behavior can be traced back to this dual-pronged grand strategy. As the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* puts it, “Russia seeks veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor.” These, in a nutshell, are the objectives of Russia’s grand strategy. All of Moscow’s machinations—both foreign

and domestic, from clamping down on civil liberties at home to meddling in Venezuela's revolution abroad—are all in support of these larger strategic objectives.

The enduring national interests of the United States are the support of freedom, liberty, and free markets around the globe. Our friends and allies figure prominently here, as we ally with other democracies and regimes that share our values. Such was the justification for the expansion of NATO, especially as articulated by President Bill Clinton at the time. He also stated in regard to NATO expansion that European security was a vital US national interest, pointing to the two World Wars as examples of what happens when nations go to war with each other. Twenty years after the first wave of NATO expansion, the same can be said of our NATO partners, all fledgling free-market democracies, making progress at various paces. Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine have made known to the world that it does not consider the borders of European states as sacrosanct, which is seen by the US as a critical component of the international system. Russia thus presents a challenge to these interests, not only in Europe, but all along its border, particularly in countries with significant pockets of Russian-speakers (e.g., Kazakhstan, Estonia, etc.). Whether NATO members or not, Russian aggression and recidivism run counter to US national interests, and the US is compelled to counter this aggression where it can. The problem here is that Russia has a propensity to act in the gray zone between peace and war, where they can deny involvement and quite often get away with actions that violate international norms, if not international law. As we look to the future and try to anticipate it, we must focus on Russia's gray zone activities and how they may counter vital US national interests.

## References

- Allison, G. (14 December 2018). China and Russia: A strategic alliance in the making. *The National Interest*.
- Applebaum, A. (28 September 2015). *Putin's grand strategy*. Public lecture delivered at the George Bush School of Government and Public Service, College Station, Texas.
- Bovdunov, A. (19 January 2018). Sopernichestvo velikikh derzhav': Chem prodiktovana novaya oboronnaya strategiya Pentagona. *RT*. Retrieved from <https://russian.rt.com/world/article/472066-ssha-oboronnaya-strategiya-rossiya>
- Cooper, J. (2012). Reviewing Russian strategic planning: The emergence of strategy 2020. Rome: NATO Defense College.
- Gurfinkiel, M. (15 April 2018). The strategic goals of a restored Russia. *BESA Center Perspectives Paper*, No. 796.
- Gvosdev, N. & Marsh, C. (2014). *Russian foreign policy: Interests, vectors, and sectors* (pp. 92-95). Washington, DC/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage/CQ Press.
- Karasin, G. (1997). Rossiya i Kitai na poroge tysyacheletiya. *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn*, 6, pp. 1-16.
- Lo, B. (2008). *Axis of convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the new geopolitics*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Lukin, A. (2018). *China and Russia: The new rapprochement*. London: Polity.

- Marsh, C. (2006). *Unparalleled reforms: China's rise, Russia's fall, and the interdependence of transition*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- McFaul, M. (17 November 2003). The grand strategy of Vladimir Putin. *The Weekly Standard*.
- Monaghan, A. (September 2013). Putin's Russia: Shaping a grand strategy? *International Affairs*, 89(5), pp. 1221-1236.
- Posner, E. (25 April 2014). Putin's grand strategy. [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <http://ericposner.com/putins-grand-strategy>
- Starr, S.F. & Cornell, S. (2014). Introduction. In Starr, S.F. & Cornell, S. (Eds.) *Putin's grand strategy: The Eurasian Union and its discontents* (pp.1-8). Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.
- U.S. Department of Defense (2018). *National defense strategy*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense.
- Wallander, C. (2007). Domestic sources of Russia's less-than-grand-strategy. In Tellis, A. & Wills, M. (Eds.) *Strategic Asia 2007-2008: Domestic politics, change and grand strategy* (pp. 140-175). Seattle, Washington: National Bureau of Asian Research.
- Wall Street Journal (19 November 1957). *Meeting the unknown* (p. 14), Column 1.

## PART II. HOW DOES RUSSIA PERCEIVE DETERRENCE, COMPELLENCE, ESCALATION MANAGEMENT, AND THE CONTINUUM OF CONFLICT?

### Chapter 6. Russian Strategic Intentions

Dr. Daniel Goure  
Lexington Institute  
[dgoure2001@yahoo.com](mailto:dgoure2001@yahoo.com)

#### Abstract

One cannot understand how the Russian leadership thinks strategic issues without appreciating the fact that the Kremlin sees itself as being at war with the West. To use a common US military term, it is always phase zero. As viewed from Moscow, the war is not total but it is fundamental. Since Russia is at war, for the Kremlin there is no separate gray zone, nor are there unacceptable forms of deterrence, compellence, or coercion. In Russian strategic thought, deterrence and compellence are two sides of the same coin. For the Kremlin, deterrence is a form of operant conditioning; it is in effect when the US and its allies condition their actions with an eye towards avoiding confrontation with Russia. Compellence is the active form of the same principle. It is a matter of actively challenging Western actions in order to force a stand down. Instead of the term compellence, a better word to describe the Russian approach is coercion. Russia's ability to manage risk in the so-called gray zone is a function of its successful integration of all the instruments of state power. The Kremlin views conventional and nuclear forces as means for managing risk. The threat to resort to the deployment of conventional forces or to employ nuclear weapons is a time-tested tool of the Kremlin's crisis management strategy.

#### Deterrence, Compellence, and the Continuum of Conflict—A Russian Perspective

To understand the Russian view of deterrence, compellence, and the continuum of conflict, it is critical to begin with a recognition of the fact that these are political-legal constructs that are derived from a Western philosophical-normative tradition. Moreover, Russian leaders believe that the US and its allies are attempting to impose on Russia these legal constructs along with those that are foundational to democratic governance and the existing international order. To the Kremlin this is hostile behavior that has the purpose of preventing Russia from taking its rightful place as a great power. In addition, the imposition of a Western political-legal culture would threaten the current leadership's hold on power.

One cannot understand how the Russian leadership thinks about strategic issues without appreciating the fact that the Kremlin sees itself as being at war with the West. To use a common US military term, it is always phase zero. The US security construct is rooted in the idea that there is war and there is peace. This is inadequate as a framework for understanding Russian strategic thought. Western strategic thinkers have had to create a new concept, that of a "Competitive Zone or Gray Area Conflict" that is alleged to exist in the space between war and peace in a clumsy attempt to reconcile the Russian and Western views of the current political-military struggle.

The Kremlin believes that the West has been engaged in an ongoing war against Russia, employing a full range of means, but particularly information operations. Consequently, the Kremlin sees itself as



having to fight a sophisticated international counterinsurgency campaign against the West, in general, and NATO and the United States, in particular.

As viewed from Moscow, the war is not total, but it is fundamental. For Russia, the war is about overturning the existing international order in order to create an environment in which the Kremlin achieves three essential, even existential, goals. The first is gaining a veto over any action by the United States and its allies that might threaten Russian security. The second is creating a sphere of influence that encompasses the states to its east and south. The third is being granted the right to prevent its political, legal, and economic system from being “infected” by Western ideas and values.

As Putin and other Russian leaders have made clear, this war is one using primarily non-military means and intended to destabilize the Russian government and political system. The threat they fear is one of political destabilization at home. In effect, the principal threat to Russian security is an insurgency, but one that exists not simply within Russia but outside it as well.

President Putin’s decision is influenced by Russia’s experiences since the end of the Cold War—internal coup attempts, terrorist attacks, ‘colored revolutions’ around Russia, wars inside and outside of Russia, unfinished reforms, and perceptions of Russia’s natural vulnerability to a fate similar to that of the Soviet Union given its one-dimensional economic base and political superstructure. However, Putin’s policy is driven mostly by concerns about Russia’s inability to compete on almost any level and in almost any sphere with the world’s greatest powers absent fundamental changes to the security, energy, economic, and financial systems around Russia (Covington, 2015, p.3).

Since Russia is at war, for the Kremlin, there is no separate gray zone. Nor are there unacceptable forms of deterrence, compellence, or coercion. The war is being fought on multiple levels simultaneously and with all means available, if not in every way. The Russian strategy seeks to move seamlessly between political/diplomatic activities, economic measures, para-military operations, and the employment of conventional and, finally, nuclear forces. The use of non-military means or what the West identifies as para-military forces is preferable largely because it is more efficient than employing classic military forces and because Russia could be called the West’s equal or even superior in these capabilities.

Russia has made use of the limited means at its disposal both to deter the West and to further its efforts to undermine external threats. Western observers tend to focus on the non-military and paramilitary means employed by Moscow, labeling them as examples of “hybrid warfare” or of “gray zone” conflict capabilities. As Russian experts are quick to point out, these terms have no equivalents in Russian strategic theory. These means are being employed as a part of a seamless, coordinated conflict strategy that sees no true distinction between war and peace.

Any discussion of so-called gray zone conflicts should not obscure an understanding of the extent to which Russia sees modernizing its conventional and nuclear forces as essential tools of its approach to conflict below the threshold of war as defined in the West. Also, these same capabilities are relevant, even critical, to the way Moscow seeks to conduct local aggressions. Russian adventures in Eastern Europe and the Middle East have rapidly morphed from hybrid operations employing non-traditional means and methods to classic conventional military operations. The recent intervention in Syria was a model power projection operation, suggesting that the Russian military is quite capable of limited high intensity conventional operations (Monaghan, 2015, p.72).

What makes Russia a particularly dangerous adversary is that its use of these non-traditional means is integrated with and supported by traditional conventional military capabilities and both are

covered by a nuclear umbrella. Moreover, as demonstrated by the operations to seize Crimea and destabilize Eastern Ukraine as well as numerous recent exercises, the Russian military is increasingly capable of and, one might argue, specifically designed to support the employment of non-traditional/informational means and methods.

Russian thinking about conventional and nuclear deterrence is strongly influenced by their view that these capabilities are relevant, even critical, to achieving victory in conflicts that primarily involve non-military or paramilitary means. While the Russian military plans for the possible use of nuclear weapons in a conflict with NATO, this does not mean that Russian leaders would welcome such a scenario. In addition to serving as the primary deterrent of a nuclear attack on the homeland, Moscow views nuclear weapons as a counter to the West's advantages in long-range conventional strike capabilities and a key tool in its strategy for so-called hybrid warfare. This expansive view of the role of nuclear weapons in conflict with NATO suggests that the classic notions of red lines and rungs on the escalation ladder may be disappearing. As Dr. Stephen Blank (2018) observed: "arguably there is a seamless web leading from conventional scenarios up to and including these supposedly limited nuclear war scenarios, perhaps using tactical nuclear weapons for which the West as of yet has found no response."

The development of advanced conventional capabilities, including hypersonic weapons, is viewed by Russia both as a means of deterring/coercing the West and as a way of achieving military impacts equivalent to those that result from the employment of nuclear weapons while avoiding many of the downside collateral consequences. If successful, traditional strategic deterrence could be extended to the realm of conventional conflict.

Russia's ability to manage risk in the so-called gray zone is a function of its successful integration of all the instruments of state power. The Kremlin views conventional and nuclear forces as means for managing risk. The threat to resort to the deployment of conventional forces or to employ nuclear weapons is a time-tested tool of the Kremlin's crisis management strategy.

Moscow is willing to accept limited gains and the creation of so-called frozen conflicts if this avoids unnecessary or costly escalation. This is particularly the case in the regions that Moscow believes are within its sphere of influence. The situation in Eastern Ukraine is an example of a frozen conflict. While Moscow would like to have Ukraine in its orbit, it is preferable to ensure that this country remain weak and in a state of perpetual internal division than that it shifts allegiance to the West.

In addition, over the past several decades, Moscow has successfully added new capabilities to its more established suite of means. For example, the creation of private para-military companies has allowed the Kremlin to deploy sophisticated combat units in regional conflicts.

The essence of the Russian approach to deterrence and compellence is how these concepts are used as active tools of the Russian strategy to conduct the war with the West. Deterrence and compellence serve the need to prevent the US and the West from countering Russian efforts to influence events in the international environment while simultaneously countering Western actions that threaten Russia or its desired sphere of influence.

The Kremlin has long employed non-kinetic means, from information warfare to cyber operations and classic espionage/influence operations not only to achieve specific political and military objectives, such as undermining the credibility of Western institutions and political processes, but also as a way of influencing Western political and military thought regarding the nature of modern war and, hence, the boundaries of classic deterrence operations. For example, the West has chosen

not to treat Russian attempts to influence its political processes as acts of war. As a result, Russia can operate in this domain without a concern that its actions will trigger a classic deterrence response. The West is, if anything, self-deterred.

While some Western experts describe Russian thinking regarding deterrence as primarily defensive in nature, this is misleading. Russian military doctrine sees the threat to employ conventional theater or strategic nuclear forces as a means of dissuading or even defeating outright a Western response to lesser Russian aggression. In such a scenario, it is Russia that is seeking to alter the status quo by means of force, and the function of its conventional and nuclear forces is to deter a Western response. Information operations, conducted prior to onset of hostilities would be directed, in part, to sensitizing Western leaders and populations to the risks associated with any effort to counter Russian aggression.

In Russian strategic thought, deterrence and compellence are two sides of the same coin. For the Kremlin, deterrence is a form of operant conditioning; it is in effect when the US and its allies condition their actions with an eye towards avoiding confrontation with Russia. Compellence is the active form of the same principle. It is a matter of actively challenging Western actions in order to force a stand down.

Instead of the term compellence, a better word to describe the Russian approach is coercion. The most effective coercion is achieved with a minimum employment of military force. Russia is developing an array of informational, conventional, and nuclear means to allow it to pursue 'cross-domain coercion' (Adamsky, 2017, p. 1-28). Information operations work across all potential domains or forms of conflict to orchestrate activities and support establishment of a favorable balance of forces. From the Kremlin's perspective, information operations can overturn regimes and destroy countries, as exemplified in the breakup of Yugoslavia and the various color revolutions. The specter of extreme violence resulting from the use of advanced conventional or theater nuclear weapons is an essential element of the information campaign, employed to paralyze Western responses to Russian aggression.

Moscow typically seeks to manage escalation prior to the initiation of a crisis or conflict. The invasion of Crimea is an extremely useful example of a sophisticated, multi-level strategic campaign to achieve a geo-political objective while managing escalation. The use of information operations, cyber attacks, and para-military forces as a prelude to the introduction of conventional military capabilities backed up by the threat of long-range strike forces enabled Russia to increase the military threat in the area as needed to control Ukraine's and the West's response to the invasion. Russian military leaders sought to communicate to NATO the threat that an attempt to retake Crimea could be met by the use of nuclear weapons.

Moscow sees its nuclear forces as central to its ability to control escalation. The Kremlin's declaratory nuclear policy, its publicity campaign around new nuclear capabilities, the alleged development of "terror" weapons, the expansion of its theater nuclear arsenal and deployment of advanced nuclear weapons to Europe are all intended to create an atmosphere that will contribute to Russia's ability to control escalation in the event of a confrontation with the US or NATO.

The Russian military is focused on the development of asymmetric capabilities that can counter the sophisticated conventional systems being developed in the West. This is a major reason for Russia's military investments. Even limited nuclear strikes at the outset of a conflict are a form of escalation control. Investment in anti-space capabilities, electronic warfare, cyber weapons, and advanced theater nuclear weapons. Escalation can be controlled by using those asymmetric capabilities to blind US

forces and deny them critical networks on which its advanced precision strike capabilities rely. Even limited nuclear strikes at the outset of a conflict are a form of escalation control.

The contest between the United States and Russia is primarily military and will be won or lost largely by non-military means. In order to deny Moscow's goal of disrupting the current international security system, it is necessary that the West deny the Kremlin the ability to disrupt this order at minimum risk and an acceptable price. Countering Russian hybrid warfare operations and deterring Russian conventional and nuclear threats will ensure that the competition between the Russia and the United States remains in areas where the latter has distinct advantages such as economics, information, the rule of law, the global banking system, and advanced technology.

## References

- Adamsky, D. (2017). From Moscow with coercion: Russian deterrence theory and strategic culture. *Journal of Strategic Studies* (pp. 1-28). DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2017.1347872
- Blank, S.J. (Ed.). (2018). *The Russian military in contemporary perspective*. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College.
- Covington, S. (August 2015). *Putin's choices for Russia* (p. 3). Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School.
- Monaghan, A. (2015-16). The 'war' in Russia's 'hybrid warfare' (p. 72). *Parameters*, 45(4).

## Chapter 7. Russia's Evolving Approach to Deterrence

Mr. Daniel Flynn  
Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)  
[daniejf@dni.gov](mailto:daniejf@dni.gov)

### Abstract

Russia is adopting coercive strategies involving the orchestrated employment of nonmilitary and military means to deter and compel the United States prior to and after the outbreak of hostilities. Russia's evolving strategies, however, will likely increase the risk of miscalculation and escalation during a future crisis involving the United States. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's approach to deterrence has evolved as its capabilities and assessment of the strategic environment changed. Russian military planners are adopting comprehensive approaches to deterrence involving the orchestrated employment of nonmilitary and military means, including information, space, conventional military, and nuclear capabilities. Russia's concepts also include options for preemptively employing force to induce shock and dissuade an adversary from conducting military operations and to compel a de-escalation of hostilities. In response to a threat of US military intervention that challenge Russian vital interests, Moscow would probably seek to use these approaches to dissuade and compel Washington to limit US actions and prevent the outbreak of a significant military conflict and, failing that, manage escalation and induce a de-escalation in an attempt to end the conflict on favorable terms.

### How Russia Defines "Deterrence"

Russian strategists define the concept of "deterrence" in their military publications differently than the United States. Russian discussions of "deterrence" include elements of both dissuasion and compellence and is more analogous to what the US military would define as coercion. For example, according to Dima Adamsky (2015), Russian professional discourse often mixes the terms coercion, deterrence, and compellence and uses them interchangeably. This is not just simply an issue of translation or variations in terminology. It is a difference in fundamental mindset. In Russian concepts, "deterrence" actions can occur in times of peace and crisis to prevent war and support the achievement of political goals. "Deterrence" actions also can take place after the outbreak of hostilities to manage escalation and compel a de-escalation of the conflict on favorable terms. For example, Russian military might take forceful actions during a crisis to compel the United States to change its behavior and forgo conducting a military intervention. While from the US perspective such actions would appear highly escalatory, the Russian military would view itself as operating in the realm of "deterrence" and conducting defensive actions with the intent of preventing further hostilities and de-escalating the crisis. Failure to understand this mindset could create conditions for miscalculation and unintentional escalation of future crises.

### Russia's Evolving Approach to Deterrence

Since the end of the Cold War, Russian military strategists have redefined their approach to deterrence in response to changes in the strategic security environment and Russian military capabilities. Kristen Ven Bruusgaard (2016), in her study of Russian "strategic deterrence," has identify several stages in Russian military thinking regarding deterrence from the 1990s to the present. One should think of these stages, however, as a continuous process of Russian examination and reevaluation on how best to prevent and manage United States and NATO military operations in

the post-Cold War period rather than discrete strategies. Since the 1990s, Russia's approach to deterrence has expanded, shifting from a focus on nuclear weapons to incorporating conventional military and nonmilitary means as Russian capabilities continued to advance.

### The Emergence of the Theory of "Nuclear De-Escalation"

By the late 1990s, Russian military strategists realized they had a problem. Although the Cold War was over and a global nuclear war with the United States was extremely unlikely, Russia still faced the prospect of potential US or NATO intervention in a limited local or regional conflict that threatened Russian vital interests. The 1999 NATO intervention against Serbia during the conflict over Kosovo realized Russian fears. From Moscow's perspective, NATO's attack on a Russian client state, over Russia's objections and without a UN mandate meant that Russian deterrence capacity had seriously diminished. Furthermore, Russian strategists saw NATO's intervention in Kosovo as raising the possibility of the United States or NATO intervening in other conflicts in the region, such as in Chechnya that would pose even greater problems for Russia's security interests (Sokov, 2014).

Given the deteriorated condition of Russian conventional military capabilities, Russian military strategists considered how to employ Russia's nuclear arsenal in a regional conflict to prevent a significant intervention by a superior conventional military force. The problem for Russian strategists was how to make the threat of nuclear weapons appear credible to have the desired "deterrent" effect (S. Yu. et al, 2000). To have a credible coercive capability, these strategists believed Russia had to demonstrate its willingness to employ nuclear weapons in response to an intervention by a conventionally superior adversary while at the same time limiting the potential for further escalation to a strategic nuclear exchange. This thinking led to the theory of nuclear de-escalation. This theory assumes that Moscow's vital national interests would be more at stake in a regional conflict on Russia's periphery than that of potential adversary, such as the United States or other NATO members. By employing nuclear weapons early in such a conflict, Moscow would demonstrate that the costs involved would outweigh any benefits an adversary would hope to obtain through military operations.

The theory also argued that constraining the physical impact of the nuclear weapons employed to create "tailored damage"—by either using very low-yield weapons (i.e., "nonstrategic" nuclear weapons) or by targeting unpopulated areas or infrastructure that limited the number of casualties and avoided strikes on the adversary's nuclear forces—Russia could demonstrate its resolve without provoking a retaliatory nuclear strike (Nedelin, Levshin, & Sosnovsky, 1999).<sup>2</sup> The intended effect on the adversary is more psychological than destructive and designed to alter the adversary's perceived cost-benefit calculus and thereby prevent further aggression. Proponents of the de-escalation theory believed that an adversary, in the position of deciding between whether to respond in kind and risk escalating the conflict to a full-scale nuclear war or deescalating and negotiating an end to the conflict would choose the latter, especially in situations where their own vital national interests are not at stake.

### The Development of "Nonnuclear Deterrence"

Although the Russian military establishment agreed on the continued role of Russian strategic nuclear weapons in deterring global nuclear war, debate continued during the 2000s over the viability of using nuclear weapons alone to prevent or de-escalate large-scale regional conventional conflicts (Blank, 2011). Russian strategists continued to argue whether the use of nuclear weapons in a

---

<sup>2</sup> See also: Malkow et al, and Sokov.

conventional regional conflict would have the desired effect of de-escalation or, instead, drive the adversary to respond in kind (Ven Bruusgaard, 2017). As the Russian military began to rebuild its conventional capabilities, Russian strategists gave more thought to the coercive role conventional strike weapons might play. In the early 2000s, former Deputy Defense Minister Andrei Kokoshin argued that there were limits to “nuclear deterrence” and that Russia needed to invest in conventional precision strike systems to obtain a credible “pre-nuclear deterrent” (McDermott & Bukkvoll, 2017). The 2010 Russian military doctrine made an initial reference to use of precision weapons as part of Russia’s “strategic deterrence.” The 2014 doctrine also mentions that Russia will achieve “deterrence” using nuclear and nonnuclear means.

Similar to the role of nuclear weapons in a regional conflict, Russian strategists believed the modern conventional weapons had the potential to prevent or control military aggression by imposing damage that would be unacceptable to an adversary. A number of Russian strategists and officials argued in favor using such strikes preemptively when US or NATO attacks against Russia’s vital interests appear imminent (Velez-Green, 2017). In 2008, Major General Burenok and Colonel Achasov wrote in *Military Thought*, the journal of Russian General Staff, that Russia should prepare “anticipatory” or reciprocal nonnuclear attacks against vital targets of an aggressor to impose costs that would exceed the benefits that an adversary hopes to achieve through military operations. The authors argued that Russia should carry out nonnuclear strikes when military aggression by a superior conventional adversary is imminent to deter that adversary from taking aggressive actions and to deescalate the situation. Furthermore, Russia should target these strikes against an enemy’s vital infrastructure, such as satellite, communications, air defense, command and control, and power generation systems, which would be disruptive to the enemy but not inflict high losses on the population in order to limit the risk of further escalation (Burenok & Achsov, 2008). The President of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences, General Makhmut Gareyev, also stated that the opening minutes of a contemporary limited-objective conflict should include anticipatory strikes against an adversary’s command and control and conventional strike systems (Polegayev & Alferov, 2015).

The development of a “nonnuclear deterrent,” however, does not replace the coercive role Russian nuclear weapons play in regional conflicts. Rather, nonnuclear capabilities are a “pre-nuclear deterrent” capability providing Moscow with coercive options at lower levels of conflict intensity. If such options fail to deter the enemy or compel a de-escalation, Moscow would still have the option of employing nuclear strikes. In this manner, Russia’s nonnuclear strikes also serve as a last warning to an adversary to de-escalate before Russia crosses the nuclear threshold.

### Incorporating “Nonmilitary” Deterrence

In 2008, General Gareyev proposed a new concept for “strategic deterrence.” He defined “strategic deterrence” as “a set of interrelated political, diplomatic, information, economic, military, and other measures aimed at deterring, reducing, and averting threats and aggressive actions on the part of any state (or coalition of states) by answering measures that reduce the opposite side’s fear or by an adequate threat of unacceptable consequences to it as a result of retaliatory actions” (Gareyev, 2008). In this concept, Russia would deter and compel adversaries through a combination of nonmilitary and military means rather than solely through the threatened use of force. This might include using social media and other informational means to shape public opinion to dissuade opposition to Moscow’s actions or manipulating the supply of Russian energy resources to persuade importing states to alter their behavior. The principle nonmilitary measures employed in “strategic deterrence” would include political, diplomatic, legislative, economic, informational, psychological, and moral measures (Matvichuck & Khryapin, 2010). Russia’s 2015 National Security Strategy codified this concept of “strategic deterrence” by noting that “[i]nterrelated political, military, military-technical,

diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures are being developed and implemented in order to ensure strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts.”

### “Strategic Deterrence” and the Russian Way of War

Russia’s concept of “strategic deterrence” is integral to Russia’s current approach to warfare. Russian strategists view “deterrence” operations as occurring both prior to and after the outbreak of hostilities. Prior to hostilities, Moscow seeks to shape the strategic environment to dissuade US or NATO intervention against Russian security interests. At the onset of hostilities, Russia’s goal is to prevent further aggression and compel a de-escalation and end the conflict on terms favorable to Moscow as soon as possible. Russia’s approach seeks to negate any benefits an adversary hopes to attain at each level of conflict by signaling capabilities and willingness to impose costs at even higher levels of escalation to dissuade further military operations and compel a de-escalation of hostilities.

If Russia’s initial actions fail to prevent a superior adversary from intervening militarily and threatening Russia’s vital interests, Russian military literature indicates Moscow would use force to prevent further intervention and de-escalate the situation to end hostilities on terms favorable to Moscow. This could involve conventional or information strikes on an adversary’s key infrastructure. If the situation was serious enough threat to Russia’s vital interests, Russia also might preemptively conduct conventional strikes in anticipation of an adversary’s imminent military operations to compel the adversary to reconsider and to deter further hostilities. If conventional strikes are insufficient to compel an adversary to de-escalate, Russian doctrine and statements by Russian officials suggests Moscow would threaten and potentially employ limited nuclear strikes to convince the adversary that the costs of further military intervention outweighs any expected benefits (Matvichuck & Khryapin, 2010). See Table 1.

### Implications for Future Crisis Dynamics

Russia’s approaches to deterrence raise the risk of miscalculation on both sides. The factors contributing to this risk include limitations in Russian capabilities to effectively signal their own intentions and manage escalation in contemporary conflicts.

Ambiguity in Russian thresholds for escalation, the dual-use nature of some of the weapons employed for signaling, and the potential divide between military and civilian leadership thinking are likely to impede Russia’s ability to clearly signal their intentions in a crisis. Russia’s thresholds for taking preemptive and other compelling actions appear ambiguous, raising the risk that at an opponent might trigger a forceful response unintentionally. It also possible that Russian military officials themselves may not know prior to a crisis the exact conditions at which certain actions would occur. Dima Adamsky (2015, p. 18), for example, notes that as of at least the fall of 2015 Russian strategic planners still lacked a codified procedure to estimate the conditions for which they would recommend to the senior leadership when to employ nuclear weapons to de-escalate a conflict. The dual-use nature of some Russia’s weapon systems is also likely to complicate signaling of Moscow’s intent during a crisis. The deployments of Russian weapons, like the Iskander, that can carry either conventional or nuclear weapons create ambiguity over whether Moscow intends such deployments to signal a lowering of the nuclear threshold, for example. Russia’s approach to deterrence and compellence is also based on the thinking of military strategists. During a crisis, it is possible that the political leadership in Moscow would opt for a more conservative approach and not approve taking preemptive actions. However, the Russian military is likely to make preparations during a crisis, such as increasing the readiness of the armed forces and deploying specific weapon systems to be able to carry out such actions if approved. This might lead to a situation in which the other side, observing



such military preparations, inadvertently perceives such activity as an intent to conduct preemptive or escalatory actions leading to an unintended heightening of tensions.

The character of modern conflict will probably challenge the ability of Russian military leaders to manage escalation in a future crisis. Russia’s approach to deterrence include the use of new capabilities, such as cyber and counterspace weapons, for which there is a lack of mutual understanding with the United States as to implications the use of these weapons will have on escalation dynamics during a crisis situation. A lack of mutually agreed upon norms between countries on the use of such weapons and where they fall on the “escalation ladder” creates a situation ripe for miscalculation and inadvertent conflict. The speed of modern conflict will also challenge Russian military officials to assess the effect of their deterrent actions and adapt quickly in a rapidly changing situation. Modern military capabilities such as cyber, anti-satellite weapons, and long-range, high-speed missiles—including potentially hypersonic weapons in the future—can decrease the time for making decisions and evaluating responses in a conflict.

Table 1. Potential Russian Coercive Actions During Peacetime, Crisis, and Conflict

Peacetime	Increasing Tensions—Crisis	Initial Period of Conflict
<p>Goal: Shape the Strategic Environment to Dissuade Aggression against Russian Interests</p> <p>Use information, economic, diplomatic, and psychological means to shape perceptions through strategic messaging</p> <p>Signal and demonstrate new military capabilities</p> <p>Conduct military exercises to demonstrate military strength</p> <p>Employ primarily non-military means, including cyber activities and covert support to proxies, to advance interests while staying below the threshold for open warfare to avoid prompting foreign intervention</p>	<p>Goal: Prevent Crisis from Evolving to Military Conflict by Deterring Aggression</p> <p>Conduct strategic messaging to foster divisions between Washington and its allies</p> <p>Manipulate export of energy supplies as part of economic coercion</p> <p>Demonstrate preparedness for military actions by deploying forces and conducting snap exercises</p> <p>Signal capabilities to conduct specific deterrence actions by openly deploying key capabilities, such as counterspace weapons and Iskander missile systems</p> <p>Demonstrate cyber capabilities through manipulation of key adversary information systems</p> <p>Conduct nuclear saber rattling through official statements about Russian nuclear</p>	<p>Goal: Compel a De-escalation and Deter Further Aggression through Actions Taken Preemptively or During the Early Stages of Conflict</p> <p>Conduct limited cyber and other information attacks on critical infrastructure, including non-destructive attacks on satellite systems</p> <p>Conduct destructive attacks on space systems</p> <p>Employ conventional precision-strike systems in limited attacks against critical infrastructure the initial period of conflict</p> <p>Use nonstrategic nuclear weapons in a limited or demonstration mode</p> <p>Employ strategic nuclear forces in a limited or demonstration mode</p>

	capabilities, deployment of dual-use forces, long-range patrols of Russian bombers, and/or exercises involving nuclear forces	
--	---	--

## References

- Adamsky, D. (November 2015). Cross domain coercion: The current Russian art of Strategy. *Proliferation Papers*, The Institut Français des Relations Internationales, No.54.
- Blank, S. (Ed.). (2011). *Russia nuclear weapons: Past, present and future*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, pp 10-11.
- Burenok, V.M. & Achsov, O.B. (January 2008). Non-nuclear deterrence. *Military Thought* (1).
- Gareyev, M.A. (8 October 2008). Strategic deterrence: Problems and solutions. *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)*, No. 183.
- Malkov, S.Yu. et al. (15 December 2000). On the question of a methodology for selection of rational strategies to safeguard strategic stability and nuclear deterrence in the modern era. *Strategiskaya Stabilnost*, No. 3.
- Matvichuck, V.V. & Khryapin, A.L. (January 2010). A strategic deterrence system under new conditions. *Military Thought*.
- McDermott, R.N. & Bukkvoll, T. (1 August 2017). *Russia in the precision strike regime*. Norwegian Research Defense Establishment.
- Nedelin, A.V., Levshin, V.I., & Sosnovsky, M.E. (May-June 1999). O primenenii iadernogo oruzhiya dlya deeskalastii voennikh dyestvii [On the Use of Nuclear Weapons for the De-Escalation of Military Conflict], *Military Thought*, No. 3, pp. 34-7.
- Polegayev, V.I. & Alferov, V.V. (2015). Nonuclear deterrence in the strategic deterrence system. *Military Thought*, July-September.
- Sokov, N.N. (March 2014). *Why Russia calls a limited nuclear strike "de-escalation,"* Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.
- Velez-Green, A. (April 2017). *The unsettling view from Moscow* (p.22). Washington, D.C.: Center for New American Security.
- Ven Bruusgaard, K. (19 July 2016). Russian strategic deterrence. *Survival*, 58:4.
- Ven Bruusgaard, K. (22 September 2017). The myth of Russia's lowered nuclear threshold," *War on the Rocks*.

## PART III. WHAT GRAY ZONE ACTIONS ARE RUSSIANS UNDERTAKING ACROSS THE GLOBE?

### Chapter 8. Russian Activities Across Europe (A Contrarian Assessment)

Dr. John Schindler  
The Locarno Group  
[provokatsiya@protonmail.com](mailto:provokatsiya@protonmail.com)

#### Abstract

Russia today is a spoiler in the US-led international system, especially in Europe, where the Kremlin continues to enjoy advantages over USG and NATO in key areas such as espionage and propaganda, in which Russian asymmetric power punches far above its weight. Contrary to conventional analysis, after two decades under Vladimir Putin, Russia represents an ideological challenge to the West, not just a political and military rivalry. Although NATO continues to possess impressive overmatch against Moscow, that edge is dwindling, and Western vulnerabilities in certain military areas are alarming. Moreover, the unwillingness of Western experts and governments to confront the ideological – as well as political and military – aspects of our rivalry with Putinism means that the threat of significant armed conflict is rising.

#### The Nature of the Regime

Putin's Russia bears similarities to the Tsarist past and the more recent Communist one but is truly reflective of neither previous system. Although Putin himself is very much a product of the Soviet system, indeed he is derided as a *sovok* ('dustpan' in Russian, meaning one who uncritically admires the Soviet past) by his enemies at home. His two decades in power since the end of the 1990s have delivered significant breaks from the Bolshevik experience in politics and Russian society more broadly.

Putin's Russia is neither free in a Western sense nor unfree in a Soviet one. It is a hybrid regime, a 'managed democracy' of a peculiarly Russian sort, with the Kremlin bestowing accolades on aspects of the Tsarist legacy and the Communist one too, while still being critical of both. Though power is centralized at 'the top' in the Kremlin, and regional power centers were brought under Moscow's heel in the early years of Putinism, it would be incorrect to view Putin's regime as possessing the long arms of the Soviet system under Stalin, for instance.

Here the prominent role of wealthy businessmen, so-called 'oligarchs,' is important but frequently overvalued by Western commentators. Although Putin rules with help from oligarchs and has become a billionaire himself thanks to those close and mutually beneficial relationships, top businessmen who fall afoul of 'the top' go into exile and not infrequently wind up dead under mysterious circumstances. (Schindler, 2016)

It's customary to track Putin's disenchantment with the West (particularly the United States) to his infamous speech at the 2007 Munich Security Forum, yet it needs to be stated that too many Western experts failed to realize just how angry the Kremlin was growing at the West by the late-aughts. Moreover, most of them missed indelible signs in the years running up to the 2014 annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression against Ukraine that Moscow was becoming implacably opposed to the postmodern West on an ideological level. Here Putin's fiery comments at the 2013 Valdai Club,

where he denounced the West as godless and even Satanic, deserved more attention than they received abroad (Schindler, 2014).

These themes became regime propaganda, and the events of 2014 were hailed by Putin with an unprecedented dose of Russian (*russkiy* not *rossiskiy*<sup>3</sup>) nationalism, combined with Third Rome-flavored religious mysticism with the staunch backing of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has become a major supporter of the regime and the de facto state religion under Putin.<sup>4</sup> This heady brew of religious nationalism falls on deaf ears in the West, which finds it strange and atavistic, yet it resonates with average Russians in a way that Bolshevism never did.

It should be noted that Russians are not especially religious in terms of churchgoing but under Putin, Orthodoxy has been reborn and weaponized to bolster the regime and encourage popular support for its policies. Putin himself puts on a convincing act of being an Orthodox believer, and whether he really is one (or not) is immaterial to the prominent role that Russian Orthodoxy now plays in creating pro-regime ideas and actions among average Russians. This harkens back to ancient Orthodox notions of *symphonia* ('symphony,' meaning symbiosis between secular and religious rulers) which stand in marked contrast to current Western ideas about 'separation of church and state.' Moscow in recent years has made clear that it views the present clash with the West as having a deep ideological aspect, rooted in nationalism and religion, whether the West notices this or not (Schindler, 2018a).

After 9/11, there was a rush among Americans to grasp the origins of the Salafi jihadist ideology that motivated its purveyors' aggression. Similarly, it is now imperative for Westerners to grasp the Putinist ideology, what motivates it, and why it is encouraging more confrontation – not conciliation – with the West.

## The Special Services

One aspect of Putinism that is unique in Russian history is the dominant role of the security agencies, what Russians term the 'special services,' in nearly all regime affairs. The dominance of these secretive agencies in the formulation of policy, foreign and domestic, has no precedent in Russian history, which for centuries has valued its spy services more than Western countries do. The connection of Putin's special services to the past, including the darkest periods of Communist oppression, is illustrated by the fanfare with which the regime recently celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Soviet secret police – and their direct connection to Kremlin spies today (Schindler, 2017).

Here's Putin's past in the KGB plays a major role and as the Kremlin boss, he has surrounded himself with senior decisionmakers very much in his own image. Indeed, there are few people at 'the top' in Moscow who didn't grow up in the Soviet intelligence apparatus, military or civilian. They are 'Chekists' to use the proper term and Putin himself famously stated, 'there are no "former" Chekists."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> In the Russian language, *russkiy* denotes Russian in an ethnic sense while *rossiskiy* refers to anyone in Russia, e.g. the Russian Federation is *Rossiskaya Federatsiya*.

<sup>4</sup> On the Third Rome myth and Russian imperial ideology see Poe, M. (2001). Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a "Pivotal Moment". *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 49(3), neue folge, 412-429. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41050783>

<sup>5</sup> In the original (which has become a mantra of Putinism): «Бывших чекистов не бывает»

In many ways, Putinism can be viewed as the fulfillment of the long-term goal of Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB from 1967 to 1982 (and briefly the top party boss, 1982-84), who assessed a political system in collapse and wanted Chekists, the only truly reliable element, to take over everything. Under Putin, they have done so.

Here the Federal Security Service (FSB), which Putin headed in 1998-99, plays a preeminent role, and the FSB and Russia's other intelligence agencies carry much more weight in broad policymaking than any Western spy services do. They function as the regime's backbone, its *corps d'elite*, and they possess the favor of 'the top' – and all Russians know it. Under Putin, Russia's special services hold a power and prestige they never had under the Communists, when those had to be shared with the party and the military. However, the dominance of Chekists in Moscow mandates a bias for action (sometimes for its own sake), a knack for tactics over strategy, and a tendency to conspiratorial groupthink in the upper reaches of the Kremlin.

### The Military

Russia's military was a major loser of the Soviet collapse, and only over the past decade has it begun to show signs of renewed vitality and operational competence, both of which were sorely lacking in the 1990s, as revealed by the debacle of the First Chechen War (1994-96). More recent operations in Georgia in 2008 and in Crimea/Ukraine in 2014-15 have demonstrated that the Russian military is a force to be reckoned with again.

The appearance of the Little Green Men of Russian military intelligence (GRU) in the latter conflict stunned the world, but just as impressive was the battlefield performance of Russian artillery and electronic warfare (EW), which when linked together decimated Ukrainian units. In these areas, Russia is ahead of NATO, including the U.S. Army, which has lost a generation in artillery and EW and is now playing catch-up. Given the historical dominance of artillery in the Russian army, this merits serious attention by the Atlantic Alliance (Schindler, 2018b).

Russia's military still has major problems with readiness, corruption, and morale compared to most NATO forces, but its strength ought not to be underestimated. While there is little question that NATO would prevail in any protracted war against Russia, in which the Atlantic Alliance's full military resources could be brought to bear, Russia's odds in any short or medium-term conflict appear more favorable.

That said, there is a dearth of serious strategic thinking in the Kremlin, as witnessed by the 'frozen conflict' in southeastern Ukraine, where the Russian military and its local proxy forces in 2014 purchased a bridgehead to nowhere and nobody in Moscow seems to know how to end that low-boil war while saving face, five years on. Given Russia's mounting economic problems stemming from its aggression with Ukraine, the fact that the General Staff seems stuck in Donbas raises questions about strategic decision-making in Moscow.

### Spiritual Security

That seemingly endless war in Ukraine has been sold to the Russian public as a strategic necessity to protect fellow Russians from the genocide-inclined 'fascist junta' in Kiev. The religious aspects of the Ukraine war have been given prime attention in Kremlin media, and the conflict has become a showcase for the regime's ideology, which approves of conflict with the West – even military conflict – when needed since the godless postmodern West is in league with the Devil: according to Kremlin propagandists, quite literally.

Such messages seem laughable to the West but are taken seriously by many Russians, not least because they possess deep resonance with centuries of their history, which has long preached about the incompatibility of Eastern Orthodox values with the 'heretic' West. Now that critique encompasses withering language about Western secularism and decadence too, but its outlines were found in Russia half a millennium ago.

This religious vision has been also endorsed by the special services, who, led by the FSB, have created a doctrine they call 'spiritual security,' meaning an adherence to traditional religion and conservative social values as a core component of national security. This is the driver of Kremlin efforts to expel Western 'heretics' (usually Protestant Evangelicals or Jehovah's Witnesses) from Russia, which show no signs of abating; rather the contrary since 2014. Putin has stated that Russia's 'spiritual shield' – meaning the Orthodox Church and its teachings, with the backing of the regime – are as important to Russia's security as her nuclear shield, so the West needs to pay attention (Fedor, 2011, p.168-181).

### What Putin Wants

We have no idea what Putin 'really' believes as a matter of faith, but in practical terms he is a hard-headed realist who is fundamentally cautious – in 2014-15 he repeatedly turned down General Staff pleas to widen the war in Ukraine when Russian strategic victory over Kiev would have been relatively easy – yet prone to occasional gambling in *va banque* fashion. We should not expect that Putin will wake one day and decide to unleash all-out war on NATO, but the chances of that happening by accident are rising as both sides grow increasingly wary and prone to provocations.

Putin does not want the restoration of the Soviet Union, nor a Tsarist Empire 2.0, but he does not recognize the 1991 post-Soviet settlement as final. To the Kremlin, those are merely lines on a Communist map. Putin's acceptance of Ukrainian statehood is conditional at best, and the same can be said for his take on Belarus; Minsk's efforts to distance their country from Moscow's tentacles are doomed to fail in extremis. Putin will never part with Crimea, that matter is settled as far as most Russians are concerned, but a negotiated settlement of the Ukraine crisis is possible, yet only on Russia's terms, which seem unlikely to find favor in Kiev – or Brussels.

At root, Putin wants Russia to be respected as a great power, the historic and geographic hegemon over Eastern Europe, possessing a proprietary interest in Russians outside the borders of the Russian Federation. Putin and his regime view the European Union with undisguised contempt while the Kremlin's assessment of the Baltic States is that they are not 'countries' in the sense that Russia is. The risk of a Russian provocation going badly wrong is notably high regarding Estonia, given recent aggressive FSB operations against that country.<sup>6</sup>

Russia's current economic problems, derived in large part from sanctions caused by the Ukraine war, will make the Kremlin more, not less, likely to engage in adventurism against the West and NATO. While Putin does not consciously seek major war in Europe, the possibility of that breaking out on the fringes of the former Soviet Union are rising, not falling, in 2019.

---

<sup>6</sup> The FSB's 2014 planned abduction of the Estonian counterintelligence officer Eston Kohver on the tense border between their countries is precisely the sort of aggressive Chekist provocation that could result in an unwanted war between Russia and NATO. See: Whitmore, B. (2015, June 3). Why Eston Kohver Matters [RFE/RL]. Retrieved April 9, 2019, from The Power Vertical website: <https://www.rferl.org/a/why-eston-kohver-matters/27052027.html>.

## What's Ahead for EUCOM and NATO

Aggressive Russian Special War – that is, espionage, disinformation, cyber-attacks and disruptions, propaganda, terrorism, even assassinations abroad – will continue to be the Kremlin's major day-in, day-out weapon of choice against NATO and the West.<sup>7</sup> Special War, led by Russia's powerful and aggressive special services, will be employed, without restraint, to weaken Western resolve while creating political and military conditions favorable to Russia. That Moscow wants the end of both NATO and the EU – and the US military out of East-Central Europe – should not be in doubt.

EUCOM and NATO need to be prepared to blunt aggressive Russian military moves on the Alliance's fringes, especially the Baltic States, while the possibility of a Kremlin-backed coup in Minsk is real. For want of a rapid response by NATO, such regional confrontations could easily turn into a wider war which nobody on either side really wants.

EUCOM's current force posture in the AOR is inadequate to realistically deter possible Russian adventurism on the Atlantic Alliance's eastern edge. Deficits in artillery and EW are especially serious, while overall NATO readiness to contest possible Russian aggression in Eastern Europe is lacking.

## What is to be Done?

1. Understand the ideological aspects of the reborn military and political confrontation between Putin's Russia and the West since 2014.
2. Understand the real drivers of Kremlin policymaking, particularly as they relate to Russian activities designed to weaken and divide the West (especially NATO and the EU).
3. Understand the central role of the 'special services' in Kremlin decision-making, and how the dominance of spies in Moscow creates threats – and opportunities – for the West.
4. Understand Putin's strategic aims in Europe and the preeminent role of Special War in the Kremlin's quotidian aggressions against NATO and the West.
5. Strengthen NATO's military posture (including rapidly deployable forces) on the Alliance's eastern edge to deter Kremlin provocations and aggression.
6. Develop effective NATO counterespionage and counterpropaganda capabilities to limit the damage inflicted on Western institutions by Kremlin Special War, which will not cease, since they are cost-effective for Moscow.
7. Accept that Cold War 2.0 is here and shows few signs of abating without the fall of Putinism – which is unlikely to happen soon. Moreover, Putin's replacement could be a more sincere Russian nationalist than he is. This conflict, to include ideological aspects, is here to stay for at least decades.

---

<sup>7</sup> This author coined the term "Russia's Special War" in 2014, see: Higgins, A., Gordon, M. R., & Kramer, A. E. (2017, December 20). Photos Link Masked Men in East Ukraine to Russia. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/world/europe/photos-link-masked-men-in-east-ukraine-to-russia.html>.

## References

- Fedor, J. (2011). *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition, from Lenin to Putin*. New York: Routledge.
- Schindler, J. R. (2014, December 27). Putin's Orthodox Jihad. Retrieved April 9, 2019, from The XX Committee website: <https://20committee.com/2014/12/27/putins-orthodox-jihad/>
- Schindler, J. R. (2016, March 16). Another Defector Dead in Washington. *Observer*. Retrieved from <https://observer.com/2016/03/another-defector-dead-in-washington/>
- Schindler, J. R. (2017, December 22). Russia Celebrates the Grim Centenary of Oppressive Police Rule. *Observer*. Retrieved from <https://observer.com/2017/12/putin-russia-celebrate-centenary-of-brutal-cheka-police-force/>
- Schindler, J. R. (2018a, March 21). Russia Has an Ideology—and It's as Entrenched as Communism Was. *Observer*. Retrieved from <https://observer.com/2018/03/russia-putin-ideology-rules-cold-war-2-0-like-soviet-communism/>
- Schindler, J. R. (2018b, August 28). Outgunned U.S. Army Isn't Prepared For War With Russia. *Observer*. Retrieved from <https://observer.com/2018/08/post-gulf-war-us-army-unprepared-for-war-with-russian-military/>



## Chapter 9. Russian Activities in Europe

Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux  
Brigham Young University- Idaho  
[lamoreauxj@byui.edu](mailto:lamoreauxj@byui.edu)

### Abstract

Russia continues to present a threat to the United States in Europe, specifically through the use of media, trade relations, foreign direct investment, energy trading, diplomacy, military posturing (war games, air and sea space violations), interference in the political processes, and the continuation of frozen conflicts. In short, the Kremlin has mastered the use of “hybrid warfare” in driving their foreign policy. By such methods, Russia potentially undermines US interests in Europe far more effectively than if they were to pose any sort of direct military threat.

### Russian Gray Zone Actions in Europe

#### Primary Russian Interests and Objectives

Russia’s primary interests in Eastern Europe are: to maintain, or regain, its sphere of influence; to protect and preserve the identities of Russians living in the region, as well as the identities of others who share a common language, culture, religion and ethnicity; to limit the influence of Western Europe and the US in Eastern Europe.

#### Recent Actions Short of Armed Conflict in Europe

There are the regular avenues Russia uses in foreign policy: the media, trade relations, foreign direct investment, energy trade manipulation, diplomacy, military posturing (war games, air and sea space violations), interference in political processes, and the continuation of frozen conflicts. However, there is a one general practice that warrants a closer look: Moscow’s ability to sow societal discord. Consider the following scenarios.

First, the ethno-linguistic Russian population in the Baltic States can potentially be used as a fifth-column. This is not to claim that Russia is intentionally planting and training ethnic Russians in the Baltic States as agents of subversion (though, that is possible). In fact, they don’t need any sort of specialized training. Rather, Russia can easily use the already-existing discontent among ethnic Russian populations in the Baltic States who, in many cases, have limited rights simply by virtue of their status as ethnic and linguistic minorities. Furthermore, this population extensively consumes Russian media. The Kremlin, knowing this, intentionally feeds these consumers pro-Russian, and anti-Western content. Additionally, anti-Russian legislation within the Baltic States simply serves to heighten this discontent.

Second, in addition to the existing diaspora, large numbers of Russians are moving from Russia to the Baltic States; this represents something of a reversal of 1990s migration trends. These migrants are often wealthy, invest in the local economy, send their children to elite schools, and become active in local politics and society. While there is no guarantee that any of these are plants from the Kremlin, nor that they are definitely promoting a pro-Kremlin agenda, there is every possibility. They generally enjoy the freedoms offered by living in an EU country, but also still have a strong connection

with Russia and there is some potential (regardless of how small) that they become another fifth column.

Third, Russia has the potential to influence the domestic political scene across the West. Russia does not even need to push a pro-Russia agenda. It simply has to promote discontent, othering, and general societal divisions across the West. In doing so, Russia effectively divides society, weakens civil society, and undermines the potential bi-or multi-partisan nature of a functioning democracy. Though potentially extreme, and not necessarily realistic in the immediate future, societal divisions could become so dilapidating that Russia simply has to exaggerate and enhance differences (so effectively done through social media), and then watch the West tear itself apart. Even if Russia does not do this extensively within the Baltic States, the West tearing itself apart, especially in the weakening or collapse of the EU and/or NATO, would mean that Russia would not need to take any sort of military action and could still re-claim the Baltic States (and potentially other states within Europe) back into their sphere of influence. A significantly weakened West could do very little about it.

### Russian Influence Activities Among Key Regional Actors and Civilian Populations

Russia is attempting to influence key regional actors in Europe primarily through media, trade relations, foreign direct investment, energy trading, diplomacy, military posturing (war games, air and sea space violations), interference in the political processes, and the continuation of frozen conflicts. It is interesting to note here that two of the primary states in Western Europe, (Germany and France) are not patently opposed to taking a softer approach toward Russia than the US or the UK. While both Germany and France are still supporting sanctions, both have also indicated a willingness to engage with Russia more as equals (implying they may not view all of Russia's actions in Eastern Europe as aggressively as the US, the UK and others view them). Perhaps they may respect Russia's views of power balances and spheres of influence. With Brexit pending, this could significantly change the EU's approach to Russia and, in that vein, toward Eastern Europe. At the extreme, this could portend very ill for the Baltic States.

Russia is attempting to influence key civilian populations in Europe primarily through media: traditional and social. Russia is very good at arguing that they occupy a high ground vis-à-vis a morally defunct West (with its increasing secularization and promotion of "non-traditional" practices such as the LGBTQ lifestyle and abortion). Unfortunately, selling the moral high ground to ethno-linguistic Russians is not so difficult in Estonia and Latvia as both states have, to some extent, sidelined ethnic Russians, many of whom have lived in those states all their lives. Additionally, in Europe more generally, Russia doesn't need to promote any sort of agenda specific to themselves. They simply need to encourage discord between groups, which they effectively do by promoting nationalism.

### Perceived Russian Threats in Europe

Russia perceives NATO as the primary threat to its interests in Europe. Again, Kremlin's focus is spheres of influence and a balance of power. NATO expansion into the Baltic States, and talk of expansion into Georgia and Ukraine, throw both off. Additionally, though, the Kremlin sees the spread of democracy as a threat to the current Putin administration. Democracy in Eastern Europe is primarily promoted by the EU through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP). However, as both programs are largely uninfluential (with no promise of EU membership, both programs cannot sufficiently incentivize active participation among Eastern European states), they do not pose that great of a threat to Russia at present.

## Looking to the Future

### Potential Future Russian Activities in Europe

Russia will continue to use all of the avenues previously mentioned in this paper. Where open military aggression would provoke an equally aggressive response from the West, this sort of tampering (often referred to as hybrid warfare) could well elicit a subdued or hesitant response from the US or Western Europe. Specifically, Russia will continue to put even more effort into sowing discord across the West. It is an extremely cost-effective way of weakening the West and undermining liberal internationalism (countries may well hesitate to cooperate with the West if their societies have turned against itself). If the opportunity presented itself, Russia would encourage a frozen conflict in the Baltic States. However, this seems rather unlikely simply because, at present, there is not any sort of significant separatist movement in any of the Baltic States. This could change if ethnic Russians coalesce into something of a fifth column.

### A Potential Win-Win Scenario

A win-win scenario looks very different from a US perspective than from a Russian perspective. From a US perspective, it involves Russia recognizing, and *observing*, sovereignty for every independent state in the region. This would include decreased (or eliminated) war games which border on the Baltic States and decreased or eliminated air- and maritime-space violations. Farther to the east, it would involve Russia pulling out of frozen conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan/Armenia and eastern Ukraine, and giving Crimea back to Ukraine. Russia would need to decrease political interference in the West. Essentially, Russia would need to stop doing everything the US dislikes.

From the Russian perspective, a win-win looks like NATO removal from the Baltic States (both the presence currently there and, ultimately, membership in general), though Russia would not be opposed to the Baltic States remaining members of the EU. It looks like the Baltic States recognizing ethnic Russians as equal citizens, including Russian as an official language in at least Estonia and Latvia, and automatic citizenship for those remaining from the Soviet era who do not yet have citizenship. It looks like the lifting of the Ukraine-prompted sanctions. In other words, it looks like a balance of power where Russia has a sphere of influence up to (and probably including) the Baltic States, the US has a sphere of influence in Western Europe up to (but not including) the Baltic States, and the Baltic States serve as buffer states that are still, at least culturally and economically (but definitely *not* militarily) European. It also means no further talks of expanding NATO to Ukraine or Georgia.

## Conclusion

Two final thoughts. First, the concept of 'relative deprivation' argues that when one group feels deprived relative to another group, and perceives that the system perpetuates the deprivation, the deprived group is more inclined to drastic action to change a 'defunct' system. This can include everything from protests to violence or even revolution. It is important to note that there need not be any *actual* deprivation: just the perception that there is deprivation (which is where social media plays a significant role). Ironically, though the West is arguably more equal than most illiberal regimes, perceptions of deprivation persist, in part because of the easy of spreading false information via social media, and in part because institutionalized inequality still actually persists in the West, for example in Estonia and Latvia. Pursuant to this, the West needs to address both the perception of deprivation (by encouraging and facilitating the crackdown on false information on social media) and

the reality of deprivation ( by encouraging/pressuring ethnic and linguistic equality in the Baltic States). Both of these can significantly limit Russian influence in the West and promote the spread of international liberalism.

Second, and finally, the US and its allies in Europe need to think very carefully about how to spread liberalism. While liberalism is certainly to be desired, if it is not approached in a sensible way (i.e. in a way that will not provoke Russia), it will undermine the very spread of liberalism across Eastern Europe and could set the region back even further. With that in mind, the US needs to maintain influence in areas that are already part of the EU and/or NATO. Steps like those mentioned above will promote this. Furthermore, the US needs to encourage the continued spread of liberalism across Eastern Europe, but not necessarily through the spread of NATO. Rather, the US needs to encourage the EU to re-energize the ENP and EaP (or create something more useful) to take a more active role in the spread of liberalism in Eastern Europe.

## Chapter 10. Russian Activities in Central Asia

Dr. Marlene Laruelle  
 George Washington University  
[laruelle@gwu.edu](mailto:laruelle@gwu.edu)

### Abstract

For Russia, Central Asia constitutes a critical region. It has lost hegemony over it but maintains the status of “first among equals” in some crucial respects. After a very active period between 2010 and 2015, Russia has been taking less decisive actions in Central Asia over the past three years but continues to develop its strategies for the region, albeit at a slower pace and without as much fanfare. Russia is the only external actor that can display three forms of power: remunerative, punitive, and ideological/normative. Remunerative power, the main carrot that Moscow used in the region during the happy decade of the 2000s, is now difficult to exert given the current economic slowdown. So far, the Kremlin has never used punitive power on the Central Asian states. Ideological power could prove the most enduring, because it is not purely state-centric but is embedded in social and cultural interactions between Russian and Central Asian societies.

### Russian Gray Zone Activities—Central Asia

#### Russian Interests and Objectives

Central Asia represents a necessary piece to secure Moscow’s proclaimed role as the pivot of a larger Eurasian region, though not at the level of the contested neighborhood of Ukraine and Moldova. Central Asia is a natural gateway to vast territories to the east and south of Russia’s borders, as well as part of a—still potential—North–South Eurasian transportation corridor.

Russia’s interaction with the region is unparalleled by any other external actor. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan constitute the core of Russia-led multilateral institutions in the post-Soviet space, both in security (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and, for the former two, in economic cooperation (Eurasian Economic Union) (Kropatcheva, 2016; Libman, 2018). All the Central Asian states, with the exception of Turkmenistan, are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and two (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) are full-fledged participants of the “Caspian Five” group, the organization of Caspian littoral countries. Central Asian leaders are routinely invited to BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summits. Russia also counts on Central Asia’s votes at the UN General Assembly, though Moscow is sometimes disappointed with the positions taken by the bloc nations.

Russian remains to a large extent the *lingua franca* of the region, and many Central Asian natives continue to be educated in Russian universities. Russian diasporas, while they have shrunk throughout Central Asia, still play important economic, political, and cultural roles in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Laruelle, 2016). Central Asia also remains the main source of labor migrants to Russia. Finally, the rapidly growing Chinese presence in Central Asia increases incentives for regional economic and political elites to rely on Moscow—among other actors—as a counterweight to Beijing. As the leadership transition in Tashkent in September 2016 demonstrated, Russia’s relations with Central Asian countries are very resilient: post-Karimov Uzbekistan has been moving closer to Moscow after two decades of a more volatile relationship.

Though all Central Asian leaders aim to diversify their foreign policy portfolios, today, almost three decades after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Moscow remains a critically important center of political gravity for the region. It has lost hegemony over the region but maintains the status of “first among equals” in some crucial respects.

### Russian Influence Activities—Key Regional Actors

Russia is the only external actor that can display three forms of power: remunerative, punitive, and ideological/normative. Remunerative power, the main carrot that Russia used in the region during the happy decade of the 2000s, is now difficult to exert given the current economic slowdown. So far, the Kremlin has never used punitive power alone on the Central Asian states. Ideological power could prove the most enduring, because it is not purely state-centric but is embedded in social and cultural interactions between Russian and Central Asian societies. This ideological power can be studied through the normative influence of Russia over Central Asian societies, which expresses itself at multiple levels:

- Institutionally, by consolidating the authoritarian status quo—from validating local elections and maintaining socializing mechanisms (contacts between presidential administrations, Security Councils, Parliamentary exchanges) to shaping the definition of regime security as similar to state security (Jackson, 2010; Roberts, 2015). Russia's emphasis on stability, state authority, and non-interference suit the Central Asian governments better than political designs advanced by other external actors, especially Western ones that prioritize democratic and liberal standards.
- Diplomatically, by developing a sophisticated public diplomacy program that offers Central Asian elites and societies a large array of ideological and associative products that can adapt to their local context—from Eurasian integration to a Russian World and/or a conservative values agenda that can satisfy ethno-nationalists and the more Islamically-oriented part of the population.
- Culturally, by sharing the media dynamics coming from Russia and extending them to Central Asia, although at different levels depending on the country and the constituencies.

### Russian Influence Activities—Key Civilian Populations

Russia media presence constitutes probably the main tool of influence over civilian populations in Central Asia. Yet it remains difficult to study the impact thereof. Russian media presence can be divided into three vectors. The first one constitutes exogenous influence upon Central Asia, actively produced by Moscow and aiming at influencing Central Asian public opinion (*Russia Today*, weak in the region, and *Sputnik*, among the most popular websites in the region). The other two vectors are emitted passively by Russia because they are produced first and foremost for domestic audiences, not foreign ones. One of these is Russian media that are state-controlled but not actively directed at foreign audiences, including a large share of the programming on Central Asian channels, which was originally produced for Russian ones. The other is non-governmental cultural products that likewise find audiences abroad more or less incidentally. This is the case for many Russian cultural products, from literature to music, which are directed primarily at domestic audiences but also find success in Central Asia.

Sociological surveys in former Soviet states show public opinion in three countries of Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—largely sharing the same interpretations as public opinion in Russia. This parallel is less evident in Uzbekistan, yet compared to many other post-Soviet countries, Uzbek public opinion can still be considered closely aligned with its Russian counterpart. We have almost no information for Turkmenistan. In 2015, the US Broadcasting Board of Governors and the Gallup Organization published a series of surveys conducted throughout the whole post-Soviet region (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2016). These surveys show unambiguously that in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, the majority of the public consider Russian media to be highly reliable—and significantly more so than Western media.

However, it is hard to determine the extent of Russian media influence, which segments of public opinion it affects, which specific issues it focuses on, or how to interpret it. It is therefore crucial to dissociate Russian media influence topic by topic. Russian media have been most successful in shaping Central Asian public opinion on foreign policy and worldview, promoting the notions that the liberal order is an illusion; everything is geopolitical; the United States has a hidden hand in every major world event; history is made by civilizations; and Russia offers at least a balance against or possible alternative to the US/liberal order. This explains why Central Asian public opinion largely supported the Russian perception of the crisis in Ukraine, as well as laws against NGOs and other “foreign agents,” which the media frame in this “civilizational” language.

However, Russian media have failed, partly or largely, to produce a narrative on Central Asian domestic issues. When it comes to questions related to Central Asian history and Russia’s place within it, or national identity, Central Asian public opinion—even if they share many aspects of the current Soviet nostalgia—is much more critical than the Russian media would like it to be. The same goes for seeing Russian society and the Russian economy as a model for the future—success is more limited than Moscow’s massive investment in its media soft power was expected to achieve.

### Russia’s Perceived Threats in Central Asia

Russia’s concerns for Central Asia mostly boil down to three negative scenarios, each of which would shatter the current status quo and lead to multiple complications for the Kremlin (Malashenko, 2013; Laruelle and Kortunov, 2019).

(1) Chaotic regime change generating instability—especially in Kazakhstan. Anything similar to the “Arab Spring” in one or a number of Central Asian countries would be regarded as a direct threat to Russia’s security. Such a development could jeopardize Russian and Russian-speaking diasporas, call into question the integrity of Moscow-led multilateral institutions in the region, fan the flames of regional nationalisms, and even provoke interstate military conflicts over unresolved territorial disputes.

(2) The spread of Islamic radicalism and terrorism—from Afghanistan if the current leadership in Kabul falls, or based on Central Asian homegrown trends, facilitated by mounting social and economic problems, development inequality, high corruption, and abuse of power by local leaders. Growing demographic pressures (particularly in Uzbekistan), environmental problems, and what Moscow interprets, rightly or not, as local leaders’ deficit of sound long-term development strategies are also being kept in mind by Russian experts and policymakers.

(3) An overall decline in Russian influence, with China taking over the region not only economically but also in terms of security, culture, language, and the like (Wilhelmsen and Flikke, 2011). The new generations of Central Asians—except for labor migrants—feel much less connected to Russia than

their predecessors. For some members of the new generations, it is China, not Russia, that is regarded as the developmental model to follow. True, there is also a growing fear of China “taking over” the region, which forces regional elites to look at maintaining closer links to Moscow, but this fear will not necessarily be shared by new generations of local leaders.

### Past and Potential Future Russian Actions, Short of Armed Conflict

After a very active period between 2010 and 2015, Russia has been taking less decisive actions in Central Asia over the past three years. There are several reasons for this slowdown of activism: tensions with the West and a “pivot” to Asia that keep Moscow busy on a daily basis, on one side; and economic crisis (both domestic and linked to Western sanctions), as well as the 2018 presidential elections and the preparation for what might be Putin’s last term, which push the Kremlin to be more inward-looking, on the other side.

That said, Russia continues to develop its strategies for Central Asia, albeit at a slower pace and with little attention. It benefitted from the change of president in Uzbekistan by creating new partnerships with the Mirziyoyev regime; it has also been accelerating military and security cooperation with Kazakhstan, especially the project of a Unitary Regional Anti-Air Defense System. Additionally, Moscow has consolidated its stranglehold over Kyrgyzstan, which is now entirely back in the Russian orbit after years of being the most pro-Western country in the region; Russia also keeps a close eye on Tajikistan. Despite this, Russia has failed to convince Kazakhstan to draw closer and accept supranational institutions inside the Eurasian Economic Union, or to convince Tajikistan to enter the Eurasian Economic Union.

### Envisioning a Win-Win Scenario

No “Grand Bargain” between Russia and the United States looks possible or even desirable at this point. It makes little sense to discuss any general “code of conduct” of the two powers in Central Asia or for them to fight each other on such general issues as definitions of “democracy,” “stability,” and so on. Obviously, the first step toward many constructive proposals would be for each power to stop treating the other as an adversary in the Central Asian context: undermining each other’s objectives in the region is a zero-sum game for Moscow, Washington, and Central Asia alike.

Central Asia stands out as a comparatively “nontoxic” region where there are limited, but not insignificant, opportunities for US-Russia collaboration both bilaterally and within multilateral frameworks. Given the current sour state of US-Russia relations, it would make sense to keep existing pockets of US-Russia cooperation in Central Asia under the political radar. That approach would help protect this cooperation from becoming another bargaining chip in the ongoing game of sanctions and countersanctions. Difficult though it may be, an effort should be made to de-link interactions between Moscow and Washington in the region from US-Russia disagreements on Iran or Syria as far as possible.

Behind the high level of distrust and feeling of adversity on both the Russian and US sides, there are still several domains where their respective soft powers complement each other: in the space industry, civil security, job-creation mechanisms and rural human capital, and knowledge-sharing (Laruelle and Kortunov, 2019). Small, symbolic joint projects targeted at enhancing security and promoting development in the region would already be a major accomplishment demonstrating that US-Russia interaction in the region is not doomed to be a zero-sum game.



## References

- Broadcasting Board of Governors, J. (2016, February 4). Assessing Russia's Influence in its Periphery: Is Russia Really Winning the Information War? Retrieved March 17, 2019, from <https://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2016/02/BBG-Gallup-Russian-Media-pg1-02-04-165.pdf>
- Jackson, N. J. (2010). The role of external factors in advancing non-liberal democratic forms of political rule: a case study of Russia's influence on Central Asian regimes. *Contemporary Politics*, 16(1), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569771003593920>
- Kropatcheva, E. (2016). Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(9), 1526–1552. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1238878>
- Laruelle, M. (2016, October 24). Why No Kazakh Novorossiya? Kazakhstan's Russian Minority in a Post-Crimea World: Problems of Post-Communism: Vol 65, No 1. from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10758216.2016.1220257?journalCode=mpc20>
- Laruelle, M., and Kortunov, A. (2019) "Envisioning opportunities for U.S.-Russia cooperation in and with Central Asia." *Harvard U.S.-Russia Working Group Paper*.
- Laruelle, M., and Royce, D. (2015) Kazakhstani public opinion of the United States and Russia: testing variables of (un)favorability. *Central Asian Survey*, forthcoming.
- Libman, A. (January 9, 2018). Eurasian Economic Union: Between perception and reality. Retrieved January 2, 2019, from <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/01/09/8767/>
- Malashenko, A. (2013). *The Fight for Influence: Russia in Central Asia*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpj5q](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpj5q)
- Roberts, S. P. (2015). Converging party systems in Russia and Central Asia: A case of authoritarian norm diffusion? *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 48(2), 147–157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2015.06.004>
- Wilhelmsen, J., & Flikke, G. (2011). Chinese–Russian Convergence and Central Asia. *Geopolitics*, 16(4), 865–901. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2010.505119>

## Chapter 11. Russian Activities in the Middle East

Dr. Mark N. Katz  
George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government  
[mkatz@gmu.edu](mailto:mkatz@gmu.edu)

### Abstract

Russian activities in the Middle East have been animated by a number of objectives. These include making sure that the region does not serve as a source of support for Chechen and other Muslim rebels in Russia, pursuing Russian economic interests, demonstrating that Russia can operate as a great power in areas beyond the former Soviet Union, and advancing Russia's image as a more successful mediator than the United States. In addition to its military intervention in Syria, Moscow has become very active diplomatically in the region. Russian President Vladimir Putin has met with many Middle Eastern leaders, including several of them multiple times. In the Middle East, Russia claims to be a more reliable supporter of the authoritarian status quo than the US, which Moscow portrays as a disruptive power. Putin in particular has sought to pursue good relations with opposing sides in the Middle East's many conflicts, and he can be expected to avoid making a hard choice between any of them (including between Israel and Iran in Syria). While Moscow and Washington actually have some common interests in the Middle East (e.g. their mutual opposition to Sunni jihadists such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al Qaeda, and shared support of the same governments), Russia also seeks to take advantage of any difference between the US and various actors in the Middle East to increase Russian influence with them. Thus, despite sharing common interests, Russia is unlikely to collaborate with the US in pursuit of them.

### Examining the Gray Zone—Russia & the Middle East

#### Russian Interests and Objectives

Russia has several interests in the Middle East. First and foremost, Moscow wants to prevent Chechnya and the status of Muslims in Russia generally from becoming an anti-Moscow *cause célèbre* in the Muslim world the way that Afghanistan was in the 1980s. Under Putin, then, Moscow has courted all Muslim governments and the major nationally-oriented opposition groups (such as Hezbollah, Fatah, and Hamas). Moscow classifies even the Taliban in this latter category and believes that the two sides can work together. Additionally, the Russian government has sought to cooperate with each of these groups at least to the point that they have no interest or desire to support either internationalist jihadist groups (such as Al Qaeda or ISIL) or Chechen or other Muslim groups operating inside Russia.

Dating back to his early years as head of state, at the turn of the century, Putin has also seen the Middle East as a place not just to advance the economic interests of Russia as a whole, but of sectors of the economy that are vital to him and his principal supporters such as Russia's petroleum, arms, nuclear power, and agricultural industries. Russia now sells a considerable amount of arms to the Middle East. It has constructed one nuclear reactor for Iran and hopes to build more for it as well as other countries in the region. Additionally, Moscow sells a significant amount of wheat to Egypt in particular. Russian petroleum firms have found investment opportunities in the Middle East; relatedly, several Gulf Arab states have invested large sums in the Russian petroleum industry. Furthermore, Russia's economic interaction with the Middle East helps Moscow both escape the impact of Western economic sanctions and limit its economic dependence on China.

The Middle East is also a region in which Russia seeks to demonstrate that it is a global great power, and not just a regional power confined largely to its former Soviet sphere. The preservation of the Assad regime in Syria has been especially important for Moscow since Syria hosts the only Russian naval base outside the former USSR. Especially compared to the US's problematic interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, the successful Russian military intervention in Syria since 2015 has served to burnish Russia's image as a rising great power.

In addition, Putin sees the many conflicts in the Middle East as opportunities for Russian diplomacy to take charge of conflict resolution efforts, even if such efforts do not actually come to fruition. Moscow now sees the USSR's breaking diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967 as having been a mistake. This cleared the way for the US to work with all sides in the Arab-Israeli dispute, while the USSR was unable to engage with Israel; this dynamic enabled the US to dominate the peace negotiations afterwards. Moscow now sees the US and Russian positions as being reversed: the US cannot or will not talk with certain parties (including Iran, the Assad regime, and Hezbollah) while Russia talks with everyone. In doing so, Moscow has sought to persuade Middle Eastern actors that Russia is in a far better position than the US to bring about conflict resolution.

Russia is not actively trying to push the US out of the Middle East but sees the many differences between the US on the one hand and its Middle Eastern allies as well as adversaries on the other as an opportunity to increase Russian influence with them. By having good relations with all major actors in the Middle East except the jihadists, Moscow also wants to ensure that they do not support any American effort to exclude Russia from the region.

#### Recent Russian Actions, Short of Armed Conflict, in the Middle East

The Russian intervention in Syria that began in 2015 is Moscow's most important recent action in the Middle East. What is especially remarkable about this event, though, is the regional reaction to it. In the past, a Soviet military intervention in the region would have been seen as hostile and even threatening by neighboring countries. However, despite uneasiness by many Middle Eastern governments at this recent action, these leaders have not understood this campaign as presaging a Russian threat to them. Indeed, top officials from some Middle Eastern governments that had called for the downfall of Assad and were angry at Russia for defending his regime have also expressed admiration for how Putin loyally supports his allies. They contrast this with what they perceive as the Obama Administration undercutting America's longstanding Egyptian ally, Hosni Mubarak, during the 2011 Arab Spring as well as the Trump Administration's announcement that it is withdrawing US forces from Syria.

Perhaps Putin's greatest achievement in the Middle East has been to create the impression that Russia is a firm supporter of the region's largely authoritarian status quo governments while the US, either because of its support for democracy and human rights, or simply its desire to reduce its involvement in the region, is not.

This does not mean that some Middle Eastern governments have not had important differences with Russia. Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in particular are unhappy at Moscow's level of cooperation with Iran. Yet despite this, each of these states has increased its cooperation with Russia. In 2015-16, Russia's relations with Turkey deteriorated sharply when Turkish forces shot down a Russian military aircraft near the Turkish-Syrian border. Since mid-2016, however, Russian-Turkish relations have rebounded strongly (likely spurred by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's apology over the incident, and Erdoğan's perception of Russian support during the July

2016 Turkish coup attempt; indeed, Erdoğan understood Russian support to be greater than that offered by many Western nations).

### Attempted Russian Influence in the Middle East

Putin has been assiduously courting Middle Eastern leaders in his own special way. He seems much less concerned about being liked than in creating a situation where it is more advantageous for Middle Eastern leaders to cooperate with him than to not do so despite their objections to his cooperation with their adversaries. The key to the success of this policy is twofold: 1) Putin expresses unqualified support for the continuation of any given leader's rule; and 2) while Putin will not reduce his support to any country's adversary, he is willing to increase support for the country that fears it. For example, while Putin will not reduce Russian support for Iran to please Saudi Arabia, he is willing to increase Russian cooperation with Saudi Arabia (even though this displeases Iran). Of course, Middle Eastern leaders are pursuing a similar strategy toward Moscow by enmeshing Russia in such lucrative relationships with them that Putin and his powerful associates see their own interests as being served through maintaining good relations with each of them.

As in Russia itself, Moscow sees civilian populations in the Middle East as potentially destabilizing forces that need to be kept under strict control by governments in order to avoid "color revolution" or "Arab Spring" scenarios. Thus, it is of great importance for Russian propaganda to try to discredit "democracy" as being a recipe for chaos that somehow benefits the US (which only promotes "democracy," Moscow argues, in pursuit of its own narrow interests) as well as the jihadists (which Moscow often claims that the US actually supports). As noted earlier, Moscow is especially concerned that Russia's treatment of its own Muslims not become an anti-Russian *cause célèbre* in the broader Muslim world the way that Afghanistan was in the 1980s. To this end, Russian propaganda emphasizes that Moscow supports certain Muslim causes that the US does not—especially the Palestinian cause—even though Russia (and indeed, several Arab governments) closely cooperate with Israel.

### Perceived Russian Threats in the Middle East

At a time when Russia gets along with all Middle Eastern governments and the major nationally-oriented Middle Eastern opposition movements (i.e., everyone except internationalist jihadists like Al Qaeda and ISIL), the primary threat to Russian interests in the region is change. The downfall of Middle Eastern governments now cooperating with Russia could lead to the rise of new ones that see it as an enemy. Even a change of leadership in an existing government could lead to a decline in cooperation with Russia. Such change, of course, also threatens the interests of the US and other external powers in the region. It is noteworthy, though, that while the Soviet Union often benefited from change in the region (especially when an anti-American regime replaced a pro-American one), Putin's Russia has become such a staunch defender of the status quo in the Middle East that it may be less able to adjust to change than the US and other external powers.

### Looking to the Future – Anticipating Russian Actions

Russia can be expected to continue its current course of action, i.e. selling arms, atomic reactors, and anything else it can to whoever in the Middle East can buy them; continuing to cooperate with Saudi Arabia (in particular in setting oil production quotas in support of the higher oil prices that they and other oil producing countries desire); continuing conflict resolution efforts in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere that regardless of their chances of success, keep Russia (and not the US) as the focus

of diplomacy in the region; and taking advantage of any and all disagreements between Middle Eastern governments and the US to improve Russian cooperation with the former. While each of the parties to the Middle East's many disputes will try to push Moscow to side with them more and their opponents less (or even not at all), Moscow will do all it can to avoid making any such choice but will seek to cooperate with all. Moscow's attitude is that it will not stop cooperating with any one state at the behest of another, but it is willing to increase cooperating with all.

### Imagining a Win-Win

The US and Russia do share some common interests in the Middle East. Unlike the Soviet Union which often sought to undermine Middle Eastern governments allied to the US, Putin's Russia basically supports them all. Furthermore, the US and Russia both oppose jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIL. It would appear, then, that there is some room for Russian-American cooperation in the Middle East. But even though Russia does not favor regime change in any US-backed Middle Eastern states, it does seek to take advantage of differences between the US and those states. And while Moscow genuinely fears Sunni jihadists, it seems much less interested in combating them (either by itself or with the US) than in buck-passing (i.e., benefiting from the efforts of others to fight the jihadists so that Moscow can avoid doing so). Russian observers have expressed the fear that if jihadist forces are pushed out of various Middle Eastern countries by the US or its allies, they will migrate to Russia or other places where Moscow does not want to have to face them. Some Russian observers believe that this is actually what the US is trying to encourage in a purported buck-passing strategy of its own.

There is, of course, the possibility of a win-win scenario for the US and Russia in the Middle East even if they do not cooperate to achieve it. This could occur through the general weakening of jihadist forces in the Middle East and elsewhere. It could also occur through the Middle Eastern governments which both Moscow and Washington support continuing to seek good relations with both. Just as Russia balances between opposing sides in the Middle East, Middle Eastern states can balance between the US and Russia.

## Chapter 12. Russian Activities in Africa

Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya  
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy  
[AnnaB@washingtoninstitute.org](mailto:AnnaB@washingtoninstitute.org)

### Abstract

Russia's interests and objectives are geostrategic, economic, political, military, and to some extent cultural. Their outreach is expanding. Moreover, Moscow's success in Syria is helping to fuel this outreach and create opportunities Moscow likely hadn't planned on prior to the intervention. Most importantly, Western inaction made it easy for Putin to step in and assert himself. Political objectives matter to the Kremlin in a zero-sum worldview: for Russia to win, the US has to lose. Political priorities for Moscow are creating a perception of Russia as a great power, a key regional powerbroker, more reliable than the US, and a partner that stands by its friends and can talk to everyone, pulling Western allies closer to Moscow. Economic objectives are also important, including access to energy and natural resource markets. Lastly, soft power plays an important role. Moscow's outreach to North Africa goes back to the beginning of Putin's presidency, whereas its venture into the rest of Africa is far more recent, but will increasingly matter in the years ahead. China is clearly a more dominant actor in Africa, but Russia is making inroads. Ironically, it is China that poses a greater overall threat to Russia than does NATO and the West, but Moscow prioritizes anti-Americanism. Ultimately, a strong and coherent US presence is the best deterrent for Russia in Africa.

### Russian Interests and Objectives in Africa

Russia's interests and objectives are geo-strategic, economic, political, military, and to some extent cultural. Russia has historically been far more active in North Africa than in the rest of the continent, especially in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. However, Russia began active outreach to the rest of Africa at least three years ago, and this outreach is expanding. Moreover, Moscow's success in Syria is helping fuel this outreach.

### North Africa

The Arab Spring originated in Tunisia. Moscow saw these events as a continuation of what it perceived as US-sponsored regime change, which had to be checked lest it one day oust Putin himself. Putin doesn't believe it's possible for people to rise up against their ruler on their own.

To give one relatively recent example, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov highlighted the Kremlin's conviction that Washington stands behind regime change throughout the world:

"Anywhere, in any country—in Eastern Europe, in Central Europe—there are a lot of facts when the US embassy literally runs the [political] processes, including the actions of the opposition ... I think they [Americans] themselves don't consider it an intervention because, first, they [think they] can do anything, and second, it's in their blood" (RIA Novosti, 2017).

To give an earlier example, in December 2016, one major Kremlin-controlled publication described the Arab as a "series of government coups ... initiated by the American special services" (REGNUM News Agency (Moscow), 2016).

The Arab Spring also caused Putin to temporarily lose influence he labored to gain with the regimes that were overthrown. But beyond the Arab Spring, Moscow always had interests in the region. One primary driver of those interests is desired access to the Mediterranean coast. Kremlin rulers historically saw this access as critical to Russia being able to achieve great power status and provide greater leverage over Europe. Putin is the latest iteration of this history. Moscow's interests and objectives on the Mediterranean go hand in hand with access it seeks simultaneously in the Black and Caspian Seas. Thus, port access is important for Moscow, especially as it is trying to expand its anti-access/area of denial (A2AD) layout in Syria.

Peeling Western allies away from the United States and closer into Moscow's sphere of influence is a critical Russian objective. Putin seeks to establish himself in a peacemaker role, and in so doing presents himself as a more reliable actor who can not only talk to everyone but also will do what he says he will do, unlike perceptions of the US. Reducing American, and more broadly Western influence, is an important Russian objective in North Africa.

Economic objectives are also important, such as access to energy and markets. To give one example, Libya's oil-rich east is important for the Kremlin. Algeria's energy market is important to the Kremlin. Moscow is building Egypt's nuclear power plant and recently began support for Morocco's nuclear energy program (Davidson, 2018; "Russia and Morocco sign agreements", 2017; "Morocco and Russia to Sign Nuclear Deal", 2018). Sudan's energy resources are also important to the Kremlin ("The return of Russia to Africa", 2018).

Lastly, soft power matters also, in terms of relating to different cultural groups. Moscow seeks connections with Christian communities while at the same time presents Russia as a country that understands the Islamic world, given its geographic proximity to the region, unique history with it, and its large and growing Muslim minority. Indeed, some Russian officials make the hajj, a journey rarely seen among American government or military personnel.

### The Rest of Africa

Economic objectives are important in Moscow's outreach to the rest of Africa. Since at least March 2014, when the West sanctioned Russia over its illegal Crimea annexation, Moscow looked outside the West for economic opportunities.

Putin also understands Africa's enormous potential, and as such stated that "Africa cannot be on periphery of international relations" (RIA Novosti, 2016).

Moscow seeks the continent's natural resources in addition to energy and arms sales. But political objectives are also tied closely to economic ones. African countries are a large bloc within the UN General Assembly, and three African countries are on the UN Security Council. Additionally, Russia's outreach within Africa cannot be entirely separated from Moscow's Middle East objectives. The Horn of Africa allows power projection into the Middle East. The Gulf of Aden provides influence over the Suez Canal. Oleg Ozerov, Russian Foreign Affairs ministry's deputy director for Africa and ambassador to Saudi Arabia noted recently that African countries requested Russian assistance after observing Russia's "success in counterterrorism operations in Syria" (Valdai Club, 2018). When Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir met with Putin in November 2017, Syria was among their discussion topics, showing how the Kremlin works multiple angles in its diplomacy. The Syria factor mattered because, among other issues, Putin is working on rehabilitating Assad, and Bashir is helpful in achieving that end, especially since most recently, Bashir became one of the first Arab leaders to visit the Syrian dictator ("Sudan's President Bashir asks Putin", 2017; "Sudan's president is first Arab

leader”, 2018). That Bashir stepped down in mid-April of this year as a result of massive protests is important, but doesn’t take away from the broader point of Putin working to leverage corrupt, authoritarian African leaders, if not war criminals, to achieve his own aims.

Just as in the Middle East, in Africa, Moscow seeks a powerbroker role and to sideline Western influence, while the region’s autocratic rulers welcome a fellow authoritarian’s support. In addition, the anti-Western undercurrent in Russia’s outreach to Africa seems to have a receptive audience in the region beyond autocratic rules. Russia was never a colonial power in Africa, and the region’s perceptions of Russia in terms of racism and prejudice issues (including its Soviet predecessor) likely do not correspond with Russia’s more grim reality in this regard. Here too, soft power matters. Historically the Russian Orthodox Church has had a relationship with Ethiopia’s Monophysitic church. (Matusevich, 2007). More recently, Moscow has been trying to attract white South African farmers to come to Russia, playing on Putin’s image as a protector of “traditional” values against what the West describes as the immoral, degenerate West (Ferris-Rotman, 2018).

### Russian Actions, Short of Armed Conflict, in Africa

#### Overall Regional Steps: Diplomacy, Business, Military, Political

Overall, Moscow has built relations with all major relevant actors in North Africa, and is increasingly applying the same model to the rest of the continent. Moscow went on a broad charm offensive hosting multiple diplomatic exchanges with representatives from many African countries in recent years. Senior Russian officials such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov increasingly tour the continent. Most recently, in January 2019, Lavrov travelled to the Maghreb. Previously, in March 2018, he toured Africa to visit primarily former Cold War allies, ostensibly at the same time as then Secretary of State Tillerson.

Russian shadowy private mercenaries—in reality with ties to Russia’s Defense Ministry—are playing an increasing role in several African countries, including, for example, Libya and the Central African Republic (CAR) (Seddon & Wilson, 2018). Reportedly, Moscow has donated weapons and sent trainers to bolster the government’s fight, as well as expand the contractors’ role to work as mediators among different warring groups. Moscow’s weapon donations in particular highlight how the Kremlin uses activities to bolster its own leverage in a conflict situation and sideline Western actors while ultimately failing to provide genuine conflict resolution. Indeed, creating a dependence on the Kremlin and managing conflicts, rather than focusing on genuine conflict resolution, is likely Putin’s ultimate goal.

Moscow’s business outreach to Africa has increased. Reuters reports that since 2014, “Moscow has signed 19 military cooperation deals in sub-Saharan Africa, including with Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, according to its foreign and defense ministries and state media” (Ross, 2018). It also has plans to establish “a five-person team at CAR’s defense industry” (Ross, 2018). Moscow involves itself in a variety of natural resource projects, supports the region’s strongmen through several means, including supporting their election strategies, sending teams of military instructors to train presidential guards and providing shipments of weapons. In Zimbabwe, Moscow agreed to invest in the country’s diamond industry.

Russia’s state-run Rosatom is working in Zambia and Rwanda on nuclear power, while Russian energy firms Rosneft and Lukoi are developing oil and gas fields across the entire African continent, focusing on Mozambique, Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon, Egypt and Algeria.



Overall, trade between Russia and Africa is growing. According to official Russian sources, in 2017, the volume of trade between Russia and African countries grew by over twenty percent from 2016, to \$17.4 billion dollars. In addition, Moscow also plans to hold its first Russia-Africa business forum this October (Ignatova, 2019).

## North Africa

Russia's involvement in North Africa has been more robust than in the rest of the region.

In Egypt, Russia signed an agreement to build a nuclear power plant, and hold joint naval drills and other military exercises. Additionally, Egypt increasingly depends on Russian weaponry. In 2014, the two countries initialed arms contracts worth \$3.5 billion -- their largest deal in many years, to be funded by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The deal hadn't gone through yet, but recent media reports discuss Egypt's plans to buy "over two dozen" Russian Su-35 fighter jets in a \$2 billion deal to buy additional Su ("U.S. warns Egypt", 2019). The Egyptian military already owns several Russian helicopters; according to firsthand pilot accounts, they are a very good fit for Egypt's needs (Borshchevskaya, 2015).

Within this context, Egypt came to accept Moscow's position on Syria's Assad and last year declined a US request to send Egyptian troops to Syria.

On the economic front, Russian tourists are poised to return to Egypt in the near future. Their contribution is hugely important to Egypt. Egypt had emerged as the top destination for Russian tourists in recent years. For example, approximately 3 million of Russian tourists (out of a total of 10 million a year) have travelled to Egypt annually in 2014 for example, until the ban on Russian tourism to the country following the October 2015 terrorist attack that resulted in the death of all 224 passengers on board the Metrojet that crashed over the Sinai as the result of the attack. Putin lifted the travel ban last year. ("Resuming Russian tourism", 2018; Borshchevskaya, 2015). The two countries also created a free-trade zone. In recent years, overall bilateral trade has grown to approximately \$6.5 billion a year according to official government sources ("Russia and Egypt", 2018).

In Libya, Moscow has provided assistance in several ways, including printing money that reportedly was transferred to a branch loyal to Khalifa Haftar, as well as airlifting many dozens of Haftar's wounded soldiers and flying them to Moscow for treatment. Haftar himself has visited Moscow several times. In addition to the relationship with Haftar, Moscow has built ties with all major factions in Libya—Haftar, pro-Qaddafi factions, and the UN-recognized government of Serraj ("Russia makes move on Libya", 2019). Additionally, Russian "private contractors" are active in Libya, ostensibly helping on various business-related projects.

Algeria and Moscow signed a strategic partnership agreement in April 2001 and Algeria has long been a major purchaser of Russian arms, as well as a partner to some extent in the energy sector. The latter is growing, as in December 2018 Russia's Transneft and Gazprom increased cooperation with Algeria's Sonatrach ("Transneft and Sonatrach to develop cooperation", 2017). Reportedly, Russia may also start producing Russian Lada cars in Algeria ("Russia may start producing Lada", 2019).

In Tunisia, Russian tourists have played a major role in the economy for the last several years, picking up following Turkey's shoot down of a Russian plane in late 2015. On a trip to Tunis several years ago I routinely heard shopkeepers speak Russian to tourists. Tunisia also is home to a Russian

immigrant community that goes back to the Bolshevik revolution; Tunis has a Russian culture center—places that are known to be fronts for intelligence gathering activities (Lifhits, 2018).

In 2016, Morocco's King Mohammed VI came to Moscow for the first time since 2002, and signed agreements on improving economic relations. More recently, Moscow began providing support for Morocco's nuclear energy program. Motivating Rabat's policy may have been Moroccan frustration with both perceived Obama and Trump administration sympathy toward the Polisario Front's position with regard both to a human rights monitoring component to MINURSO's mission as well as lack of enthusiasm for Morocco's position on the Western Sahara. That the Polisario Front was a Soviet Cold War proxy is an ironic, but not insurmountable obstacle in Moscow's outreach to Rabat.

### Perceived Threats to Russian Regional Interests

For all of Russia's strides in Africa, it's clear that China is the dominant actor in the region, especially outside of North Africa. Moscow officials don't directly talk of China as a threat—indeed it is the West they routinely name as a threat across the globe, but it's difficult to imagine Russia settling on playing second fiddle to anyone unless Russia undergoes a fundamental change. For now, at least they are settling on spheres of influence. Privately, however, Russians have feared China's rise for years.

Russian officials talk about terrorism threats emanating from the region. While theoretically it's easy to see such a threat to Russia, it is hard to reconcile that position with Moscow's actions towards terrorism—sometimes contributing to it, or failing to fight it with any consistency.

Ultimately, Moscow fears regimes turning pro-US. A strong and meaningful US presence more than anything is likely to deter Russia, especially one that signals US unwavering commitment, and one that is focused not only on geopolitics but also on long-term development and values, especially in Africa beyond the continent's north, where historically US involvement had been relatively limited and narrowly focused on Cold-war era competition.

### Anticipated Potential Russian Actions in Africa

One possible action is a greater attempt to mediate the region's conflicts and by doing so giving Russia leverage over all major actors rather than create a genuine resolution. Egypt's growing tilt toward Moscow is increasingly worrisome (Borshchevskaya, 2018). In the absence of a clear US role, Libya appears to be a prime candidate for Moscow to play a larger powerbroker role (Borshchevskaya, 2017). Another potential set of actions are more energy, arms, and natural resource deals with Russia across the region, along with Moscow's continued attempts to gain berthing rights on the Mediterranean. Third, efforts to rehabilitate Syria's Assad are likely to continue.

### Imagining a Win-Win Scenario

Putin's worldview is zero-sum, so it's hard to imagine a win-win scenario. For Putin to win—to look “great,” the US has to lose. Due to our fundamentally opposing values and worldviews, we are likely to have a hard time coming up with genuinely shared goals that both sides can truly work on together.

### Conclusion

By now the West clearly sees Russia as an adversary. However, the broader issue in the backdrop of Russia's activities in Africa is that the West has yet to come up with a coherent policy towards Russia

itself, regardless of the region where it operates. Before turning to Russia's activities in Africa—and elsewhere—the West must define what broader strategic vision it intends to pursue with regard to Russia.

Western analysts often describe Putin as a mere short-term opportunist. Many dismiss Russia as a declining power that, if anything, can be a distraction from the larger emergent competition with China. Yet it is the West that has yet to think about Russia strategically. Russia lacks in resources but not determination. The West has the resources but lacks a clear vision. Resources can, over time, diminish in importance when our adversaries see that we are not serious about utilizing them, and when we remain ambiguous in the face of their determination.

## References

- Borshchevskaya, A. (2015, February 6). How to judge Putin's trip to Egypt. *The Washington Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-to-judge-putins-trip-to-egypt>
- Borshchevskaya, A. (2017, February 13). After Syria, Putin's Next Move Could Be Libya. *The Hill*. Retrieved from <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/319272-after-syria-libya-could-be-putins-next-move>
- Borshchevskaya, A. (2018, June 21). Could Russia Flip Egypt? *The National Interest*. Retrieved from <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/could-russia-flip-egypt-26367>
- Davidson, J. (2018, July 1). Egypt says to start building nuclear plant in next two years. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-russia-nuclearpower/egypt-says-to-start-building-nuclear-plant-in-next-two-years-idUSKBN1JR1M0>
- Ferris-Rotman, A. (2018, September 23). Why Russia is wooing South Africa's white farmers. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/why-russia-is-wooing-south-africas-white-farmers/2018/09/23/3308a7c4-b6a3-11e8-ae4f-2c1439c96d79\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.875d48e77d92](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/why-russia-is-wooing-south-africas-white-farmers/2018/09/23/3308a7c4-b6a3-11e8-ae4f-2c1439c96d79_story.html?utm_term=.875d48e77d92)
- Ignatova, O. (2019, January 16). Первый бизнес-форум Россия-Африка пройдет в октябре, Парламентская. *Gazeta*. Retrieved from <https://rg.ru/2019/01/16/pervyj-biznes-forum-rossiya-afrika-projdet-v-oktiabre.html>
- Lifhits, J. (2018, April 3). Why did Trump expel the Director of the Russian Cultural Center? *The Weekly Standard*. Retrieved from <https://www.weeklystandard.com/jenna-lifhits/why-did-trump-expel-the-director-of-the-russian-cultural-center>
- Matushevich, M. (ed.) (2007). Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters. *Africa World Press*.
- Middle East Monitor (2017, October 12). Russia and Morocco sign agreements to inaugurate military and security cooperation. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171012-russia-and-morocco-sign-agreements-to-inaugurate-military-and-security-cooperation/>

- Morocco & Russia to sign nuclear deal. (2018, October 5). *The North Africa Post*. Retrieved from <http://northafricapost.com/25700-morocco-russia-to-sign-nuclear-deal.html>
- REGNUM News Agency (Moscow) (2016, December 4). Retrieved from <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2213257.html>
- Resuming Russian tourism to Egypt to decline tourist flow from Turkey. (2018, October 19). *Egypt Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.egypttoday.com/Article/9/59184/Resuming-Russian-tourism-to-Egypt-to-decline-tourist-flow-to>
- RIA Novosti (2017, August 11). Лавров заявил, что США в некоторых странах руководят оппозицией, Retrieved from <https://ria.ru/20170811/1500209550.html>
- Ross, A. (2018, October 17). How Russia moved into Central Africa. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-russia-insight/how-russia-moved-into-central-africa-idUSKCN1MR0KA>
- Russia and Egypt ready to take their partnership to new level – Lavrov. (2018, October 13). Retrieved from <http://tass.com/politics/1025824>
- Russia and Morocco sign agreements to inaugurate military and security cooperation. (2017, October 12). *Middle East Monitor*. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171012-russia-and-morocco-sign-agreements-to-inaugurate-military-and-security-cooperation/>
- Russia makes move on Libya peace as clashes rage near Tripoli. (2019, April 9). *The Moscow Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/09/russia-makes-move-on-libya-peace-as-clashes-rage-near-tripoli-a65149>
- Russia may start producing Lada vehicles in Algeria (2019, January 30). *TASS*. Retrieved from [http://tass.com/economy/1042513?mc\\_cid=446e26a2cb&mc\\_eid=b7ebb1001d](http://tass.com/economy/1042513?mc_cid=446e26a2cb&mc_eid=b7ebb1001d)
- Seddon, M. and Wilson, T. (2018, August 21). Journalists' deaths highlight Russia's moves into Africa. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/7e55b796-9cac-11e8-9702-5946bae86e6d>
- Sudan's President Bashir asks Putin for 'protection' from 'aggressive' U.S. (2017, November 23). *France24*. Retrieved from <https://www.france24.com/en/20171123-sudan-president-bashir-asks-putin-protection-aggressive-us>
- Sudan's president is first Arab leader to visit Syria since crisis. (2018, December 18). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-sudan/sudans-president-is-first-arab-leader-to-visit-syria-since-crisis-idUSKBN1OF0TE>
- U.S. warns Egypt over Russian SU-35 fighter jets deal. (2019, April 9). *Defense Blog*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-to-judge-putins-trip-to-egypt>
- The return of Russia to Africa. (2018, November 16). *Herald Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.nbs.ntu.edu.sg/NewsnEvents/Pages/Inthedia->

[Details.aspx?news=2f0e3381-39a8-4c98-92f1-d54e19799c6e](https://en.transneft.ru/news/view/id/14662/?re=en)

Transneft and Sonatrach develop cooperation (2017, September 20). *Transneft.ru*.  
<https://en.transneft.ru/news/view/id/14662/?re=en>

Valdai Club. (2018, December 19). Russia's return to Africa: Interests, challenges, prospects. Expert discussion [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzCZpSPmvzE>

## Chapter 13. Russian Activities in Africa (Continued)

Ms. Malin Severin

UK Ministry of Defence Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC)

[Malin.severin100@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Malin.severin100@mod.gov.uk)

### Abstract

Russia has been taking steps to advance its economic, military, and geopolitical influence in Africa since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. This campaign has intensified in recent years and the reestablishment of footholds in Africa appears to be guided by purposes of arms trade and access to natural resources. The recent announcement that Russia is invited by the Central African Republic to open a military base in the country suggests that Moscow is ushering in a direction towards a greater focus on strategic power projection and geopolitical influence. The Russian 'light footprint' approach with private military contractors (PMCs) and embedded advisors to African regimes, as cultivated and refined in Ukraine and Syria, will almost certainly remain an essential part of the Russian operational 'toolbox' in the future. This interventionist model could gain in momentum across Africa by the potential withdrawal of US troops on the continent.

### Russian Gray Zone Activities—Africa

#### Russian Interests and Objectives

The political leadership in Russia has for many years held a pessimistic, bordering on dystopian, outlook on the future in two overlapping areas. Firstly, with an oil-dependent economy under increasing pressure from greater global use of renewables, a population projected to shrink by the millions, and a fragile state system for welfare provision, Russia is under great internal pressure. Corruption and nepotism at all levels undermine efforts at reform and change.

Secondly, there is broad consensus across the Russian policy community that international affairs have entered a time of considerable competition across multiple domains: over resources, technological dominance, cultural values, influence, and access to markets. Russian officials and analysts often emphasize their view that a major transition away from the West is underway in the international architecture, resulting in chaos and possibly war through the 2020s (Monaghan, 2017).

From a Russian point of view, the country is currently engaged in a multi-faceted, multi-domain conflict with the West, in which the US and its allies have been using its comprehensive power options to undermine, weaken, and marginalize Russia. Moscow views itself as being besieged and constrained by the West's policies, which they view as a continuation of classical containment strategy. Since Putin came to power, the Russian objective has been to break this 'siege' and challenge, if not over-turn, the status quo and regain its rightful status as a great power. From a Russian point of view, competition with the West is a zero-sum equation, and there is reportedly a sense of frustration in Moscow that the West has yet to fully realize that Russia and the West are in a gray zone state of conflict, short of armed struggle, and have been for several years (Giles, 2019).

Since Russian armed forces do not possess the resources required to compete on an equal footing with the US, Russia has developed its own approach to competition, seeking out and exploiting contested spaces and points of vulnerability, whether it stems from a vacuum of military power, of political will to use it, or a divergence of threat perception within a country or an alliance. Information

has been weaponized, and disinformation has become an incisive instrument of state policy. Nowhere is Western confusion more clearly demonstrated than in Russian employment of digital technology, used to reinforce one of Russia's key tools of statecraft, *maskirovka*, literally translated as 'little masquerade'. The concept of maskirovka involves camouflage, denial, deceit, misdirection, and operational dexterity (Pollock, 2017).

#### Private military companies

Another of Moscow's tried and tested approaches, which has been refined since the Georgian War in 2008, has been to employ coordinated, 'low intensity' and bespoke packages wherever an opportunity or power vacuum emerges. These packages often include private military contractors (PMCs), special forces, and military specialists (technical specialists, C-2, electronic warfare, drones, signals, ISR, etc.). Together, these components represent an increasingly flexible instrument for refined expeditionary warfare.

Although still formally illegal in Russia, the use of PMCs and mercenaries has allowed Moscow to manage public opinion, by way of offering a degree of separation from the Russian state. This approach has been evident in Eastern Ukraine, Syria, and Sudan—theatres in which Russia's involvement has been deliberately ambiguous. PMCs also offer an opportunity to confuse Russia's rivals and muddy the waters concerning the identity and objectives of the forces, exploiting the wilderness of mirrors that disinformation reinforces.

Russia, it appears, has observed how the West has utilized mercenaries and military contractors in historical and contemporary campaigns from the Yemen civil war in the 1960s to more recent operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. But the Russian use of PMCs differs from the standard Western perspective in the sense that Russian PMCs carry out purely military functions, both kinetic and non-kinetic, rather than the supporting and enabling tasks of Western PMCs (Sukhankin, 2018a).

By utilizing the vast pool of former military manpower within Russia and post-Soviet states, the Kremlin seeks to achieve strategic effect and incremental advantage across multiple domains, while mitigating the risk of strategic over-commitment and military over-extension, as occurred during the proxy wars of the 1980s. In summary, these deniable non-state forces have offered the Kremlin a way of streamlining its expeditionary capabilities while advancing Russian geo-economic interests, without requiring major involvement of the state and its resources.

#### Recent Russian Actions, Short of Armed Conflict

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had several military bridgeheads on the African continent, although no military bases of its own. Today, Russia benefits from these legacy Cold War-era ties and cultivates essentially the same group of countries as it did back then, including Angola, Libya, and Sudan. Many of these countries' leaders have attended Russian institutions, such as the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, or the Frunze military academy. These relationships are now providing Russia with an advantage in this new "Scramble for Africa" (Carmody, 2016). Russian presence in Africa has intensified over the past couple of years and, since 2015, Russia has signed over 20 military cooperation agreements with African states (Hedenskog, 2019). This development has caught many Western analysts and policymakers off-guard.

As one of the world's largest exporters of energy, Russia is driven by different imperatives than some of the other external actors engaged in securing access to African oil supplies (Carmody, 2016). However, as Siberian deposits of natural minerals have reduced in profitability, acquisition of other

types of natural resources remains a priority. African countries have also become an increasingly important food supplier to Russian markets, especially after Russia banned the import of certain Western food products.

Moreover, African countries have become an increasingly important source of diplomatic support, in venues such as the United Nations. In addition, in the face of continued Western sanctions and a stagnant economy, arms exports are perceived as an increasingly lucrative area for Russian economic growth, in selling both surplus stockpiled Cold War era equipment as well as newer equipment to provide hard currency revenues to finance its military industrial sector and research and development. From 2012-2016, Russia accounted for 35 percent of arms exports to the region, making it Africa's largest supplier of arms (Hedenskog, 2019).

Russia's expansion into the war-torn and deeply impoverished Central African Republic (CAR) has recently become the focus of much media attention, following the death of three Russian investigative journalists. After an approval from the United Nations Security Council in January 2018, Russia was allowed to supply the CAR regime with arms and ammunition. The delivery of the Russian donation of AK47s, sniper rifles, and grenade launchers was accompanied by hundreds of Russian "civilian experts." Several open source investigations, such as the one performed by the Russian opposition newspaper *Novaia Gazeta*, have pointed out that these "experts" were in fact mercenaries linked to the private military company Wagner, which in turn is linked to a Russian businessman with close ties to Putin (*Novaya Gazeta*, 2018). These soldiers of fortune have been used in Syria and Sudan as well as in the Russian military operation in Donbas.

In addition to sending mercenaries to highly unstable countries, Russia's renewed push for Africa appears to include an element of gaining access to the host nation's decision-making circles and creating new malleable networks. For example, CAR's President has agreed to the appointment of a Russian citizen, Valeriy Zakharov, as his national security advisor. A similar approach has been adopted in Sudan, where Moscow has managed to establish permanent representation in the country's Ministry of Defence (Hedenskog, 2019).

In January 2019, the CAR's Minister of Defence announced that the country would welcome the opening of a Russian military base on its territory. This declaration has been interpreted as an indicator that Moscow is seeking to gain footholds in Africa for purposes beyond resource acquisition and military equipment sales. If such a base were to open, analysts have speculated that the former French colony, strategically situated at the heart of the continent, could become Russia's new geopolitical base and point of entry for expanding Russia's influence throughout East Africa (Sukhankin, 2019).

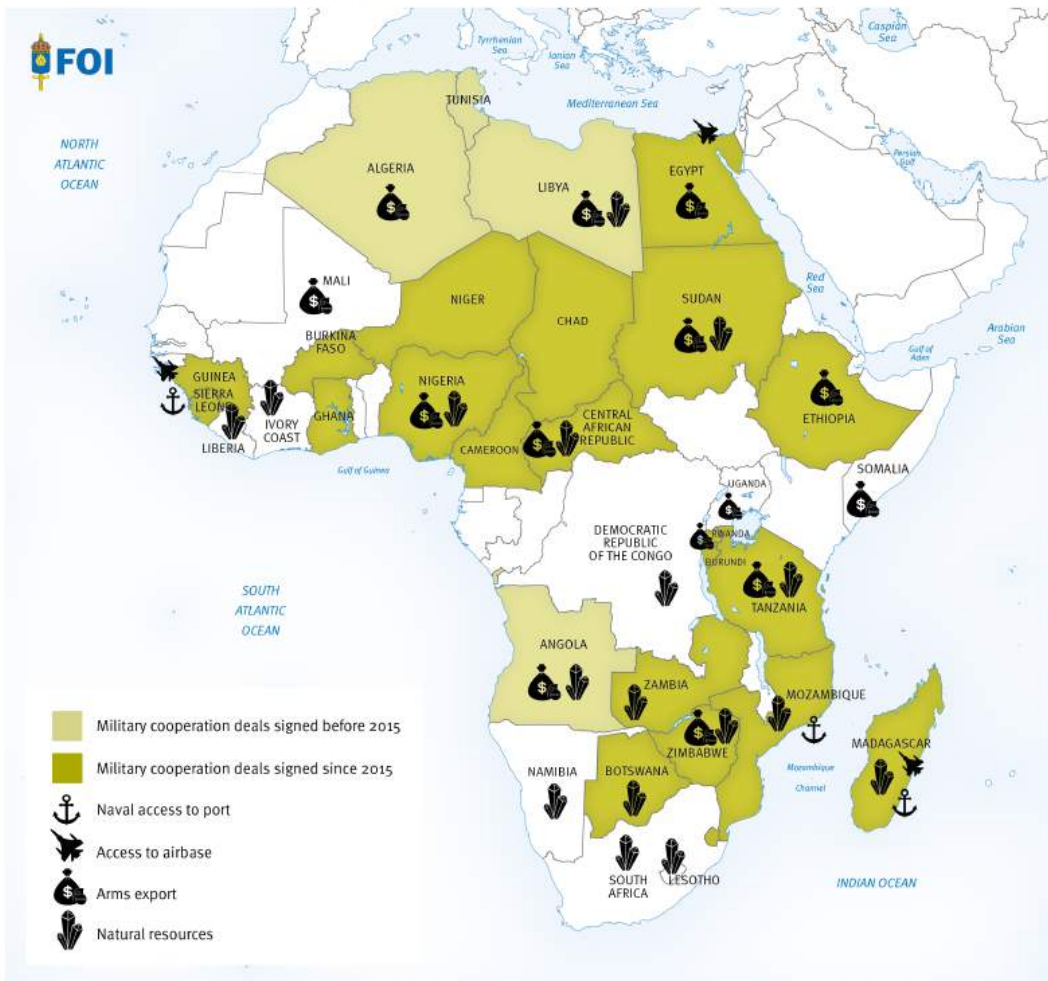
From the viewpoint of some African regimes, especially those with autocratic leadership, Russia's bid to provide a reliable supply of military equipment and trained personnel with operational experience and specialized skills (without the conditions of moral prescriptions of the West) represents a way to maintain the status quo in an increasingly unstable region. The fact that Moscow never attempted to colonize the African continent, but rather supported the anti-colonial struggle, likely provides some credibility to Kremlin as a reliable partner (Hedenskog, 2019). Putin's steadfast support for the Assad regime and the protracted military commitment in Syria provide further evidence that Russia is a reliable sponsor and partner to autocratic regimes.

Russian officials have hinted that a Russian military base in the CAR could become an important precedent and that other African countries might follow suit. Indeed, members of the Russian parliament have declared that Russia is ready to challenge France's dominance in this part of Africa



(Sukhankin, 2019). The region thus appears to be set out to become yet another arena for Russian challenging of Western global influence. It is likely that the Kremlin’s use of PMCs will become more extensive and entrenched in Russian policy in the coming years, and that we will see more widespread employment of strategically flexible and operationally adaptable forces across Africa. This development may be exacerbated by the diminished status of AFRICOM within US and Western strategic thinking. The announced withdrawal of US troops in countries such as Cameroon could provide new exploitable power vacuums and windows of opportunity in which Russia could employ its refined and streamlined form of expeditionary warfare.

## Russia’s Military Cooperation and Strategic Interests in Africa



Sources: Reuters, Jeune Afrique, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Swedish Center for Russian Studies, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Atlantic Council.

Figure 1. Source of map: Hedenskog, J. (2019). Russian military cooperation in Africa. FOI brief

## References

Adamsky, D. (2018). From Moscow with coercion – Russian deterrence, theory, and strategic culture. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(1-2), 33-60.

- Beaumont, P. (11 September 2018). Russia's scramble for influence in Africa catches Western officials off-guard. *The Guardian*.
- BBC News. (2018). US Africa: Bolton Unveils Plan to Counter Russia and China Influence.
- Carmody, Pdraig (2016), *The New Scramble for Africa*, second edition, Malden, MA: Polity Press
- Connolly, R. & Boulegue, M. (2018). Russia's new state armaments programme – Implications for the Russian armed forces and military capabilities to 2017. *The Royal Institute of International Affairs Research Paper*, Chatham House.
- Deni, J.R. (Ed.). (July 2018). Current Russia military affairs – Assessing and countering Russian strategy, operational planning and modernization [Conference executive summaries]. *Strategic Studies Institute*, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College.
- Fainberg, S. (December 2017). *Russian Spetsnaz, contractors and volunteers in the Syrian conflict*. Russia/NIS Centre, Russie.Nei.Visions, No 105 Ifri.
- Giles, K. (2019). Moscow rules: What drives Russia to confront the West. *Chatham House Insights*.
- Goble, P. (6 November 2018a). Moscow's neo-colonial enterprise running into difficulties in Central African Republic. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation.
- Goble, P. (13 November 2018b). Moscow laying groundwork for deeper military involvement in Libya. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation.
- Hedenskog, J. (2019). Russian military cooperation in Africa. FOI brief.
- Hodgson, Q. (2003). Is the Russian bear learning? An operational and tactical analysis of the second Chechen War 1999 – 2002 (pp 64-90). *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26(2).
- McGregor, A. (2018). How Russia is displacing the French in the struggle for influence in the Central African Republic. The Jamestown Foundation – Eurasia Daily Monitor – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018
- Monaghan, A. (2017a). *Power in Russia*. Manchester University Press.
- Monaghan, A. (2017b), *Global strategic trends 6: Geopolitics, governance, defence and security*. Report commissioned for Defence Research and Development Canada.
- Novaya Gazeta (2 August 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/08/02/77376-nam-nuzhen-svoy-tsar>
- Ogulturk, M.C. (2017). Russia's renewed interest in the Horn of Africa as a traditional and rising power – Turkish armed forces (pp. 121 – 143). *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2(1).
- Pollock, J. (13 April 2017). Russian disinformation technology – Russia's reinvention of war exploits old techniques for a new century (pp. 4 – 5). *MIT Technology Review*.
- Renz, B. (2018). Russia's military revival. *Polity*.
- Russel, M. (November 2018). Russia in the Middle East – From sidelines to centre stage. *European*

*Parliamentary Research Service.*

Sukhankin, S. (13 July 2018a). Continuing war by other means: The case of Wagner, Russia's premier private military company in the Middle East. *The Jamestown Foundation*.

Sukhankin, S. (12 October 2018b). Russian PMC's in Yemen: Kremlin-style 'security export' in action? *Eurasia Daily Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation*.

Sukhankin, S. (12 November 2018c). Russia's hired guns in Africa. *European Council on Foreign Relations – Commentary*.

Sukhankin, S. (23 January 2019). The Kremlin's game in the CAR: What does the facade conceal? *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*.

Ripley, T. (30 January 2019). Moscow's mission – Russian expeditionary warfare capabilities. *Jane's Defence Weekly*.

Ross, A. (17 October 2018). How Russia moved into Central Africa. *Reuters*.

United States Army Special Operations Command. (n.d.). 'Little green men': A primer on modern Russian unconventional warfare – Ukraine 2013–2014. Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

## Chapter 14. Russian Activities in Latin America

Dr. R. Evan Ellis  
U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute  
[robert.e.ellis78.civ@mail.mil](mailto:robert.e.ellis78.civ@mail.mil)

### Abstract

Russian engagement in Latin America is limited in both the resources it has available to dedicate, as well as the range of countries and sectors in which it principally focuses. Its engagement is generally episodic and often reactive to US activities in what it considers its own “near abroad,” including US attempts to expand the boundaries of NATO, deploy missile defense systems in Russia’s periphery, US deployments during the 2009 Georgian Civil War, and US pressures on Russia during the Ukraine crisis of 2013-14. Nonetheless, as a nuclear power with significant conventional capabilities, which has demonstrated its willingness to act belligerently against the US in the hemisphere through the deployment of nuclear capable Tu-160 bombers and warships on multiple occasions (among other behaviors), Russia’s position and activities in Latin America must be considered a potential strategic threat to the US. In contrast to the PRC, Russia arguably has a greater reserve of understanding of the politics of the region, largely from the (now aging) cold-war era intelligence specialists and academics who in the previous era worked with the Cubans and other promoters of communist insurgency in the region.

While Russia has far fewer resources to act in or impact the region, compared to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and while Russia and China occasionally compete with respect to commercial projects and arms sales in the region, there is an inherent synergy between PRC and Russian activities in Latin America, which must be considered when assessing the risks posed by Russia’s activities. Specifically, PRC loans, investments, commodity purchases, and diplomacy help sustain populist regimes in the region such as Venezuela, contribute to the viability of those regimes. Subsequently engaging with Russia tends to be in a manner more hostile than with China, who is more actively seeking to avoid conflict with the US. Russia’s fledging efforts to coordinate with China in Latin America on select issues, such as the crisis in Venezuela, magnifies the strategic threat that its activities present to US interests.

### Russian Interests and Objectives in Latin America

Russia’s strategic interests in Latin America do not directly originate in its current security, prosperity, or regime survival, so much as they are a product of the current regime’s desire to show domestic audiences that it is returning Russia to a “greatness” rooted in a romanticized concept of Russia’s 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century past. Russia also has an interest in exploiting Latin America’s proximity and economic and human connectedness to the United States, in order to act there in ways that threaten the US as a vehicle for buying Russia greater autonomy of action in the geographic area close to its own territory.

Russia’s current government under Vladimir Putin (and to an extent, that of his predecessor Dimitry Medvedev) has worked with a coalition of anti-US regimes, including those in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba, to maintain a political and military position that demonstrates Russia’s global reach, sending a warning to the US that Russia could threaten the US in its “backyard” if the US continues to pressure Russia and interfere in Russia’s “near abroad.” Separately, through helping to prop up rogue regimes such as those of Venezuela and Nicaragua, and manipulate the politics of others, such as

Mexico, Russia seeks to undermine the consolidation of the region as a group of pro-US states adhering to “Washington Consensus” policies of free trade, democracy, and the rule of law, and in the process, distract the US and weaken its strategic position in the Western hemisphere.

Beyond such strategic goals, Russia also has some commercial interests in Latin America and the Caribbean. While these interests are to some degree related to national priorities through the profits of Russian businesses and Russia’s ability to feed itself, they are more principally interests of Russian companies and the individual oligarchs that control them (including Igor Sechin, head of the oil company Rosneft, or Oleg Deripaska, the billionaire head of mining conglomerate Rusal) (Ellis, 2015).

While Russia purchases significant amounts of meat and other agricultural products from the region (principally from South America), and while Russia opportunistically leverages such purchases to strengthen relationships with the individual countries in which it conducts such transactions, Russia does not behave in a way that suggests that it considers such food supplies and other products from the region critical to its national interests, or a key vehicle in a broader plan for securing other national objectives (such a strengthening its strategic position in specific parts of Latin America). (Ellis, 2015).

### Recent Russian Activities in Latin America

Russian activities in Latin America may be divided into (1) political-military initiatives with key partners but which also have an economic component, (2) more purely economic activities in search of expanded political leverage, and (3) non-economic influence operations, principally seeking to support Russia’s friends, and sew doubts or undermine support for the US, regional stability, or pro-market democratic values in other nations of the region.

Overall, Russia’s position in Latin America and the Caribbean in the past five years has weakened considerably, due largely to a political shift to the right across the region. That shift has been deepened and sustained, ironically, through the negative political and economic example of the populist-socialist Maduro regime in Venezuela (which Russia helped to sustain in power). Outside of Venezuela, such changes include the replacement the pro-Russian Peronist regime of Christina Fernandez de Kirchner by the pro-market government of Mauricio Macri in Argentina’s October 2015 elections. The expulsion of Christina and her leftist-Peronist government substantively froze Argentina’s courtship of Russia, which had included consideration of the purchase of Russian Su-24 fighter aircraft, oil deals, nuclear power collaboration, and the construction of a hydroelectric facility by the Russian firm InterRao. In Peru, the April 2016 victory of neoliberal Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (replaced by equally conservative Martin Vizcarra in Peru when Kuczynski resigned in March 2018), similarly slowed Russian advances and set the stage for an investigation of corruption associated with the purchase of Russian helicopters by the preceding administration of Ollanta Humala. In Chile, in December 2017, elections removed the center-left *Concertación* coalition from the presidency, returning to power center-right businessman Sebastian Pinera. In the process, it ended Chile’s cautious exploration of military ties with Russia, begun by outgoing President Michelle Bachelet, who had been drawn to the left, in part, through the communists in her coalition. Similarly victories in Colombia by conservative Ivan Duque in that nation’s March 2018 election, in Paraguay, by Mario Abdo Benitez in April 2018, and in Brazil, by Jair Bolsonaro in October 2018, foreclosed ties cautiously being developed with Russia by governments in those countries (including the contemplated purchase of a Russian air defense system by Brazil) (Ellis, 2017).

Russia's most significant activities in Latin America in recent years arguably center on the nation's three principal enduring strategic partners: Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, although Russia has also suffered significant setbacks in each of these relationships during the period.

Venezuela, under the socialist governments of Hugo Chavez and Nicholas Maduro, has been the partner that has most permitted Russia to use its territory and resources to advance Russian strategic objectives. From 2006 until Venezuelan resources began to run out, coinciding with Chavez' death (officially in March 2013), Venezuela bought over \$11 billion in arms from Russia, including Su-30 fighter aircraft, Mi-35 attack helicopters, Mi-17 transport helicopters, T-72 tanks, BMP and BTR armored vehicles, and a range of other equipment (Ellis, 2015). On three separate occasions, Venezuela allowed (perhaps encouraged) Russia to operate nuclear-capable Tu-160 bombers out of its country (in 2008, 2013, and 2018), and in 2008, Russia deployed warships to Venezuela. In 2008 and 2013, Venezuela allowed Russia to establish a military airbase on La Orchila island, just off the Venezuelan coast and in close proximity to the United States. The Russian oil company Rosneft has loaned an estimated \$6 billion to the Venezuelan national oil company PdVSA and has invested billions more in the country. It has helped to shelter Venezuela from the effect of US sanctions by making its Vadinar refinery in India available to refine Venezuelan oil, as an alternative to using US Gulf coast refineries. Russia also sent mercenaries to Venezuela in December 2018 and allowed the Venezuelan oil company PdVSA to relocate its offices from Lisbon to Moscow. Russia also joined China in February 2019 in blocking a United Nations resolution that might have facilitated a UN peace enforcement force to help the legitimate government of Juan Guaido consolidate his physical control over Venezuela (Schwartz, 2019).

Russia's help to Venezuela has not always produced the hoped-for results. Its arms sales to Venezuela were significantly curtailed when Venezuela ran out of money. Four of Russia's five oil companies pulled out of Venezuela due to bad experiences there (Lukoil, TNK, Gazprom, and Surgutneftegaz). PdVSA, the Venezuelan state-owned energy company, has fallen behind in its payments to Russian energy producer Rosneft. Making matters worse, Rosneft is likely to be prevented from taking control of the downstream oil company CITGO, offered by PdVSA as collateral for a \$1.5 billion loan.

With the deepening crisis in Venezuela, Nicaragua has expanded in value as a partner for Russia in the region. Building on Nicaragua's previous relationship as a client state of the Soviet Union from 1979-1990, when former communist president Daniel Ortega and his Sandinista party returned to power in 2007, Nicaragua endeared itself to Moscow by recognizing the pro-Russian separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia during the 2008 Georgian civil war. In the decade which followed, Russia provided Nicaragua food supplies, busses and other donated goods, as well as T-72 tanks, armored vehicles, patrol boats, and missile boats to upgrade its military, a police training center in Managua, and an antenna-laden GLONASS satellite downlink facility (suspiciously close to the US embassy in Managua). Nicaragua also signed an agreement facilitating access by Russian warships to its ports, as well as allowing Russian Tu-160 bombers to land in the country (in the process violating Colombian airspace) while visiting the region in 2013.

While Cuba's relations with Russia were strained due to the latter's abrupt withdrawal of financial support following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia bought some goodwill by forgiving \$30 billion of the island's outstanding \$35 billion in cold-war era debt. Russian companies have been involved in Cuba's nickel and petroleum industries, and committed to construction projects involving thermoelectric plants, an airport and the Mariel port. Russian firms also sold or donated cars and other vehicles to Cuba, and explored renovating the Cienfuegos refinery (and possibly even completing Cuba's cold war-era Juragua nuclear power plant). Nonetheless, despite proclamations of interest from Russian legislators, Cuba has not led Russia resume use of its Cold-War signals

intelligence facilities in Lourdes, Bejucal, or Santiago de Cuba (for monitoring the US), nor has it bought significant quantities of Russian military equipment or participated in all of the occasions since 2008 in which Russia has deployed military assets to the region. Cuba has, however, permitted some visits by Russian warships (including the docking of the signals collection ship Leonov in Havana Harbor in February 2014 when the US was negotiating with Cuba to restore diplomatic relations).

Beyond these key partners, with respect to military engagement, Russia has leveraged previous sales to Peru (beginning under the regime of General Juan Velasco Alvarado and continuing with Mig-29 sales during the administration of Alberto Fujimori), to sell the country Mi-17s, Mi-35s, and other equipment and support packages, although in at least one case (regarding replacement of Peru's aging BM-21 self-propelled rocket launchers), Russia lost out to a Chinese competitor selling its Type 90B system. Russia has also signed a military cooperation agreement with Suriname.

With respect to extractive sectors, Russian oil companies are doing work in Ecuador Bolivia, Venezuela, and Cuba, among other countries, while Rusal, as noted previously, has a presence in Jamaica, Guyana and Cuba. Nonetheless, all of these ventures are generally hampered by low international commodity prices and a lack of funds to expand through acquisitions as aggressively as their Chinese counterparts (Ellis, 2014; Ellis, 2018).

With respect to sales of Russian products and services, beyond arms (where Russian helicopters and other equipment are relatively common in the region), Russian construction company InterRao and the equipment manufacturer Power Machines, as well as Lada cars and Kamaz trucks, only have a limited presence. For the US, the lighter Russian presence is, in part positive, since the lack of sales means that Russian products are not seen as competition by local manufacturers, in the way that Chinese products often are (Ellis, 2016).

With respect to Russian imports from Latin America, while Russia purchases a sizable quantity of meat and grains, principally from the southern cone, the size of the Russian market does not generally inspire the imagination of Latin American politicians and businessmen the way the 1.4 billion-person Chinese market does.

### **Likely Future Russian Activities in Latin America**

For the moment, Russia appears likely to continue its principally reactive set of political and military activities in Latin America, and limited economic engagement. The most likely sources of near-term change may come from the evolving situations in Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, as well as through expanded cooperation with the PRC in the region.

In Venezuela, US-led military intervention (including a multi-national force responding to a breakdown of order), could lead Russia to opportunistically join Cuba in supporting elements of the military and collectivos that remain loyal to Maduro, and attempt to wage a protracted guerilla campaign against the Guaido government (per Cuban doctrine adopted by the Venezuelan military), as well as support other criminal groups resisting the imposition of order, including the ELN, FARC dissidents, and "sindicatos" in the Venezuelan interior, among others.

In Cuba, consolidation of power by Miguel Diaz-Canel, including the eventual retirement of Raul Castro from leadership of the Communist Party, in combination with a continued hard line from the US, could lead the regime to finally permit an expanded Russian defense presence, including possible

base access agreements or renewed use of SIGINT facilities such as Lourdes, Bejucal, and Santiago, in ways the Cubans have been reluctant to do thus far.

In Nicaragua, successful elimination of dissidence by the Ortega regime could pave the way for renewed Russian engagement, currently operating at a low profile coinciding with the political crisis that began in April.

In Guatemala, following the constitutional crisis between the government of Jimmy Morales and his Supreme Court over the UN anti-corruption body CICIG, the June 2019 elections could bring a new leftist government to power that embraces a more active Russian presence (de Leon, 2018).

In Mexico, frustration by the leftist AMLO government over US rhetoric and policies regarding a border wall, migrants and US failure to ratify the new USMCA trade deal could lead AMLO to more fully embrace both China and Russia as counterweights to the US. While Russia has little to sell, loan to, or invest in Mexico, it could engage in expanded symbolic defense interactions such as institutional visits, officer training in Russia, Russian training in Mexico, or joint exercises. With respect to arms sales, AMLO's cancellation of purchases of US Blackhawk helicopters could open the door for it to do more work with the Russians in upgrading its Mi-17s.

### **Perceived Russian Threats to its Interests in Latin America**

Russia arguably does not have any vital interests in Latin America that it is likely to perceive as threatened. It may, however, feel the obligation to use its veto in the United Nations, diplomacy, loans and other tools to help defend "friendly" regimes in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, due mostly to its fear of damage to its reputation if it allows them to be overthrown with US help.

### **Russian Efforts to Influence Key Actors in the Region**

In contrast to China, which uses access to its markets and the possibility of loans and investment as tools of soft power, Russian ability to exert influence through economic resources, either by providing aid or denying commercial transactions, is minimal. Even among its friends, Russia's ability to exert influence in the region is limited. Cuba has long regarded itself as independent from (although allied with) Russia, and as a leader (not a follower) with respect to communist and leftist politics in the region. Indeed, there are arguable more Cuban than Russian agents on the ground in Venezuela, with a greater ability to understand and influence the outcome of the current crisis (even with Russia's oil presence).

### **Russian Efforts to Influence Civilian Populations in the Region**

Beyond the favors that Russia can extract from friendly governments in exchange for their cooperation, its ability to exert influence in the region is concentrated on using traditional and social media influence operations to shape Latin American politics at the margins.

With respect to media operations, the Russian news organizations Russia Today and Sputnik have clearly sought to position themselves as credible alternative media outlets across the region, with content that subtly seeks to question the US, conservative regimes, and confidence in governance, democratic processes, and Western values therein. As a compliment, Russia may be using social media to plant "fake news" or magnify stories that support its strategic communication objectives, possibly using trolls and bot farms to further those same objectives. Yet, to date, Russia neither



appears to have succeeded, nor has tried to use propaganda to secure the election of a pro-Russian government anywhere in Latin America.

## References

- De Leon, I. (9 December 2018). Sandra Torres y Raúl Molina Aspiran a la Presidencia, *Guatevision*, Retrieved from <https://www.guatevision.com/noticias/nacional/elecciones-2019-sandra-torres-y-raul-morales-aspiran-a-la-presidencia/>.
- Ellis, Evan R. (2014). *China on the Ground in Latin America: Challenges for the Chinese and Impacts on the Region*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Ellis, Evan R. (June 2015). The New Russian Engagement With Latin America: Strategic Engagement, Commerce, and Dreams of the Past. *U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute*, Retrieved from <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1275>.
- Ellis, Evan R. (June 2016). Characteristics and Assessment of Russian Engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean, *Ensayos Militares*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Retrieved from <http://www.ceeag.cl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/1junio16.pdf>, pp. 29-42.
- Ellis, Evan R. (5 December 2017). Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Update. *Global Americans*. Retrieved from <https://theglobalamericans.org/2017/12/russian-engagement-latin-america-update/>.
- Ellis, Evan R. (March 2018). Hacia una asociación estratégica: Las inversiones de China en América Latina. *RedCAEM*. Retrieved from <http://chinayamericalatina.com/wps-papers/>.
- Schwartz, M. (28 February 2019). Russia Blocks Venezuela Measure at U.N., Calling It a U.S. Ploy for Regime Change. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/world/americas/russia-venezuela-veto-united-nations.html>.

## Chapter 15. Russia and the Arctic

Mr. Pavel Devyatkin  
The Arctic Institute  
[pavel.devyatkin@thearcticinstitute.org](mailto:pavel.devyatkin@thearcticinstitute.org)

### Abstract

Russia has important socio-economic and security interests in the Arctic. This paper analyzes Russia's interests and recent activities in the region. It is argued that Russia's Arctic strategy is generally oriented towards expanding upon domestic economic projects (e.g. energy and shipping), working with Arctic states towards circumpolar cooperation, and using the military to secure their interests. Russia's actions are consistent with their official interests and objectives, and are pragmatic considering the region's economic and strategic significance.

### Russian Interests and Objectives in the Arctic

The Russian Federation's strategy in the Arctic is a contested topic in academia, media, and policymaking. Russia is often portrayed as the foremost instigator of conflict in the region. It is true that the Russian government has declared that all activity in the Arctic should be tied to the interests of "defense and security to the maximum degree" (President of the Russian Federation, 2001). However, Russia's policies are generally more focused on domestic security and economic projects rather than outward expansion.

When analysts talk of the "scramble for the Arctic" and Russia's "plan to dominate the Arctic," we risk the emergence of a security dilemma (Hosa, 2018; Peck, 2018). A 2013 Department of Defense report warned, "There is some risk that the perception that the Arctic is being militarized may lead to an arms race mentality" (United States Department of Defense, 2013). The portrayal of Russia as a threatening rival in the Arctic distorts our understanding of the Kremlin's strategy in the region.

US-Russia tensions in other regions of the world have contributed to suspicion surrounding Russia's activities in the freezing and faraway North. However, over the past two decades, Russia has been a cooperative actor in Arctic governance and has focused on domestic development issues. Russia's dependence on natural resources and the degradation of Soviet-era infrastructure have made Russia increasingly oriented towards remedying its internal issues in the Russian controlled Arctic region. By partnering with foreign actors in economic projects, Russia is also partially internationalizing its energy extraction, natural resources, and maritime shipping.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic has been an exemplar of constructive interstate diplomacy. Perhaps the greatest example of circumpolar cooperation is the Arctic Council (AC), an intergovernmental forum that acts by consensus between the eight Arctic states – the US, Russia, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland. Although the AC does not discuss military and security issues, it has successfully enabled the negotiation of legally binding agreements on search and rescue (SAR) operations and oil-spill response, as well as the resolution of competing territorial claims between Russia and Norway in the Barents Sea.

Moscow also has an interest in maintaining a comprehensive sea, air and land presence in the Russian Arctic. After close examination of Russia's military and security policies in the Arctic, it is reasonable to say that Russia seeks to defend its sovereign interests in a region that has been of strategic and

cultural importance to Russia for centuries. The mythical status of the Arctic has been significant throughout Russian history. The northward expansions of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great were fundamental to the growth of the Russian Empire. The faraway northern regions were also the settings for the brutal gulag camps under Stalin.

### State Development Policy

Russia's official Arctic strategy and interests are best understood by examining the government publications put forward by the various bodies of the Russian state. In September 2008, the *Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period Until 2020 and Beyond* was adopted by then President Dmitry Medvedev. The document presents the Russian Federations' national interests and basic objectives for state policy in the Arctic region. Russia's objectives can be summarized as follows:

- to actively work with Arctic states on the basis of international law,
- to create a standardized SAR system to prevent accidents such as drowning and oil spills,
- to strengthen Russia's relationships with multilateral forums such as the AC,
- to effectively manage the Northern Sea Route maritime shipping lanes,
- to improve state management of economic development,
- to support scientific research,
- to improve the quality of life of indigenous peoples, and
- to develop the Arctic's natural resource base.

Russia's interests in the Arctic are evidently complex but generally oriented towards internal economic and social development, along with international cooperation through existing legal and multilateral regimes. In 2013, President Putin approved the *Development Strategy of the Russian Arctic and the Provision of National Security for the Period Until 2020*. The strategy, a revision of the 2008 document, provides a more comprehensive description of Russia's objectives, priorities, and means of implementation. The document mentions economic and environmental priorities more often than it discusses defense aims. Further objectives include "developing the Russian icebreaker fleet, modernizing the air service and airport network, and establishing modern information and telecommunication infrastructure" (President of the Russian Federation, 2013). Throughout the strategy document, these measures are tied to economic interests. For example, surveillance of the Russian Arctic's maritime areas is necessary since the region's harsh climate hinders economic development, without an adequate monitoring system.

### Security Interests

Russian military presence in the Arctic has three goals: to protect national sovereignty in the region, to secure economic interests, and to demonstrate that Russia remains a great power with first-rate military capabilities (Heininen, Sergunin & Yarovoy, 2014). In contrast to the Soviet era, when the state's military posturing was oriented towards confrontation, the contemporary Russian military in

the Arctic is not focused on parity with NATO. These themes can too be found in the following government documents.

The *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* states that the Arctic is a region where Russia must “promote peace, stability and constructive international cooperation.” Russia also proclaims that the state will “be firm in countering any attempts to introduce elements of political or military confrontation in the Arctic.” The *National Security Strategy to 2020* (NSS) outlines Russia’s position that the “development of equal and mutually beneficial international cooperation in the Arctic” must be prioritized.

The *Development Strategy of the Russian Arctic* and NSS contain a much less assertive tone compared to the documents’ earlier versions (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2009; President of the Russian Federation, 2008). The newer Arctic strategy papers focus on combating socio-economic issues such as “smuggling, terrorism, and illegal immigration” instead of balancing military power with other states. The 2008 and 2013 editions of the *Development Strategy* do not mention the military activities of other nations.

Russia’s Ministry of Defense has consistently called for the development of Russian military facilities in the Arctic to meet “emerging threats” (Fomichev, 2015). The 2014 *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* declares that armed forces must be present in the Russian Arctic to secure national interests even during peacetime. However, the document calls for a general military renovation to replace old icebreakers and other decrepit units.

### Energy and Natural Resource Interests

The 2013 Development Policy highlights Russia’s interest in expanding large-scale economic projects involving energy extraction. One of Russia’s main priorities is to satisfy Russia’s need for “hydrocarbon resources, water bio-resources and other types of strategic raw materials.” The document characterizes the Arctic as a major source of natural resources (President of the Russian Federation, 2013).

Two thirds of all Russian oil and gas is estimated to be found in Russia’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Arctic (Claes & Moe, 2014). As much as twenty percent of Russia’s gross domestic product (GDP) is generated within Russian territories in the Arctic (Laruelle, 2014). Accordingly, exploitation of the Arctic’s resources is considered essential for Russia’s social and economic development. Former President Medvedev declared that the state’s “first and main task is to turn the Arctic into a resource base for Russia” (Klare, 2013).

In the *Energy Strategy for Russia up to 2030*, the Arctic is described as a key region for increasing “geological exploration, private investments, and state participation in the development of new territories and waters.” This document also proclaims the Russian state’s hopes to enhance Russian energy companies’ positions abroad and provide an environment for efficient international cooperation for sophisticated energy projects in the Arctic.

### Maritime Shipping Interests

The fading sea ice in the Arctic has led analysts and policymakers to herald the development of a new maritime shipping lane, the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The route may become a shorter lane for shipping between the major ports of East Asia and Western Europe. The NSR is within Russia’s EEZ,

meaning that Russia has jurisdiction over the route. As a result, the NSR receives great attention in the *Development Strategy* and *Transport Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2030*. Russia aims to develop the NSR by commissioning nuclear icebreakers, improving the ports along the lane and creating a monitoring system. Furthermore, it is a high priority for Russia to build an effective border control service to monitor the route and enforce regulations.

Moscow also has a partial interest in internationalizing access to the NSR, but is so far oriented toward regulating the route for national economic development. For instance, recent legislation excluded foreign vessels from transporting Russian natural resources along the NSR (TASS, 2017). However, the caution of allowing foreign ships into the Russian EEZ is understandable considering its location on Russia's northern border.

Admiral Robert Papp, the State Department's Special Representative to the Arctic under President Obama, stated, "Russia is doing those things we would be doing ourselves if there was an increase in traffic above our coast" (Jopson & Milne, 2015). A large component of Russia's military in the Arctic has been designated to secure the NSR. The Ministry of Defense has prioritized security measures to combat oil and waste spills, smuggling, poaching, and to provide SAR services necessary in the high seas.

### Recent Russian Actions, Short of Armed Conflict, in the Arctic

Russia's actions in the Arctic demonstrate a commitment to realizing their economic, security, and developmental objectives. Russia has partially focused on offshore drilling, mineral extraction and maritime shipping. On the other hand, Moscow is acting defensively during a time of heightened tensions with neighboring countries and as a result, is building its security in the region. The Kremlin is committed to confronting any emerging threats to its Arctic territory, maritime transport ventures and energy projects. Russia has opened or reopened military facilities, conducted military drills, and maintained a comprehensive armed presence. Russia's security interests can be described as realist and pragmatic. Russia aims to maintain control over the region while at the same time cooperating with other Arctic states' through military drills and SAR operations.

### Security Activities

Russia's security actions in the Arctic reflect a commitment to upholding national sovereignty, securing ongoing economic interests, and asserting Russia as a first-class military power in the twenty-first century. Since the 2007 polar expedition when Russian scientists planted their flag on the North Pole's seabed, many Western journalists and politicians have cast Russian actions in the Arctic as expansionist, aggressive and threatening. Popular perceptions of Russia's Arctic actions have also turned negative after the Ukrainian Crisis.

It was expected in the wake of the crisis that the Kremlin would ramp up and accelerate its military activities in the Far North. However, there was no paradigmatic shift of Moscow's vision of the military's role in the Arctic. Russian military activities in the Arctic remain comparable to those of other Arctic states protecting their sovereignty and economic interests (Sergunin & Konyshchev, 2015). Although Russia's military projection in the Arctic is mostly aerial and naval, there are garrisons of Russian ground troops and security services throughout the Russian Arctic.

The Northern Fleet is perhaps the most important aspect of the Russian military in the region. Since the 1950s, it has had the greatest number of icebreakers and submarines of the Soviet/Russian naval

fleets. Several ships are under construction due to need for coastal ships to conduct rapid operations, but they have been afflicted by delays. Alarmist media and politicians declare that Russia is dramatically increasing its naval presence. In reality, Russia has fewer naval units in the Arctic than the Soviet Union had during the 1980s. Russia is rebuilding its navy after a virtual absence during the nineties (Heininen, Sergunin & Yarovoy, 2014).

Russia's only aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, is part of the Northern Fleet. It hosts twenty fighter jets and ten helicopters. In addition, the recently repaired destroyer, the *Vice-Admiral Kulakov*, was introduced into the Northern Fleet in 2011. Naval aviation includes 200 combat aircraft and fifty helicopters (Lasserre & Tetu, 2016).

The Northern Fleet includes around forty surface ships and forty submarines, most of which are rundown Cold War era units. The sea-based nuclear deterrence capability makes the Northern Fleet a fundamental part of Russia's military. Consequently, Russia has since 2007 expanded naval patrols near Norwegian and Danish territories, increased the operational radius of the Fleet's submarines, and commenced below-ice training for submarines (Klimenko, 2016). However, Russian submarines are in the process of re-equipping and modernizing rather than striving for superiority or parity. The Russian navy aims to deploy new ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBNs) but they cannot compare to US conventional-strike capabilities. US Atlantic naval presence vastly outnumbers the Russian Arctic presence (English & Thvedt, 2018).

In 2007, Russian strategic bombers started flying over the Arctic for the first time since the end of the Cold War. These flights are criticized by journalists, but authoritative military experts recognize that the resumption of bomber flights is more about the Kremlin's desire to not lose capacity and for domestic approval rather than outward aggression (Lasserre & Tetu, 2016). Close encounters between NATO and Russian fighter and bomber pilots in the air above the Arctic have drawn media criticism, but NATO officials say these practices are "perfectly legal" and "welcome" (Posey, 2016). Russia does not have any fifth-generation fighters deployed at all nor an advanced airborne warning system that can compare to the US' multiple F-22 and F-35 squadrons in Alaska and unmatched airborne warning system (English & Thvedt, 2018).

Russia has a large fleet of icebreaking vessels, but they are for escorting commercial shipping and supplying research stations and remote communities. They have minimal military utility and serve a similar purpose as the US icebreakers do in supporting the Coast Guard. The Russian Arctic border guard was established in 1994 to monitor ships and illegal fishing. Nowadays, this force implements the 2011 Arctic Council agreement on the maintenance of a Maritime and Aeronautical SAR System.

These measures can be interpreted as "soft security" actions that do not sway the regional military balance, but instead focus on monitoring. The Russian Coast Guard concentrates on monitoring shipping, fishing, and extraction in the Arctic waters, conducting SAR operations, as well as protecting against oil and waste pollution. This is in line with the activities of other Arctic states' coast guards. The coast guards of the eight Arctic states established the Arctic Coast Guard Forum in 2015. The forum was established for the coast guards to combine emergency response operations in the northern seas (Grant, 2017).

After the end of the Cold War, the regional military presence severely deteriorated and is now in need of modernization. Given the economic and strategic significance of the region, it is understandable that Russia aims to build its military forces in the region to meet emerging dangers and security issues. Furthermore, Russian military practices should not be cast as a threat since their capabilities are not comparable to US superior military presence.

## Economic Activities

The Arctic has long been a significant source of energy and resources for Russia. During the Soviet era, the coal, minerals, and oil of the Far North played key roles in the nation's industrialization. Currently, there are a number of hydrocarbon companies operating in the Arctic. Sanctions on Russian oil and gas executives, low oil prices, and the difficulties of extraction in the hostile environment have been obstacles to Russia procuring the benefits of its Arctic resources. Despite these challenges, Russia has made efforts to develop its Arctic energy projects as well as collaborate with foreign partners, since unilateral extraction can be expensive and complicated.

In 2018, Russia's Minister of Natural Resources Dmitry Kobylkin announced a major five year plan to invest in infrastructure and resource development. For the period until 2024, the sum of \$83 million will cover investments in railways, sea ports, and hydrocarbon and coal fields. This sum is comparable to what the Russian government invests in healthcare and education combined (Staalesen, 2018). Offshore commercial production is only underway at the Prirazlomnoye field. This field was discovered in the Pechora Sea in 1989. It is estimated to hold 70 million tons of oil. Oil production operations at Prirazlomnoye began in 2013 under the license of Gazprom. It is the only Russian hydrocarbon production project being implemented on the Arctic shelf because of a 2008 ban prohibiting private companies from access to offshore fields (Gazprom 2019).

Yamal LNG (liquefied natural gas) is another significant energy project in Russia's North. Launched in 2013, Yamal LNG is one of the largest and most complex LNG projects in the world. It is a joint venture between Russia's largest independent gas company Novatek, French gas company Total, the China National Petroleum Corporation, and the Chinese Silk Road Fund. Largely due to Western sanctions and Russian countersanctions, Russia has pivoted eastwards and fostered relationships with Asian countries, especially China. As a heavily industrialized country, China has a growing interest in securing their energy supply, and is looking to the Arctic for hydrocarbons and minerals.

Yamal LNG is pivotal to the maritime economy of the Arctic as it is one of the major sources of cargo from the Arctic to China. In 2018, icebreaking LNG carriers made landmark voyages across the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Novatek has used the NSR since 2010, but 2018 marked the first time it has sent an LNG carrier from Yamal to China and to Northern Europe (G-Captain, 2018). This marks a new period for the gas industry and economic growth for Russia's northern regions. Novatek plans to build a second LNG project called Arctic LNG-2. It is set to be completed by 2023. Saudi Arabia is also set to invest \$5 billion in Novatek's future LNG project. The combined LNG projects are predicted to rival the world's leader Qatar in gas production (Daiss, 2018).

In May 2018, President Putin set an ambitious target for the NSR. Putin announced that shipping on the NSR should reach 80 million tons by 2024. This is a stark increase from the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources' initial estimate of 72 million tons by 2030 (Staalesen, 2018). These objectives are not impossible since the Yamal LNG project accounts for shipping millions of tons of LNG. Putin's announcement was part of a collection of government objectives that aim to reduce national poverty and eventually make Russia into one of the world's five biggest economies. To support this objective, it was announced in November 2018 that Russia will invest over \$4 billion to build an Arctic port along the NSR (TASS, 2018).

There are also ongoing projects for the extraction of natural resources such as palladium, gold, nickel, and platinum in the Murmansk region. In 2018, Russia unveiled the first sea-based floating nuclear power plant. The 21,000 ton station is scheduled to be towed to the Arctic in the summer of 2019.

Greenpeace has nicknamed it “floating Chernobyl” (Wootson, 2018). Russian ambitions for the maritime economy are ambitious and it shows in the breadth of collaborations and investments.

To conclude, Russian interests and activities in the Arctic are generally oriented towards achieving domestic economic and social development. Russia’s major economic ambitions involve energy extraction and maritime shipping. Considering these projects’ economic significance and the geographical location of the Arctic, Russia has a military interest to secure this region. Russia is adamant about securing its territory as well as asserting its sovereignty.

## References

- Claes, D. H. & Moe, A. (2014). Arctic petroleum resources in a regional and global perspective, *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: Regional Dynamics in a Global World*. Routledge: London, p. 97-120
- Daiss, T. (29 October 2018). “\$5 billion Saudi LNG investment plays into Russia’s hands,” *Oil Price* Retrieved from <https://oilprice.com/energy/natural-gas/5-billion-saudi-lng-investment-plays-into-russias-hands.html>
- English, R. & Thvedt, A. (2018). The Arctic. *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fomichev, M. (25 February 2015). Shoygu: shirokiy spektr ugroz Rossii formiruyetsya v Arktike [Shoigu: a wide range of threats to Russia is being formed in the Arctic] *RIA Novosti*. Retrieved from [https://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20150225/1049607549.html](https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20150225/1049607549.html)
- Gazprom. (2019). Prirazlomnoye field. *Gazprom*. Retrieved from [gazprom.com/projects/prirazlomnoye](http://gazprom.com/projects/prirazlomnoye)
- G-Captain. (19 July 2018). Russia ships first Yamal LNG cargoes to China via Northern Sea route. *G-Captain*. Retrieved from <https://gcaptain.com/russia-ships-first-yamal-lng-cargoes-to-china-via-northern-sea-route>
- Grant, A. (24 March 2017). U.S., other nations gather to work on Arctic issues. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/03/24/joins-with-russia-and-other-nations-coast-guard-agreement-for-arctic/mVoiUgz5w5Jqwtvos1tDPI/story.html>
- Heininen, L., Sergunin, A. & Yarovoy, G. (2014). Russian strategies in the Arctic: Avoiding a new Cold War. *Moscow: Valdai Discussion Club*. Retrieved from <http://www.valdaiclub.com/files/11482>
- Hosa, J. (28 October 2018) Has Russia already won the scramble for the Arctic? *The Maritime Executive*
- Jospon, B. & Milne, R. (9 March 2015). U.S. urged to assert itself over Arctic. *The Financial Times*.
- Klare, M. (8 December 2013). Rushing for the Arctic’s riches. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/08/opinion/sunday/rushing-for-the-arctics->



[riches.html](#)

Klimenko, E. (2016). Russia's Arctic security policy: Still quiet in the high north?. *SIPRI*, Policy Paper 45

Laruelle, M. (2014). *Russia's Arctic strategies and the future of the far north*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe

Lasserre, F. & Tetu, P.L. (2016). Russian air patrols in the Arctic: are long-range bomber patrols a challenge to Canadian security and sovereignty? *Northern Research Forum*

Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. (2009) O Strategii natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii do 2020 goda [On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, no. 4912. Retrieved from <https://rg.ru/2009/05/19/strategia-dok.html>

Peck, M. (6 January 2018) Russia has a plan to dominate the Arctic. *The National Interest*

Posey, C. (September 2016). The guard at NATO's northern gate. *Air and Space*

President of the Russian Federation. (2001). Osnovy gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike [Basics of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic] *Government of the Russian Federation*. Retrieved from <http://www.sci.aha.ru/econ/A111c.htm>

President of the Russian Federation (2008) Osnovy gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2020 goda i dal'neyshuyu perspektivu [Foundations of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period until 2020 and beyond]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, no. 4877. Retrieved from <https://rg.ru/2009/03/30/arktika-osnovy-dok.html>

President of the Russian Federation. (2013) O Strategii razvitiya Arkticheskoy zony Rossiyskoy Federatsii i obespecheniya natsional'noy bezopasnosti na period do 2020 goda [On the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security for the Period to 2020]. *Government of the Russian Federation*. Retrieved from <http://government.ru/info/18360/>

Sergunin, A. & Konyshchev, V. (2015). Russian military activities in the Arctic: Myths & realities. *Arctic Yearbook: Arctic Governance and Governing*. Akureyri, Iceland: Northern Research Forum

Staalesen, A. (14 December 2018). Russia presents a grandiose 5-year plan for the Arctic. *The Barents Observer*. Retrieved from <https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-industry-and-energy/2018/12/russia-presents-grandiose-5-year-plan-arctic>

Staalesen, A. (15 May 2018). It's an order from the Kremlin: shipping on Northern Sea route to reach 80 million tons by 2024. *The Barents Observer*. Retrieved from <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2018/05/its-order-kremlin-shipping-northern-sea-route-increase-80-million-tons-2024>

TASS (16 November 2017). Putin rasschitvayet, chto tol'ko sudam pod flagom RF razreshat perevozit' uglevodorody po SMP [Putin expects that only ships under the Russian flag will

be allowed to transport hydrocarbons in the NSR]. Retrieved from  
<http://www.tass.ru/ekonomika/4735263>

TASS (28 November 2018). Russian corporation eyes construction of a new Arctic port. TASS.  
Retrieved from [tass.com/economy/1033248](http://tass.com/economy/1033248)

Trenin, D. & Baev, P. (2010). The Arctic: A view from Russia. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Washington, DC

United States Department of Defense. (November 2013). *Arctic Strategy*. Washington, DC

Wootson Jr, C. (1 May 2018). Russia says its sea-based nuclear power plant is safe, Critics call it a 'floating Chernobyl.' *The Washington Post*

Zysk, K. (2008). Russian Military Power and the Arctic. *The EU-Russia Centre Review: Russian Foreign Policy*, no. 8, p. 80-86.

## PART IV. HOW SHOULD THE US COUNTERACT RUSSIAN GRAY ZONE ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE GLOBE?

### Chapter 16. Potential Global Actions to Counter Provocative Russian Activities

Mr. Roman "Comrade" Pyatkov  
HAF/A3K CHECKMATE  
[roman.pyatkov.ctr@mail.mil](mailto:roman.pyatkov.ctr@mail.mil)

#### Abstract

The US National Defense Strategy (NDS) calls out Russian actions to undermine NATO and modify European and Middle Eastern security and economic organizations in its favor (National Defense Strategy summary, p. 2). Countering Russian provocations requires all instruments of national power. The NDS recognizes that simple fact and points out that successful competition requires integrating multiple elements of national power (Mattis, 2018 p. 4). The NDS states, "in competition short of armed conflict, revisionist powers and rogue regimes are using corruption, predatory economic practices, propaganda, political subversion, proxies, and the threat or use of military force to change facts on the ground" (Mattis, 2018, p. 5). US responses can be both proactive and reactive. Proactively, the United States can strengthen our ally and partner democratic systems of governance, while reducing their dependence on Russian energy through diversification of energy sources. As during the Cold War, the most effective antidote to propaganda is free press, backed up by resilient democratic institutions. To counter Russian military proxies, the United States can increase the capabilities of allies and partners. Meanwhile, Russian threats to use force can be mitigated by demonstrating US resolve and capability to deter and defeat Russian aggression. If the US redlines are clearly communicated, and backed up by credible force, escalation can be avoided. The specific Russian redlines are not as critical for the Competitive Zone actions, because due to its nature Competitive Zone provocative activities taken by Russia are designed to stay away from open conflict. At the same time, the United States needs to groom a new generation of Russia experts who not only understand Russian actions in the current context, but that have a cultural and historical understanding of Russia on which to base their recommendations for future US actions. The United States remains the world's most powerful nation, with the largest GDP and most powerful military. It has tremendous resources available through all the instruments of national power to confront provocative Russian actions.

#### Introduction

The return of the Great Power competition, as articulated in the latest strategic guidance, is reinvigorating the US government's efforts towards a more competitive approach towards China and Russia. This paper addresses, from a global perspective, the question of what potential actions the United States could employ proactively or in response to Russian provocative activities in the Competitive Zone. The National Defense Strategy (NDS) lays out the priority of effort to address the Russian threat. Specifically, the NDS calls out Russian actions to undermine NATO and modify European and Middle Eastern security and economic organizations in its favor (Mattis, 2018, p. 2). While this is a somewhat broad characterization, the specific identification of Russia's objectives as described below can focus the US government's efforts to counter Russian provocative actions. The

United States remains the leading diplomatic, economic, and military power in the world. As such, it is uniquely capable of addressing Russia's provocative actions.

### Potential Actions to Counter Russian Activities

As articulated in the NDS, Russia is focusing its efforts in two geographic areas, Europe and the Middle East. While the United States cannot be everywhere, it can focus its actions to address both regions. That does not mean that Russian actions should be ignored in other areas of the world, such as Central or South Asia. However, in those areas the US actions and responses will be based on Chinese actions. In contrast, the United States has significant interests vis-à-vis Russia in both Europe and the Middle East. In Europe, NATO is the primary security organization that shapes US security policy. While in the Middle East, our Gulf partners represent a significant resource investment to ensure regional stability.

Countering Russian provocations requires all instruments of national power. The NDS recognizes that simple fact and points out that successful competition requires integrating multiple elements of national power (Mattis, 2018, p. 4). In order to address specific provocative actions, one has to understand what the threat is. The NDS states that states such as Russia are: "revisionist powers and rogue regimes are using corruption, predatory economic practices, propaganda, political subversion, proxies, and the threat or use of military force to change facts on the ground (Mattis, 2018, p. 5). The list of provocative actions are not all encompassing but provides a good starting point to focus US responses.

US actions can be both proactive and reactive. A key proactive action is strengthening our ally and partner capabilities to expose, attribute, and reduce corruption. As listed in the Corruption Perceptions Index—with minor exceptions—the least corrupt countries in the world are democracies (Corruption Perception Index, 2018). Therefore, it naturally follows that the United States should focus its instruments of power on strengthening democratic governance in allied and partner nations. In Europe, it means focusing on former communist nations such as Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and others. The proposition is more difficult in the Middle East. Most of America's partners are non-democratic governments. Therefore, there is not much the US can do to increase its Middle East partner's resistance to corruption. Instead, the US must accept that these countries are more susceptible to corrupt practices by adversaries such as Russia and be ready to mitigate any fallout. The same goes for the rest of the world. Democratic systems of governance present the biggest challenge to Russian and Chinese use of corrupt practices.

Another way Russia presents a challenge is in the unique way it uses its state-owned hydrocarbon companies to pursue political objectives. In Europe, the threat to our allies is their dependence on Russian oil and gas. That dependence can be proactively managed by encouraging diversification of energy sources and investments in alternative energy sources. In the Middle East, Russia has no similar economic leverage against US partners.

In the information realm, Russian propaganda is an age-old problem. While the methods of propaganda Russia uses have changed from Soviet times, the problem is similar to the one the United States faced during the Cold War. As during the Cold War, the most effective antidote to propaganda is free press, backed up by resilient democratic institutions. Reactively, the US government can expose Russian propaganda efforts to the US and allied publics to educate their societies on specific Russian provocative actions. The advantage for the United States is that American companies such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook are at the forefront of social media while at the same time are subject

to US oversight. This means that the United States can use legislative actions to expose Russian actors spreading propaganda on those platforms.

Beyond the non-military instruments of power, Russia uses both proxies and the threat of force to achieve its objectives. Both of these actions were clearly demonstrated in Ukraine in 2014 and have carried over to other places such as Syria. To counter these actions, both proactive and reactive steps can be taken. Proactively, the United States can increase the capabilities of allies and partners to combat Russian proxies through training and equipment as being done now in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Russian threats to use force can be mitigated by demonstrating resolve and capability to deter Russian aggression. Concurrently, the United States should continue to modernize its conventional forces, while integrating innovative technologies such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, quantum computing, and augmented reality to maintain US military edge. In Europe, the United States, through NATO, can demonstrate to Russia that there is a willingness and capability to resist Russian threats. In conjunction with partners and allies, the US can do the same in the Middle East. The effort to counter Russia there is less demanding since Russia's only close relationship is with Syria, and Russia does not physically border any US partners or allies. Reactively, the United States has used force against Russian proxies that threatened US and allied interests in Syria in 2018, to which Russia produced no response (Gibbons-Neff, 2018).

The range of actions the United States can take against Russian provocative actions is vast. Some will continue as day to day activities, such as actions to counter corruption and propaganda. Others, such as proxy engagement can be perceived as more escalatory by the Russians. However, if the US redlines are clearly communicated, and backed up by credible force, escalation can be avoided. Some actions such as corruption or economic coercion might not be possible to deter, however they can be mitigated through proactive actions.

Throughout the spectrum of competition, the United States should be cognizant of any potential Russian redlines that could escalate the situation. This must be done through the lens of US strategy. The specific Russian redlines are not as critical for the Competitive Zone actions, because due by its nature Competitive Zone provocative activities taken by Russia are designed to stay away from open conflict. One can assume that attacks on Russia proper or support for a regime change in Moscow would be a Russian redline. Beyond these obvious redlines, the rest of the competitive activities would focus on other elements of power that should not rise to the level of a potential redline.

Underpinning all of these efforts is the need for a baseline of knowledge about Russia throughout the US government. The Soviet expertise that was resident within different US agencies has atrophied following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For the United States, to identify the correct actions to employ proactively or reactively against Russia, it needs to groom a new generation of Russia experts who not only understand Russian actions in the current context, but that have a cultural and historical understanding of Russia on which to base their future recommendations.

Even without that baseline of knowledge, the United States still has to act both pro- and reactively. The worst-case scenario for the United States would be to ignore Russian actions that threaten US objectives worldwide, but specifically in Europe and the Middle East. As the NDS states Russia wants to undermine NATO and change security and economic relationships into its favor. The United States knows what Russia wants; the worst case would be allowing it to happen through inaction.

## Conclusion

The United States remains the world's most powerful nation, with the largest GDP and most powerful military. It has tremendous resources available through all the instruments of national power to confront provocative Russian actions. The range of provocative actions that Russia takes will leverage all instruments of US national power. Until the Russian leadership changes its course, Russia will continue to threaten to US and Western interests. The United States can and should use all its capabilities, proactively and reactively, in conjunction with allies and partners, to address Russian activities. This should be done with clear priorities, as articulated in the strategic guidance, while being cognizant of any other emerging points of contention.

## References

- Corruption Perception Index 2018. (2018). Transparency International. Retrieved from <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>
- Gibbons-Neff, T. (2018, May 24). How a 4-hour battle between Russian mercenaries and U.S. commandos unfolded in Syria, *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/world/middleeast/american-commandos-russian-mercenaries-syria.html>
- Mattis, J. (2018). Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America Retrieved from <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

## Chapter 17. Countering Russian Influence in the Baltic States

Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux  
Brigham Young University - Idaho  
[lamoreauxj@byui.edu](mailto:lamoreauxj@byui.edu)

### Abstract

Russian influence in Europe happens primarily through “hybrid warfare” techniques. To counter this, the United States ought to take steps to strengthen economic, political and societal liberalism across Europe. Economic and political liberalism both create strong states capable of providing the institutions necessary for societal liberalism. Societal liberalism, when it is upheld by the rule of law, helps create a more diverse, yet united, populace more committed to the state, to its basic institutions, and less likely to be influenced by outside sources (in this case, Russia).

### Promoting Liberalism in Europe

The US is best protected within the global community when political and economic liberalization thrive. Economic liberalization (which even authoritarian regimes embrace) is not enough. Political liberalization is vital. The US and Western Europe are the key proponents of political liberalization.

The US needs to reengage the promotion of political and economic liberalization. The same broad approach the US took vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (promoting the ideals of liberalism via media: VOA, radiofreeeurope, etc.) is the same approach Russia is using today while the US seems to have backed off of it. Instead, Western “morals” (which often have nothing to do with US foreign policy ideals of political and economic liberalism) are being promoted via entertainment media and providing fodder to Russia’s argument that they have the higher moral ground. By allowing US entertainment media to be the sole transference of what it means to be “Western,” the narrative focuses almost solely on societal liberalization. This means the US risks disregarding the basic political and economic institutions that make such rights possible. Societal liberalization is built on political and economic liberalization. The US must promote inclusion, tolerance, and a wide variety of human rights across Europe; but do so without crossing the line of promoting an agenda of regime change. Rather, they need to encourage political and economic liberalization among the population, and then let the populace do the societal changing.

If there is one moral the US ought to be pushing, it is transparency. Transparency is a key component of any functioning liberal political or economic system, and yet that is exactly what many of the countries in Eastern Europe lack. Specifically, transparency in Ukraine would significantly improve the chances of enduring democratization and marketization.

### US Actions in the Competitive Zone

The US can do two things: actively promote liberalization and transparency, and actively encourage allies to narrow the gaps between their own societal identities. The US could encourage the EU to take a more active approach to liberalization in Eastern Europe countries such as Ukraine and the Balkans. Economic and political stability (through liberalization) can limit Russia’s influence. It is a real stretch, but the EU could be encouraged to incentivize liberalization by offering more specific options for membership for some of these countries whereas, at present, the prospect of membership is not realistic (in large part because of expansion fatigue within the EU). Still, the EU can be

encouraged to do more. Promoting transparency alongside liberalization will lend credibility to democratic institutions and processes, and to market institutions and processes. When those succeed, Russia's anti-Western propaganda will lose some of its influence. Additionally, doing so will limit the anti-Western influence of Russia's propaganda.

Second, the US needs to encourage societal healing. This would make the US somewhat hypocritical (as we need significant societal healing within our own country), but societal healing, especially within the Baltic States, would do much to limit Russia's influence there. Many states across Eastern Europe suffer from tensions between different ethnic/religious/linguistic groups. The Baltic States, especially Estonia and Latvia, though experiencing this tension between ethnic Balts and ethnic Russians, are in a position that reflects something of a Janus. On the one hand, they are already in the EU and NATO, so don't need to make any societal changes to secure institutional support. On the other hand, they are already members of the EU and NATO, so they are in a prime position to embrace the Russian minorities while still being assured of Western institutional support. Specifically, if Russians were finally afforded equal rights, the ethno-linguistic Russian population would have considerably less incentive to believe Russia's propaganda about having a moral high ground. Instead, being treated equally could undermine Russia's arguments in this regard. For example—and I cannot stress this enough—if the Baltic States will reach out to their ethnic Russian populations, invite them to participate as equal members of society, Russia's influence will diminish significantly. By maintaining those gaps, they maintain and invite Russian influence.

We could positively impact the situation by signaling our support for the Baltic States through continued NATO presence there *while* publicly encouraging societal reconciliation between ethnic Balts and ethnic Russians, and publicly discouraging “Russian-bashing” by Baltic elites. Send a signal that we are happy to support them within Western frameworks but expect them to refrain from provoking negative/aggressive behavior from Russia.

### Strategic Implications of US Actions and Objectives

We need a politically and economically liberal Europe. We need the Baltic States within that liberal Europe. But, we need the Baltic States to be something of a “Finland”: conciliatory and cooperative toward Russia (even while wary) instead of provocative. If the Baltic States continue to provoke Russian disfavor through policies unfriendly to ethnic Russians, and through strong anti-Russian rhetoric among political elites, Russia has every incentive to continue their revanchist policies, which just heightens the prospect for conflict between the US and Russia. The US admitted the Baltic States to NATO and has troops in the Baltic States. In return, the US has every right to expect the Baltic States to *refrain* from provocative discourse and behavior.

Within Europe, the US needs to limit Russia's propensity to promote societal discord, because we need a societally strong and vibrant Europe. If Russia can divide Europe, the US is potentially left alone promoting the international liberal order that helps us maintain our own security. We need Europe strong so we can be strong. And vice versa.

### Russian Response to US Actions

From a Russian perspective, anything involving the military would be seen as an escalation. Increased military—even if for defensive purposes—will be seen as an escalation. A drawdown of troops, on the other hand, could be seen as a de-escalation. Unfortunately, a drawdown of troops effectively signals to the Baltic States that they do not matter to the US. So, the US is currently caught, very much, between a rock and a hard place: increase troops to offer more protection to the Baltic States, and we



risk escalating tensions with Russia; draw them down, and we risk angering the Baltic States, potentially causing them to become even more toxic towards Russia and, quite possibly, more unwelcoming to their own ethnic Russians.

However, if the US were to publicly encourage the Baltic States to heal societal fissures, it could well be something of a salve to tensions with ethnic Russians and possibly even Russia. In addition, the old adage “if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all” still has some staying power. The leaders of the Baltic States are notorious for abusing Russia in no uncertain terms. This is especially true of Lithuania most recently. And, when looking at history, they have every reason to view Russia negatively. However, such speech does nothing to ease tensions between Russia and the West. As it is in both the US and Western Europe’s best interest to improve relations with Russia, perhaps the US could actively discourage open hostility toward Russia among Baltic elites. The same sentiment can still be shared and acted on behind closed doors and through diplomatic channels without the public humiliation associated with a war of words. As Russia is already somewhat backed into a corner economically and diplomatically, already trying to cope with international humiliation for the general opposition to their blundering war with Ukraine, any progression in relations between Russia and the West could start with something of an olive branch from the Baltic States.

### Russian “Red Lines”

Offering NATO membership to Ukraine or (in another dimension) Belarus. These two states are perceived in the Kremlin as being in Russia’s sphere of influence in no uncertain terms. Historically this is true. Just as importantly, Russia claims a religious/moral right to these countries (as explained in Ch. 1). These are absolute red lines that, were NATO membership to be unconditionally offered to either of these states, would provoke further action from Russia (along the lines, or worse, of what we’ve seen in Crimea and eastern Ukraine). Granted, NATO membership was conditionally offered to Ukraine, but the likelihood of that happening seems very remote. The likelihood of NATO membership ever being offered to Belarus seems entirely unlikely. Regardless, the prospect of NATO membership has already provoked Russia to move against Ukraine, and any further prospects of NATO expansion in to these two states would provoke further, perhaps more destructive, response.

At a lesser level, Finnish or Georgian NATO membership, while not absolutely red lines, are risky for the US. Finland, even during the Cold War, maintained a working (if tense) relationship with Russia, but on the condition that Finland did not join NATO. The recent war in Ukraine (and annexation of Crimea) have left many in Finland more openly considering NATO membership. The Kremlin, in return, has stated that Finnish NATO membership would provoke some response. Georgia is in a situation similar to Ukraine: they’ve been offered (rather tentatively) NATO membership, but it looks unlikely that they will accede to membership any time soon. However, the prospect of NATO having more influence in Georgia, and especially in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (where a majority of the inhabitants are ethnic Russian), does not rest at all easy with the Kremlin. Either of these scenarios could provoke a Russian response.

### Potential Negative Outcomes & Worst-Case Scenarios

The US could negatively impact the situation by increasing military presence in the Baltic States, encouraging continued provocation by Baltic elites, encouraging continued societal discord in the

Baltic States, or encouraging Ukrainian/Georgian/Finnish (or, heaven forbid, Belarusian) NATO membership. We could also negatively impact the situation by dissuading the EU from doing their share to promote the international liberal order (most specifically on their own borders to the east). Removing ourselves, or others, from NATO would be just as negative. We need to maintain a strong NATO. But, we need a strong NATO *without* members provoking Russia.

If one were to imagine gradually worsening scenarios, we would see a Europe becoming increasingly divided, the Baltic States continue aggressive behaviors while still expecting NATO protection. In either case, the door would be open for Russia to become more aggressive in their agenda of securing their sphere of influence and limiting US influence in Europe. Or, while less realistic *at present*, we could imagine a Russia starting a frozen conflict in the Baltic States. Doing so would require the US to respond (getting us into some sort of hot conflict with Russia), or back down (seriously limiting our influence across Europe and damaging our reputation on the global stage).

## Conclusion

As a matter of promoting an international liberal order, the US as every incentive to promote their own interests in the Baltic States, not least because in doing so they limit the influence of Russia in the region. But, this means that the US needs to actively promote NATO presence in the Baltic Region, while also promoting societal change. Specifically, the Baltic States need to be much more accommodating to their ethnic Russian populations and, so by doing, limit Russia's influence. However, the US needs to stop well short of promoting the continued spread of NATO to other states in the area such as Ukraine, Georgia or Finland.

## Chapter 18. Recommended US Response to Russian Activities Across Central Asia

Dr. Roger Kangas  
National Defense University, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies  
[kangasr@ndu.edu](mailto:kangasr@ndu.edu)

### Abstract

Among the sub-regions of the world, the area of Central Asia is one of the more difficult to outline clear actions for the US, simply because of the advantages that other large powers have, due to geographic proximity and current rates of economic and security engagement. Given this geopolitical reality in Central Asia, the US has a limited role to play. If the “tools of engagement” are exercised consistently and clearly, the US can have a positive influence in the region. The countries collectively chafe at that notion they are part of some “Russian Near Abroad.” Officials and analysts from the region repeatedly discuss the need to choose their future paths of engagement, whether in terms of multi-vectored security relations or diversifying trade and export/import routes. These signals can be addressed by US policies and actions. The refrain of needing the US to act as a “balancer” is heard from such actors, as well as many in the Washington, DC think tank community that focus on Central Asia. To do this, the US must be able to shape its own narrative in the region, combatting a rather vitriolic Russian message that paints the US in a negative light.

### Geopolitics in Central Asia

Among the sub-regions of the world, the area of Central Asia is one of the more difficult to outline clear actions for the US, simply because of the advantages that other larger powers have, due to geographic proximity and current rates of economic and security engagement. The Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have up to 300 years of direct contact with Russia (as the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now the Russian Federation), with nearly 70 years of being part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. During the period 1924-1991, that is, from the national delimitation of 1924 to the collapse of the country in 1991, these states were “Union Republics” politically, economically, and socially managed by Moscow. Since 1991, each has charted their own course of action in these fields, in addition to establishing their own security national structures and forces.

Given this geopolitical reality in Central Asia, the US has a limited (or sometimes no) role to play. The five states have connections with Russia that are historic, institutional, and existential. Although China has become the key economic actor in the region, Russia remains critical in other areas. It is important to stress that the Central Asian countries are different in terms of their capacity—economic, political, and security—and have varying relations with Russia. Some are members of the multilateral organizations headed by Russia (CIS, CSTO, Eurasian Economic Union), and others are not. Three have Russian security forces on their soil, and two do not. To generalize too much distorts the presence of Russia in the region and its importance. Over time, the level of connectivity with Russia has become more complex; Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are perhaps the least “dependent” on Russia, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan rely heavily on Russian investment, opportunities for remittances from their citizens working in Russia, and security. Kazakhstan, touting its “multi-vectored” policy, engages with Russia, but also makes it a point to have fairly robust relations with the European Union, China, and the US, to name a few.

## Examining & Defining Russian Competitive Activities

Within this environment, what would be categorized as competitive Russian activities? One could look at increased pressure to host Russian troops in a given country or expanding the remit of existing units therein (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). Economically, it could be pressure to adhere to Eurasian Economic Union guidelines and enhanced measures to create common markets and currency guidelines, while limiting engagement with non-Eurasian Economic Union nations. Finally, it would be Russian pressure to have a given state in the region distance itself from the US/West, such as not participating in US-led missions in Afghanistan or not signing energy deals with Western companies that could diversify export routes. While there has been concern raised about Russia being more aggressive along the Kazakhstani border, it is unlikely that it would resort to actual kinetic operations (invasion) in the immediate future. Barring a radical shift in Kazakhstan's foreign and security policy, or a crisis in the upcoming succession of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, as he manages the country's future, nothing *should* prompt the Russian government to act in an overtly hostile manner. Therefore, one has to look at the competitive actions noted above that could force a given Central Asian state to distance itself from the US. The closure of the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan in 2014 is a good example of this. While there was popular support among the Kyrgyz population for closing the base, fueled largely by a Russian-influenced media campaign, the Russian government continually called for the base's closure and repeatedly brought it up in discussions with Kyrgyz officials, as early as 2005. That the decision was not made for nearly a decade highlights the value of that facility, as well as that of the US partnership, had for the Kyrgyz government.

## Conditions that Impact Russian Role

We must look at the regional and domestic political, economic, and social conditions that could reduce Russian influence and effectiveness. First of all, if the region remains conflict-free, it is less of concern to Russia. This includes violence within a country (such as Kyrgyzstan in 2010), or an increased possibility of spillover of terrorist groups emanating from Afghanistan. The latter scenario has consistently been part of Russian public statements on security in Central Asia.

Second, the domestic political conditions have to focus on systemic stability within each country. It is not enough to have a strong leader, but systems that are greater than the individual. Tajikistan, for example, relies heavily on the Rakhmon family, and Turkmenistan on the Berdymukhammedov leadership. The transition in Uzbekistan, even if not democratic, belies a certain institutional strengthening that may be happening "post-Karimov." As seen with other Russian neighbors, if the political elite and system are fractured or weakened, the Russian government stands a better chance of manipulating that given country.

Third, in terms of economic conditions, diversification and a greater independence of action are required to reduce Russian influence and effectiveness. If a Central Asian country can participate in a range of trade and economic associations, conduct business with any and all interested partner nations, and export commodities to, or trade goods with other interested states, this will de facto limit Russian economic influence. Dampening this for three of the countries is their membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan all have to follow the guidelines set by this organization, which is ostensibly managed by Russia. Likewise, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan all have citizens working in Russia, sending back remittances which are important for the overall economic growth of these countries. The Russian government's ability to allow or deny such work is a clear "Influence" that is hard to counter.

Fourth, in terms of social conditions, the immediate issue that is often raised is the role of ethnic Russians within the countries of Central Asia. As the protection of Russians abroad is a security concern articulated in Russian security documents and Mr. Putin's speeches, one needs to assume that Kazakhstan, with roughly 20 percent Russians, and Kyrgyzstan, with around five percent Russians, ought to be concerned. The other three states have minimal Russian communities present, nearly thirty years after massive outmigration efforts took place. Compared to the 1989 Soviet Union census, the percentage of ethnic Russians in each country, as well as the total number, has dropped. It is an aging community that will see this trend continue, especially in light of the fact that the Central Asian populations themselves are increasing at healthy rates. That said, if the perception that the Russian community in a given country is somehow being threatened, one could expect to see an initial Russian verbal reactions, leaving the option for further action. Realistically, the only country this would involve would be Kazakhstan.

A second "social element" needs to be recognized. While the Russian physical presence in the countries has decreased, the media and information presence remains fairly strong. It is the case that even news in Central Asian languages is simply a repetition of Russian-language sources, thus presenting the world through a Russian-government approved lens. As long as local media insist on utilizing Russian newsfeeds and alternatives are not as aggressively available, expect to see this trend continue. Curiously, popular support for state-run media is declining in Russia itself, especially as more of the younger generation receive their news from a range of internet sources outside the government purview. Perhaps over time, this diminution of Russian media influence will also be repeated in the Central Asian states, as online access continues to increase therein.

### Defining the "Red Lines" and Worst Case Scenarios

The escalatory measures noted above would approach a "red line" level if carried out without Russian knowledge or support. Were the US to set up a military base in Central Asia, or have a Central Asian military partner more closely with US-led exercises, specifically NATO ones, Moscow would express a negative reaction. Otherwise, most US actions would probably not cross such a line.

Given that the US largely sees Central Asia through the effort in Afghanistan, a worst-case scenario is that the Central Asian states submit to a Russian-controlled security and diplomatic effort toward that country, effectively cutting the region off from South Asia and beyond. Russian security rhetoric suggests a belt of states around Russia itself, offering a buffer from external threats—national or transnational. Russia's success in making the region a true "Near Abroad" would be detrimental to US South and Central Asian policies which emphasize Central Asian connectivity.

### US Response to Russian Activities in Central Asia

Overall, the US could have "limited" role in responding to Russia activities as it is doubtful the US would devote the necessary time and resources. Central Asia is not a high priority region for the US, short of the Afghanistan theatre. However, it is this commitment to Afghanistan, as well as the broader message highlighted that the US is determined to counter revisionist regimes, that the Central Asian region needs to be examined. The countries collectively chafe at that notion they are part of some "Russian Near Abroad." Officials and analysts from the region repeatedly discuss the need to choose their future paths of engagement, whether in terms of multi-vector security relations or diversifying trade and export/import routes. The refrain of needing the US to act as a "balancer" is heard from such actors, as well as many in the Washington, DC think tank community that focus on Central Asia. Therefore, in a rather oblique way, there is a demand signal from some

parts of the Central Asian region for the US to remain engaged, especially if Russia employs competitive activities that might not be directly countered at this time.

The US' tool kit is rather limited in its ability to respond to Russian competitive activities in the region. The US has no permanent military presence in Central Asia, nor does it have a strong business/diplomatic/civil society presence in the region *as a whole*. While the US maintains embassies in all five Central Asian states, and has done so since the countries' independence in 1991, US investment in them is modest when compared to what the US is currently doing in other post-Soviet states, let alone regional neighbors such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. That said, any of the actions noted above can be countered with a consistent and clear messaging of what is proper international behavior and what is not. That is, if and when Russia asserts itself beyond what a given Central Asian state would like, the US needs to vocally support that country and refuse to acknowledge a Russian "sphere of influence" in Central Asia. The US can also re-emphasize business opportunities for American firms and educational exchanges for students in the region, efforts that were touted in the 1990s, but diminished in subsequent years. The American private sector presence in the Astana Expo 2017 was supported by the US embassy in Kazakhstan and was an opportunity to positively portray the US to a Kazakh audience. In the end, it is about presenting a viable narrative that highlights the strengths of the US, not always focusing on refuting Russian false claims.

### Potential Russian Perceptions of US Actions

High on the list of US actions that would irk Russia would be the return of US military bases in Central Asia, or perhaps just a strong increase in security cooperation. The presence of US troops in the region in the 2000s was "accepted" by Russia as it was in the context of the campaign in Afghanistan that Russia itself vocally supported. However, since the closure of the Manas Transit Center, the drawdown of NATO/US troops in Afghanistan, and the current discussions of reconciliation/peace process/withdrawal of foreign forces in Afghanistan, the Russian position on non-CSTO/SCO security forces in Central Asia is clear. Indeed, the CSTO has wording to the effect that any foreign troop presence in the region must be agreeable to all CSTO members, effectively giving Russia veto power.

Any US-sponsored effort to develop "democratic norms" or electoral processes in the region would also be looked upon with great concern. Again, in the 1990s and early 2000s, such activities were common for US embassies and NGOs in Central Asia. With the Russian-framed perception of "colored revolutions," particularly in light of the 2005 overthrow of Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev, to see such US engagement return to the region would be perceived as an attempt to turn the countries away from Russia and towards the West.

Other actions might not be direct "escalation of force," but "escalation of interest" by the US toward Central Asia. Increased visits of senior US political and military officials through the region, the open expression of US-backed regional cooperative efforts (C5+1), and public statements and US security documents connecting the five Central Asian states with Afghanistan, and hence part of a broader US regional policy are examples of this. Russia most likely would object to these, or at least raise concerns with the leaders of the Central Asian states.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the US has limited options in Central Asia. For years, the US emphasized that the Central Asian states needs to create more open political systems, more diverse and accessible economic markets, just social systems that respect all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender, and a stable and secure region that is void of violent extremist organizations. Obviously, the US-led

operations in Afghanistan imbued the American government's perception of the region, often framing it in a broader South and Central Asia region. Since 2001, a significant percentage of high-level visits, funded programs and assistance packages, and overall prioritization of effort tended to focus on security matters. As the US presence in Afghanistan continues to change, and looks to do so even more in the near future, one can expect a re-emphasis on the earlier priorities, if still applicable.

In terms of having a positive impact, the US already has a tool kit that can work—if properly resourced. Security cooperation efforts, modest as they are, engage the Central Asian security forces with the US. Likewise, efforts of other US departments continue to build ties with the region. Emphasizing connectivity with Afghanistan, and by extension, the broader South Asian region, has been a mainstay of US policy toward Central Asia and this has found its way into how the countries see themselves. Meetings and trade agreements between each Central Asian country and Afghanistan are increasing and improving, along the lines expressed by the US. Encouraging reform in a country, as has been the case with Uzbekistan under President Mirziyoyev, also offers a positive “carrot.”

Negative measures would include an acceptance of a Russian “sphere of influence,” first and foremost. When senior US officials acknowledge Russia's self-proclaimed dominant role in the region, even to the point of “understanding” the illegal invasion and annexation of Crimea, it is perceived in the region that the US has lost interest in being a global partner. Second, reducing aid and opportunities for Central Asian countries, and citizens, further alienates the region from the US, requiring that they look elsewhere. Positive perceptions of the US have dropped over the years, with events like the 2003 invasion of Iraq, or the implementation of the so-called “Muslim ban” in 2017, create the impression that the US is somehow hostile to Muslim nations, which include all five Central Asian states. As noted above, given the Russian media influence in the region, such actions have been portrayed in a negative light, further diminishing US objectives.

## Chapter 19. Responding to Russian Gray Zone Activity in Central Asia

MAJ Adam Dyet  
U.S. Army, J5-Policy USCENTCOM  
[adam.j.dyet.mil@mail.mil](mailto:adam.j.dyet.mil@mail.mil)

### Abstract

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states have presented a new area of engagement for the United States. However, Russia maintains a high level of influence throughout the region and seeks to bind the Central Asian states closer to itself while limiting the regional influence of outside actors, such as the United States or China, and creating difficulties in the level of penetration that can be achieved. The region is somewhat chaotic, with significant domestic and political challenges stemming from the post-Cold War formation of national boundaries and an eclectic mix of ethnic, tribal, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Many borders are disputed, and marked political borders do not always correspond with areas claimed by ethnic groups. Distrust among states in the region is high, hindering the potential for regional cooperation. Russia maintains the largest foreign military presence, and the Russian led Collective Security Treaty Organization is the dominant security apparatus (Cooley, 2012). Meanwhile, human rights issues and democratic reforms remain low priorities for Central Asian leaders.

### Way Ahead

The strategic context in Central Asia and prevailing state of affairs limit the overall impact of US efforts in the region and make a strong case for a modest approach to competition with Russia in Central Asia. Pending an unexpected event, Western interest in the region is expected to wane as the war in Afghanistan draws to a close. China can be expected to continue its quest for a foothold in the region by signaling that it is a viable and interested partner—a move that can be expected to be received favorably by the Central Asian states (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2016).

As Chinese economic investment increasingly turns into political capital and a greater security presence, it is increasingly likely that China and Russia will experience greater levels of competition with each other in coming years (Aron, 2019). While a pragmatic relationship exists between the two powers based on shorter term mutual interests in the region and a close relationship between President Xi and President Putin, the two nations' interests in their respective near abroad will diverge in the longer term (Stronsky & Ng, 2018).

### Responding to Russia in Central Asia

The United States' role in Central Asia and the options available to compete with Russia in the region are both limited. As with investment in the Middle East, policy makers must carefully consider the return on investment in Central Asia before committing excessive amounts of time or resources. Although Russian influence in the region has declined after a negative reaction in Central Asia to the Russian incursion into Ukraine, the Central Asian states and Russia maintain strong historical, cultural, and ethnic ties that the United States cannot readily match. While the United States has interests in Central Asia, they are broadly applied and consist primarily of a desire to prevent the spread of violent extremism and weapons of mass destruction, preserve regional stability, prevent domination from a foreign power, and promote economic access, growth, and the spread of American values. Some of these are directly aligned with Russian interests in the region, especially as they



relate to counterterrorism. However, the remaining interests will continue to provide opportunities to compete with Russia in Central Asia (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2016).

From a diplomatic standpoint, a continued US presence in Central Asia is essential. Diplomatic relationships need to be cultivated within the Central Asian states, especially among those demonstrating the greatest potential for both economic and democratic development, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Diplomats must encourage potential reform attempts within Central Asia and cultivate positive incremental changes rather than acute and unrealistic ones. Central Asian states are aware of their strategic location with respect to Russia and China and are interested in maintaining friendly diplomatic ties with the United States in the interest of balancing the other great powers. When it serves US interests, the United States should not miss an opportunity to capitalize on any overtures that are made. (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2016).

The prevalence of social media and a globalized network lends credence to the value of the information space as an element of national power and a viable counter to inaccurate messaging and propaganda. English language proficiency is correlated with higher levels of economic success, innovation, and social development. It is the predominant language for international business, and nations understand the importance of learning it (Muslimin 2017) The United States should focus on information campaigns that promote English learning and the benefits of understanding the language. This maintains an interest in, and understanding of, Western and English dominant literature, media, music, and culture, with select media venues providing a counter to Russian disinformation and supporting US interests. This includes highlighting Russian failures in collecting and releasing accurate information on Russian casualties in Syria, a sensitive topic that would portray Russia in a negative light in Central Asia (Tsvetkova 2019). Similar to options available in the Middle East, the United States can amplify messaging on Russia's history of conflict with Muslims in a region with a high Muslim population in Central Asia.

Competition with Russia below the level of armed conflict in the military domain is more limited. The US military posture in Central Asia is almost nonexistent, and this is unlikely to change. The US military can promote US vital national interests by conducting less restrictive security cooperation programs in Central Asia and facilitating military equipment sales. These actions serve to strengthen partnerships and build partner security force capacity and capability. Greater capacity and capability, in turn, reduces the risk of domination from a foreign power not friendly to the US government and extends American influence.

Economically, the US can continue to focus on expanding sanctions, instituting export controls, and imposing additional security reviews on Russian investments in technology firms. A broad strategy for containing Russia economically, such as blacklisting major Russian financial institutions and removing Russia from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication network, can also serve to punish Russia globally for malign actions in Central Asia and elsewhere (Harrell, 2019). While this plays out, the United States can encourage greater business investment or give financial incentives to US firms interested in doing business in Central Asia.

### **Effectiveness of Competition in Central Asia**

Conditions in Central Asia that would reduce Russian influence and enhance US competitive efforts are varied. While some positive conditions do exist, the United States must seriously consider the net benefit of the investment. Stronger economic and commercial ties between Central Asian states, the US, and Europe, coupled with political systems or leadership promoting democratic values, could result in an increase in influence wielded by the US and the West as a whole, thus yielding greater

opportunities for competition with Russia. Increased cooperation between the Central Asian states, facilitated through expanded trade agreements, greater overall security and stability in the region, and political movements towards democracy would likewise diminish Russia's capability for regional manipulation and further reduce their influence.

### Russian Red Lines

With clearly defined interests in Central Asia, Russia's red lines in the region are also more obvious. Longstanding concerns of Russian leadership with regard to feelings of encirclement, invasion, and instability are exacerbated in Central Asia. This region is considered to be Russia's near abroad, and a significant loss of influence here would be unacceptable to Russian leadership. Several actions that could be undertaken by the US to compete would increase Russia's paranoia and are clear red lines. One of these actions would be a new or expanded US posture in Central Asia, primarily the establishment of permanent bases within the region. Large scale military exercises, depending on the scenario and nations involved, could also be seen as provocative in nature. Likewise, any perception of a US attempt to promote pro-Western or pro-democracy reforms in Central Asia would be reminiscent of past "color revolutions" that Russia abhors and may go to extra lengths to quell. Revolutions of this kind were a Russian red line in the past, and Russia's close relationship with Central Asia makes it more likely to respond to unrest there. Outside of US actions, the perception that Chinese economic interests in the region are beginning to markedly transition to a greater security interest would be a cause for alarm in Moscow. A Chinese attempt to encroach on the Russian role of security guarantor for the region would be highly disconcerting for Russian leadership (Radin & Reach, 2017).

### Strategic Implications for US Actions

In a worst-case, albeit highly unlikely, scenario, overzealous or provocative US actions in Central Asia could lead to a strategic alliance between Russia and China that is not centered on shared ideology, but rather on shared grievances against the United States (Van Oudenaren, 2019). More likely worst-case scenarios for the region include Russian or outside actor-induced destabilization, or *fait accompli*, which would lead to a risk of Russian domination, and thereby limit Central Asian state sovereignty and create Russian proxy states. Equally troubling is a collapse scenario or large-scale destabilizing event, such as a massive refugee flow north from a resurgent civil war in Afghanistan, that would allow for the rise of a new and formidable extremist group comparable to ISIS.

Ideally, US actions would create and underpin stable, sovereign, and functional Central Asian states that are friendly to the West and are supportive of Western interests. These attributes would help to prevent the cultivation of terrorist organizations within national borders, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and produce governments that promote democracy and human rights while being resilient enough to resist internal and external threats. Unfortunately, the current reality is that the populace in Central Asia sees Russia as the greatest long-term investor and future influencer in the region, with China quickly gaining ground. The United States has a role that is far more modest, and this is likely to continue.

## References

- Aron, L. (2019, April 04). Are Russia and China Really Forming an Alliance? Retrieved from <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-04-04/are-russia-and-china-really-forming-alliance>
- Cooley, A. (2015, April 01). The New Great Game in Central Asia. Retrieved from <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-asia/2012-08-07/new-great-game-central-asia>
- Harrell, P. (2019, January 03). How to Hit Russia Where It Hurts. Retrieved from <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2019-01-03/how-hit-russia-where-it-hurts>
- Muslimin, A. (2017, December 01). Why Asian Countries Are Investing So Heavily In The English Language. Retrieved April 18, 2019, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anismuslimin/2017/11/30/why-asian-countries-are-investing-so-heavily-in-the-english-language/#188034585e85>
- Radin, A., & Reach, C. (2017). *Russian Views of the International Order* (pp. 69-70, Rep. No. RR-1826-OSD). Santa Monica, CA: RAND.
- Rumer, E., Sokolsky, R., & Stronski, P. (2016, January 25). U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/25/US-policy-toward-central-asia-3.0-pub-62556>
- Stronski, P., & Ng, N. (2018, February 28). Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic. Retrieved April 15, 2019, from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/28/cooperation-and-competition-russia-and-china-in-central-asia-russian-far-east-and-arctic-pub-75673>
- Tsvetkova, M. (2019, February 05). After deadly Syrian battle, evidence of Russian losses was obscured. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-usa-insig/after-deadly-syrian-battle-evidence-of-russian-losses-was-obscured-idUSKCN1PU11Y>
- Van Oudenaren, J. S. (2019, January 12). America's Nightmare: The Sino-Russian Entente. Retrieved from <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-s-nightmare-sino-russian-entente-41447>

## Chapter 20. Rebalancing in Europe to Reduce Russian-Chinese Ties

Dr. Robert Spalding III  
U.S. Air Force  
[rob@subutaistrategy.com](mailto:rob@subutaistrategy.com)

### Abstract

The US role with regard to Russia should be to continue to engage European allies to take the lead for balancing in Europe. The allies' goal should be deterrence. At the same time, the US should bilaterally engage Russia to peel them away from China's orbit. The US can work with Russia in ways that improve the US-Russia relationship without detracting from European efforts to balance and deter. This can be applied by engaging with Russia in other regional or functional domains that do not detract from European efforts to deter.

### US Response to Russian Influence and Activities in China

There are two avenues to reduce Russian influence: 1) Assist in strengthening the economic and political institutions in the nations of Russia's near abroad; and 2) Seek bilateral avenues of cooperation with Russia in regions and functions that do not detract from European efforts to deter Russian aggression.

The US role should be to encourage European allies to balance Russian aggression in Europe. Their main goal should be deterrence. At the same time, the US should bilaterally engage Russia to peel them away from China's orbit. The US can work with Russia in ways that improve the US-Russia relationship without detracting from European efforts to balance and deter. This can be accomplished by engaging with Russia in other regional or functional domains that do not detract from European efforts to deter.

Upon leaving the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the US could encourage European allies to introduce intermediate mobile conventional land-based ballistic and cruise missiles. These weapons are hard to attrit, and when coupled with a comprehensive C4ISR (command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) architecture can be extremely effective.

The other challenge for Europeans confronting Russian aggression is cyber and electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attacks. The US should work with European allies to strengthen telecommunications and electrical infrastructure to preclude Russian preemptive attacks. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) should be followed with actions that seek to insulate European citizens from disinformation campaigns waged in social media. The US could encourage a strengthening of telecommunications networks to secure and encrypt European data.

Russia's primary source of revenue is liquified natural gas (LNG) and oil. There should be an effort to help diversify European sources of energy while not overly impacting the price of Russian energy. An alternate source of energy for Europe means that Russia cannot coerce Europe. However, this alternate source should be one that maintains a small footprint just short of competing directly with Russian energy. Russian efforts to build pipelines into China should be forcefully discouraged.

Overall, the most important US strategy in the evolving situation will be to deter unwanted behavior. Once the threshold is crossed the best way to deal with a crisis situation will be to use it to isolate Russia from the International Community while simultaneously assisting the targeted country with military arms.

### **Russian “Red Lines” and Perception of Escalation**

Any encroachment in Russia’s near abroad will be viewed negatively. Any new military deployments must be carefully managed to avoid the appearance of attempted encirclement. Attempting to find areas of military cooperation with Russia, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) outside the European theater can be a means of improving military relations with Russia. Any conflict between Russia and a country in its near abroad will negatively impact US objectives.

Russia’s “red lines” would include new treaties or otherwise permanent US security relationships in Russia’s near abroad. Depending on the area, US deployments could also be viewed as escalatory, but not as a red line.

### **Diminishing the Russian-Chinese Relationship**

The weight of the effort in Europe should be centered around diminishing Russian and Chinese economic and informational influence. Encouraging European allies to strengthen Internet security and encryption in order to deny anonymity will help them counter Russian efforts to use social media to influence their citizens. Multi-lateral exercises which improve coordination among European allies and partners will help grow confidence in their ability to defend themselves. Providing information on Chinese predatory lending will enable European countries to avoid China’s debt diplomacy. Constant engagement with allies and partners to reinforce the dangers posed by revisionist states is critical. DoD should work with the Broadcasting Board of Governors to increase the scope and effectiveness of Radio Free Europe and Voice of America (VOA). Any economic assistance should be focused on telecommunications infrastructure and energy diversity.

Until the US can adequately compete across the whole of nation under what is considered today as “peaceful conditions” it will continue to see influence wane in International Institutions. The DoD should work with the Interagency to design policies that disincentivize US corporate behavior that aids Russia and China. For example, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) can be a powerful force to signal US companies about the possible risk of sanctions or other potential enforcement measures. Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security is another Interagency partner that can use multi-lateral agreements like the Wassenaar Arrangement to signal potential enforcement actions. The entity list is an effective tool for discouraging company behavior that impacts collective security. The requirement for placing companies on the Entity list is entirely dependent on the characterization of a national security threat as determined by DoD.

### **Conclusion**

Overall it will be very difficult to place a wedge between Russia and China, but it is a necessity. Russia has an economy less than the size of Texas, while China’s is the world’s second largest. Therefore the combined strength of Russia and China is enough to give Russia confidence in its European near abroad. European countries need for energy from Russia continues to be the main impediment to reducing coercion. However, it is probably better in the long run to have energy flowing to Europe from Russia rather than to China.

Russia is not yet responsive to Chinese intermediate ballistic missiles, but this could change over time.

One source of potential friction between Russia and China is the Belt and Road Initiative. Reinforcing the idea to the Russians that there is the potential to lose influence in Central Asia could be accomplished through intelligence sharing regarding Chinese activities. Additionally, making Central Asia and Eastern European countries aware of Chinese lending practices could be useful.

There have been great advances in the area of targeted influence which need to be considered. The use of multi-media and social networks combined with AI can be a powerful combination. Targeting Russian operating in the near abroad as well as Russian citizens would be helpful in creating opposition for continued coercive actions in the near abroad. A recent NATO exercise was used to demonstrate this capability when researchers were able to impact troop behavior in the exercise via social media (Copp, 2019).

## References

Copp, T. (2019, February 20). NATO troops got catfished & honeypotted on social media, revealing serious vulnerabilities. *Military Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/02/20/nato-troops-got-catfished-honeypotted-and-revealed-how-vulnerable-they-are/>

## Chapter 21. Responding to Russian Gray Zone Activity in the Middle East

MAJ Adam Dyet  
U.S. Army, J5-Policy USCENTCOM  
[adam.j.dyet.mil@mail.mil](mailto:adam.j.dyet.mil@mail.mil)

### Abstract

Russia's actions in the Middle East are deeply rooted in its strategic culture. Moscow has a worldview shaped by several historical experiences of invasion and an underlying fear of military encirclement. This culture continues to permeate Russian strategic thinking and is exacerbated by the breakup of the Soviet Union. This culture was exacerbated by the Soviet Union's breakup—considered a blow to national pride that led to a reassessment of Moscow's role in the world—and continues to permeate Russian thinking today (Lantis and Howlett, 2013).

### Russian Strategic Calculus in the Middle East

#### Actions in Syria

Russia's intervention in Syria and its destabilizing actions in the Middle East serve to expand its sphere of influence, posture more effectively, and avoid encirclement from organizations like NATO (Kirkpatrick, 2017). Russian basing in Syria provides access to major transit routes like the Mediterranean Sea and also helps to liberate Russia from the constraint it feels with NATO countries firmly positioned along its western periphery. With action in Syria, Russia displayed its great power status while preserving the status quo and maintaining a loyal ally in the form of Bashar al Assad. The circumstances of the conflict created a situation in which Russia became a major player in the region that needed to be recognized, a reliable security partner, and a state with significant equities and clout in any kind of Syrian political settlement. Russia's strategic calculus was based on wanting to avoid another situation like Libya, where not only had foreign powers under NATO intervened, but had facilitated a situation that was more destabilized and prone to terrorist threats than it had been under Muammar Gaddafi. Russia's lingering distaste for regime change and fear of international terrorism made the situation in Syria unacceptable, and appear as a direct threat to Russian security interests, requiring decisive action before Western powers became involved (Sladden, Wasser, Connable, Grand-Clement, 2017).

#### Actions with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries and Iran

Russia continues to make inroads into the rest of the Middle East in order to garner influence and capitalize on economic benefits. Moscow is heavily increasing the amounts of its infrastructure development, arms deals, and energy investment in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. There have been several high profile visits and diplomatic overtures corresponding to increased business dealings and trade negotiations (Malsin and Simmons, 2019). Russia maintains a close relationship with Iran regarding military actions in Syria, and invests in Iranian infrastructure and energy as well. These actions serve to propagate the narrative that Russia is a stabilizing force in the Middle East, a security guarantor, and a recognized power with significant influence in its near abroad.

#### Way Ahead

Moscow will continue to expand its influence or consolidate gains wherever it perceives a loss of relative influence or the involvement of Western powers. Moscow views the Middle East as a zero-sum game in which any perceived or real gains made by the West come at a loss to Russia. The inverse also holds true, which explains Moscow's opportunistic approach to Egypt in light of its falling-out with the United States in recent years. This pattern of thinking and behavior from Moscow will likely continue well into the future. Strategic culture is an ingrained and habitual perception of the world, reinforced by actions that other states take (Gray, 2006). It will be difficult for Russia to change its worldview or its actions in the gray zone. The malign activity in which Russia engages is effective, as demonstrated with its actions in Crimea, Western Ukraine, and the recent US elections, and can be executed without resorting to conventional conflict with Western powers.

### Responding to Provocative Russian Actions in the Middle East

There are several ways, below the level of armed conflict and without crossing Russian redlines, in which the United States could respond to provocative Russian actions in the Middle East. From a policy standpoint, strategic competition with Russia below the level of armed conflict is necessary to secure US interests and advance American influence in the world (National Defense Strategy Summary, 2018). The United States has a role in responding to Russian activities in the Middle East to maintain key interests there, but the unique nature of this region limits the efficacy of many options. The nature of the Middle East requires careful consideration of the returns the United States can capitalize on after investing significant time and resources. Not all nations in the Middle East behave in a way that reflects the values of United States. However, to keep potential US partnerships from shifting to a less morally- or legally-conscious power, the United States has to make concessions for some behavior that would otherwise be unpalatable, like supporting Saudi Arabia's and the United Arab Emirates' involvement in Yemen. Policy makers should consider where, and how they want to compete with Russia in the Middle East, and accept that longstanding differences between the United States and many states in the region will never produce ideal results.

### Diplomatic

Focusing on diplomacy would be an effective means to compete with Russia in the Middle East. In recent years, Russia has drastically increased diplomatic overtures in the Middle East with several high profile visits, while the United States has several ambassadorial posts in the region that are still unfilled (Mathews, 2018). Filling these posts with experienced diplomats would allow the United States to better counter Russian diplomatic schemes, highlight Russian failures, and give greater assurance to existing partners with regard to America's commitment in the region, as well as encourage others to seek out the United States as the desired partner of choice. Diplomatic initiatives led by the State Department in the Middle East should be maintained to clearly articulate US regional interests, what partners can do to assist the United States in achieving those interests, and what the consequences of falling short would be. Appropriately, diplomatic overtures like deconfliction, or discussions with Russia about operations in Syria, prevent situations in which competition could escalate from "below the level of armed conflict" to "armed conflict." A continuation of these types of diplomatic initiatives should be encouraged to avoid miscalculation and escalation. As a major policy change, the United States could engage in similar deconfliction measures or offer some diplomatic overtures with Iran. Russia used the recent US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to establish closer relations with Iran (Miles, 2018). Following Russia's zero-sum logic, any influence the United States gains with Iran will come at the expense of Russian influence. The continuous use of public diplomacy in the Middle East can be used to promote American soft power. Additionally, the fact that the English language and elements of soft power, like American entertainment, have a higher volume of penetration in the Middle East than do either the Russian



language or other aspects of Russian soft power presents additional opportunities. American soft power and inspiration remain very potent in the Middle East and throughout the world, allowing diplomatic activities promoting American culture, language, and values to be used as valuable tools to propel American interests (Rugh, 2017).

### Informational

Strategic communication will prove invaluable for “competition below armed conflict” in the Middle East. The global prevalence of social media lends credence to the value of the information space as an element of national power, and the need to counter inaccurate messaging and propaganda. An information campaign in this region with proper legal authorities would be especially worthwhile, both to discredit Russian messaging and to boost US influence. The United States can use media venues to counter Russian disinformation and promote US interests. This includes highlighting Russian indifference and involvement in human rights abuses in Syria, or collecting and releasing information on Russian casualties in Syria – a generally guarded and politically sensitive topic to the regime (Jones, 2018). Additionally, the United States can amplify messaging on Russia’s history of conflict with Muslims, such as past conflict in Chechnya. US messaging regarding the defeat of Russian mercenaries in Syria at the hands of American forces can likewise be amplified and spread throughout the region (Cook, 2018). It gives an account of vastly superior American military strength in a region in which strength is highly respected. Success stories that highlight the competence and lethality of US military forces also enhance other means of US competition with Russia like Foreign Military Sales and security cooperation initiatives in the region.

### Military

The US military has several effective ways to compete with Russia “below the level of armed conflict” in the Middle East. Security cooperation programs are valuable for strengthening partnerships and attracting new partners – a focal point of the 2018 National Defense Strategy. These programs provide a level of assurance to existing partners, and serve to develop partner military capacity and capability. From a military standpoint, this allows regional partners to better defend against violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and domination by a foreign power not friendly to the United States. Partner cooperation also provides a venue for the exportation of US soft power, for example, by cultural exchanges and International Military Education and Training. These programs often facilitate sales of US military equipment in lieu of Russian equipment, and provide the United States with both peacetime and contingency access to basing and infrastructure in partner nations. Security cooperation programs and exercises with partners are ways to show commitment and interest beyond what Russia is able to do. The United States currently provides about half of the military hardware for the Middle East, generating a great deal of revenue for the United States (Macias, 2018). Overwhelming Foreign Military Sales put the United States in a more advantageous position when it comes to leveraging influence, as military sales deals often come with long-term training, maintenance contracts, and monitoring provisions. While Foreign Military Sales is a Department of State run program, the Department of Defense is the facilitator and executor of any agreements made. US military equipment is generally preferred over Russian equipment. However, the high cost, support requirements, and legal and bureaucratic processes required to attain US military hardware are sometimes a hinderance to buyers. In contrast Russian military equipment is often offered with no strings attached as well as less robust maintenance and logistics requirements.

## Economic

The US possesses unique economic tools to compete with Russia in the Middle East. Of these, the already active Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act is the most forceful piece of economic leverage against Russia in the Middle East. While several Middle Eastern states currently have deals in place to buy Russian military equipment, there has not been significant movement on these deals (Gaouette, 2018). Levying sanctions, or the threat of sanctions, for doing business with Russia is both a legitimate US response to Russian malign activity, and one that may encourage some Middle Eastern countries to defer to the United States when major deals are required. Not only does this have net economic benefit for the United States, it keeps the US involved in the region and impacts Russia's bottom line. Russia has several business ventures in the Middle East, focused primarily on oil, gas, and nuclear power (Sly, 2018). These projects are expected to be incredibly lucrative for Russia, but only if Middle Eastern states are fully behind them. The United States can exercise its diplomatic and economic levers to delay these deals and threaten additional economic hardship for Russia. Since Russia is already stagnating economically, this can impact Russia's strategic calculus.

## Russian "Redlines" and Escalation

Russia has clearly defined redlines that are either mentioned in policy documents or were highlighted in the past by Russian leadership. These redlines include further enlargement of NATO, threats to the current regime, loss of influence in the Russian near abroad, and actions or an imbalance that would void their nuclear deterrent (Delpech, 2015) Some of these redlines have been tested and received a strong Russian response. However, at other times actions from other states that normally could be perceived as crossing a "redline" elicited no response from Moscow. These instances include Color Revolutions that occurred in the early 2000s, as well as numerous formally Soviet or Eastern European states joining NATO before 2010. Since then, Russia has escalated several times as a response to perceived violations of their stated redlines. This was demonstrated most effectively by recent Russian incursions into Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria (Radin and Reach, 2017). There is some relative inconsistency with regards to Russian actions on their claimed redlines. This may be best explained by pointing out that leaders like Putin may make opportunistic or politically fueled decisions based on perceptions in that moment rather than a decision being based on a long term strategic plan (Sladden, Wasser, Connable, 2017).

## Strategic Implications for US Actions

There are strategic implications for what the United States does or does not do to compete with Russia in the Middle East. Continued, calculated actions that the United States takes in the Middle East will serve to maintain vital national interests in the long term. Key interests of the United States in the region include maintaining economic and basing access, preventing terrorist groups from attacking the United States or allies, and spreading American influence (National Security Strategy, 2018). While it is apparent that Russia has increased influence in the Middle East, it does not appear to want hegemonic dominance (Economist, 2017). Since neither side wants armed conflict, competition below the level of armed conflict will likely persist in the region long term, and the United States should be very selective in prioritizing the type and location of competition with Russia in the Middle East. The methods that the United States uses to compete should always be aligned with the ultimate objective of preserving these vital interests, assuring stability, and achieving an equilibrium of influence that favors the United States. Perceived neglect by partners may lead to even more reliance on a newly accessible Russia, potentially leading to governments in the region shifting

to support Russian interests over US interests. In the Middle East, the United States can achieve an ideal scenario if it can maintain a favorable, stable equilibrium with Russia. A favorable equilibrium for the United States is one that allows it to preserve its vital national interests in the region while applying minimal resources to that end. In the worst-case scenario, the United States would lose influence in the region to the point that vital national interests were threatened. Alternatively, the United States could over invest in the region, wasting resources on competition efforts that do little to improve its standing with partners or that have a significant effect on Russia.

## References

- Cook, S. A. (2018, March 16). Russia Is in the Middle East to Stay. Retrieved March 13, 2019, from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/16/the-middle-east-needs-a-steady-boyfriend/>
- Delpech, T., (2012) *Nuclear deterrence in the 21st century: Lessons from the Cold War for a new era of strategic piracy* (MG-1103-RC) Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, pp. 131-134
- Gaouette, N. (2018, February 08). Russia sanctions may force U.S. to punish key allies. Retrieved March 14, 2019, from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/08/politics/us-allies-russia-sanctions/index.html>
- Gray, C. (2006, October 31). *Out of the wilderness: Prime time for strategic culture*. Retrieved March 27, 2019, from <https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dtra/stratcult-out.pdf>
- “In the Middle East, Russia is reasserting its power.” (2017, March 25). *The Economist*. Retrieved March 14, 2019, from <https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/03/25/in-the-middle-east-russia-is-reasserting-its-power>
- Kirkpatrick, D. D. (2017, December 01). In snub to U.S., Russia and Egypt move toward deal on air bases. *The New York Times*, Retrieved March 20, 2019, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/middleeast/russia-egypt-air-bases.html>
- Lantis, J. and Howlett, D. (2013). *Strategic Culture*. In J. Baylis, J. Wirtz, and C. Gray (Eds.), *Strategy in the Contemporary World, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 77
- Macias, A. (2018, December 12). Led by Saudi Arabia, Middle Eastern countries are the biggest buyers of U.S. military equipment. Retrieved March 20, 2019, from <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/12/12/middle-eastern-countries-are-biggest-buyers-of-us-military-equipment.html>
- Malsin, J. (2019, January 21). Russia flexes its muscle in the Middle East. Retrieved March 25, 2019, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-flexes-its-muscle-in-the-middle-east-11548070200>
- Mattis, J. (2018). *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Defense.
- Mathews, J. (2018, March 06). Russia replaces America as the power player in the Middle East. Retrieved March 21, 2019, from <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/376929-russia->

[replaces-america-as-the-power-player-in-the-middle-east](#)

- Miles, T. (2018, May 04). Russia sees closer Iran ties if U.S. exits nuclear deal: Official. Retrieved March 26, 2019, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-russia/russia-sees-closer-iran-ties-if-u-s-exits-nuclear-deal-official-idUSKBN1I516Z>
- Radin, A. and Reach, C. *Russian views of the international order* (RR-1826-OSD) RAND, Santa Monica, CA, pp. 69-70.
- Rugh, W. (2017, January 10). American soft power and public diplomacy in the Arab world." *Nature News*, Nature Publishing Group, Retrieved March 27, 2019, from [www.nature.com/articles/palcomms2016104](http://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms2016104).
- Sladden, J., Wasser, B., Connable, B., and Grand-Clement, S. (2017) *Russian Strategy in the Middle East* (PE-236-C) Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., p. 4
- Sly, L. (2018, December 05). In the Middle East, Russia is back. Retrieved March 20, 2019, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-the-middle-east-russia-is-back/2018/12/04/e899df30-aaf1-11e8-9a7d-cd30504ff902\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a9d345faef13](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-the-middle-east-russia-is-back/2018/12/04/e899df30-aaf1-11e8-9a7d-cd30504ff902_story.html?utm_term=.a9d345faef13)
- The White House. (December 2017). *United States National Security Strategy*.

## Chapter 22. Recommended US Response to Russian Activities in Africa

Dr. Joseph Siegle  
Africa Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University  
[sieglej@ndu.edu](mailto:sieglej@ndu.edu)

### Abstract

Russia has significantly expanded its engagements in Africa in recent years in response to perceived opportunities to access natural resources, expand weapons sales, and elevate its geopolitical posture in a region with rapidly developing emerging markets and considerable promise for growth and trade. These engagements often take the form of propping up embattled and isolated autocratic leaders of countries that are rich in natural resources. This provides Moscow considerable leverage with these leaders and the ability to undermine previously negotiated political settlements, access natural resources under opaque agreements, and weaken democratic governance standards. The United States can draw a distinction with Russia's destabilizing role by pursuing a positive engagement strategy in Africa. This should be coupled with an assertive policy of sanctioning individuals and entities that are facilitating illicit resource diversions, deploying mercenaries, and undermining democratic processes, while calling out the lack of legitimacy and conflicts of interest facing leaders that Moscow has compromised. The United States must avoid the Cold War trap of competing with Russia for the affections of corrupt, autocratic leaders in Africa, however, as such a policy would be disastrous for Africa while not advancing US interests.

### Countering the Destabilizing Fall-Out of Russia's Pivot to Africa

Russia's "Pivot to Africa" (Foy, Astrasheuskaya, & Pilling, 2019) has begun to take shape. In 2018, Moscow swooped into Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR) with arms and mercenaries in order to prop up the weak government of President Faustin-Archange Touadera in exchange for mineral rights. A former Russian intelligence officer is now national security advisor and Moscow is considering opening up a military base in the CAR. In the process, Russia undermined the fragile diplomatic efforts of the United Nations and France that had brought the competing factions in Bangui back from years of instability toward a path to peace. Opportunistically, Russia has simultaneously negotiated for access to mineral rights with three rebel groups contesting Touadera's government (Plichta, 2018). Meanwhile, three Russian journalists who were investigating the role of Russian mercenaries were murdered in a targeted killing while driving in rural CAR in July 2018.

In Sudan, Russia provided diplomatic, financial, and arms support to the beleaguered government of Omar al-Bashir who, overseeing economic mismanagement and rapidly rising inflation, was ousted in a military coup in April 2019 following widespread protests to his 30 years in power. Tellingly, it was the Bashir government that hosted the alternate diplomatic process promoted by Moscow in the CAR. Khartoum hosted a similarly incongruous revised peace agreement among the main rival actors in the conflict of South Sudan, which given its oil wealth is of interest to both Sudan and Russia.

These episodes reveal a pattern of Russian support for embattled African leaders of natural resource rich countries (Burger, 2018). Subsequent natural resource access agreements are highly opaque. A combination of arms, diplomatic cover, and help in orchestrating electoral outcomes while touting a disdain for human rights and transparency standards have endeared Moscow to leaders in a host of countries including Zimbabwe, Egypt, Libya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Russia's outreach to Africa is more than short-term opportunism, however (Giles, 2013). Moscow has also strategically pursued mineral access, weapon sales, negotiated security cooperation agreements, nuclear power development, and trade relationships in selected countries in Africa. This has resulted in a steady growth of Russia's trade with Africa over the past decade, amounting to just under \$20 billion. Targeted countries include old Cold War partnerships, mineral-rich Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, and countries with large populations and growing markets (see table).

*Table 2. Targeted Russian Initiatives in Africa*

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Key African Target Countries</b>
Natural Resources	Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Mozambique, Libya, Nigeria, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Arms Sales	Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Security Cooperation	Angola, Central African Republic, Egypt, Madagascar, Mozambique, Somalia, Somaliland, South Africa, Sudan
Counter-Terrorism	Chad, Nigeria, Somalia
Nuclear Power Technology	Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia
Hydropower Construction	Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Namibia, Zambia
Railway Construction	Angola, Guinea, Nigeria

In short, Russia's intentions in Africa are multifaceted. In certain circumstances it is pursuing viable trade and investment opportunities in Africa (such as for engineering and power generation projects) as do other external interlocutors. In this way, Russia presents itself as a reliable partner and supplier of needed technical expertise. Russia is hosting an Africa leaders' summit in Sochi in October 2019 and is going all out to ensure maximum participation. Yet, in other contexts, Russia resembles a rogue actor, embracing pariah leaders, deploying mercenaries, bypassing arms embargos, and actively undermining existing internationally-brokered peace agreements so as to advance Moscow's leverage (Luhn & Nicholls, 2019). In some cases, Libya and CAR for example, Russia appears to be applying some of the lessons from its experience in Syria where support to an isolated leader establishes a dependency relationship that gives Russia enormous regional influence that could prove highly lucrative.

## Respond to Russia's Disruptive Engagements by Reinforcing the Rule of Law

Russia's varied engagements in Africa call for a multi-tiered policy response. To be clear, it is the destabilizing elements of Russia's actions that are most concerning, especially those that are undermining established norms of accountable governance and the upholding of the rule of law. Importantly, then, the response from the United States should not be reflexively anti-Russian. Russia and African governments may reasonably wish to pursue cooperative partnerships. Rather, any focus on curbing Russian actions in Africa should be aimed at the destabilizing activities that Russia pursues in Africa's weak states often with illegitimate leaders.

To underscore this distinction, the United States should make respect for the rule of law a prominent theme of its policy guidance in Africa. This theme should be a recurring message in public statements and should steer US priorities in Africa, recognizing that this principle has not always been consistently applied. Governments that are legitimately elected, respect term limits, and uphold the rule of law should gain greater diplomatic, development, and security cooperation support from the United States. Doing so establishes a clear and positive framework to guide US engagements in Africa. It also reinforces the message that the United States pursues partnerships on the continent for their mutually beneficial merit.

Such a policy framework also builds on a legacy of positive American initiatives that have enhanced stability and improved the quality of life on the continent, including such popular programs as the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Power Africa, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. In addition, the United States has been the world leader for years in commitments of development assistance, support for peacekeeping, foreign direct investment, and expanding access to information and communications technology in Africa.

A policy framework upholding the rule of law is not only consistent with US values, it also has contributed to better governance and thus greater stability and well-being on the continent. Notably, since the end of the Cold War, Africa's democracies have consistently realized economic growth that is a third faster than the norm on the continent, been part of just a fraction of conflicts, and are targets of higher levels of foreign direct investment as investors seek emerging markets that are stable and respect the rule of law.

In short, legitimacy matters. By making this an operating principle of US engagements in Africa, the United States would be aligning itself with the hopeful, stable, and rules-based future to which the vast majority of Africans aspire. Doing so can also more clearly juxtapose the extralegal and destabilizing actions taken by Russia.

## Raise the Costs to Russia for its Destabilizing Actions

It is the destabilizing elements of Russia's engagements in Africa that warrant most attention. Russia is a consistent supporter of autocratic governments, opaque natural resource contracts, and arms shipments to already unstable regions in Africa. This has perpetuated the rule of repressive leaders, who have fostered institutional corruption, societal disparities, long-running conflict, and record levels of refugees and population displacement on the continent.

Russia has persisted and expanded its destabilizing activities in Africa because Moscow bears few, if any, costs for doing so. It is a high benefit-low risk calculation. Curbing Moscow's behavior, therefore,

is predicated on changing this calculus by increasing the costs Moscow faces for its destabilizing actions in Africa. These costs can take multiple forms.

The first is reputational. Russia's propping up of unpopular regimes that are resistant to power-sharing (such as in Algeria, South Sudan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe) should be publicized for both African and international audiences. These governments are using coercive means to hold on to power against the wishes of their youthful populations that are demanding more say over the national decisions affecting their lives. Russian diplomatic, financial, and military assistance enables these leaders to remain in place. Yet, the costs of these policies – heavy-handed government, stagnant living conditions, elite corruption – are being paid for by African citizens thanks, in part, to Moscow. The Russian link to instability and exclusionary regimes needs to be conveyed to African citizens – through multiple channels, including trusted media, civil society, and social media networks. This awareness-raising will create additional pressure on complicit national leaders while establishing a reputational cost for Russia. Beyond the countries in question this reputational effect will spill across borders and affect Russia's ability to negotiate trade, investment, and security cooperation deals elsewhere on the continent.

In addition to reputational costs, changing the political calculus for Russia will entail increasing the financial costs it bears for its destabilizing actions in Africa. Those individuals or organizations involved in Russia's opaque natural resource deals on the continent should be considered for sanctions and investigation under the Foreign Corruption Practices Act (FCPA) with the aim of denying these actors and their intermediaries' access to the US financial system. The United States has broad jurisdiction in such cases covering any transaction that transits through, draws on a bank account in, or involves correspondence based in the United States. Implemented by the Department of Justice and the Security and Exchanges Commission, the FCPA has previously been applied to organizations operating in Russia, Nigeria, Angola, and Ghana, among others.

The United States should also consider applying provisions of the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act for destabilizing Russian actions in Africa. The law establishes the scope for US sanctions against any country involved in transactions with Russia's defense and intelligence sectors. This may entail Russia's reliance on private security contractors (such as the Wagner Group in the CAR) or third-party arms dealers. Such groups provide Russia a measure of plausible deniability, however, echoing practices it has employed in the Ukraine. Consequently, an alternative approach toward these groups is to treat them as organized criminal syndicates and apply the relevant protocols (especially with regard to trafficking in firearms) under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime as well as the legal tools embodied in the 2017 US Presidential Executive Order on Enforcing Federal Law with Respect to Transnational Criminal Organizations and Preventing International Trafficking. The United States and other rules-based international actors should also continue to support arms embargos in unstable contexts where, at times, illegitimate leaders have used violence against civilians (e.g. Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe). By so doing, the United States can narrow the legal space that Russia can exploit to prop up these governments (and maintain its leverage.)

The deployment of mercenaries, even if called advisers and sent with the tacit assent of an African leader, contravenes the Organization for African Unity's 1972 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenaries in Africa. In fact, Africa was one of the earliest adopters of such a ban given the destabilizing effects that these foreign fighters have had on the continent historically. Upholding these norms should continue to be a priority.



Increasing the costs to Russian decision-makers for their initiatives that undermine such norms, and security more generally, can create incentives for Moscow to dial back its destabilizing actions in Africa.

### Increase the Costs for Russia's African Enablers

Russia gains leverage for these destabilizing actions through the complicity of often unelected and isolated African interlocutors who, lacking legitimacy, turn to Moscow for financial support or military assets. In so doing, these individuals may benefit politically or financially, though to the detriment of their societies that face greater instability and compromised sovereignty. An extension of the policy increasing the costs to Russia for its exploitative actions is to sanction African individuals who facilitate Russia's destabilizing actions. In particular, the United States should consider imposing travel bans and asset freezes on individuals identified as responsible for cooperating with Moscow on illicit transactions, actions that result in human rights violations against their citizens, or actively undermine democratic processes or institutions.

As Russia tends to leverage its influence through illegitimate African leaders, the United States and other rules-based actors in the region should also selectively consider not recognizing these leaders as the rightful head of state. This is what the United States and 50 other countries have done in Venezuela following the fraudulent elections, coercive use of state security forces against civilians, and gross misgovernance there. The threat of this action will highlight the tenuous claim of public authority these leaders wield as well as the liability their lack of legitimacy poses. While not to be taken lightly and requiring clear guidelines, once established, this determination also provides a basis from which to obviate international recognition of public contracts that these leaders have signed. In effect, such a designation would signify that these contracts are signed with individuals rather than state authorities. A further effect of this action is to raise the risk premium for external actors attempting to gain access to a state's sovereign assets through these compromised individuals.

Implicit in this approach is avoiding the impulse to compete with Moscow for the affections of these illegitimate and unaccountable leaders. Doing so provides unwarranted leverage for these leaders who can easily play Russian and American interests off one another. Such an approach would be a replay of the Cold War outcomes observed in Africa that were marked by record levels of conflict and repressive governance. In short, the only winners in such a competition are these illegitimate leaders themselves. Under such circumstances, it is not even clear that Russia, which may gain access to some resources and a sense of prestige, comes out ahead. The costs of maintaining such kleptocratic and unstable clients can easily surpass whatever gains Moscow may realize.

### Sustaining Engagements with an Emerging Africa

Given its emerging markets, natural resource wealth, strategic location, and growing importance in international fora, interest in Africa is growing among multiple external actors, not just Russia. Over 350 new embassies and consulates have been established in Africa by a wide range of foreign governments since 2010. By building on its solid foundation of engagements in Africa, the United States is well-positioned to be a part of further mutually beneficial partnerships in the future. To do so, however, will require sustained engagements. Such engagements can help set a bar for good governance and the rule of law that has direct benefits for stability, development, and ongoing investment in Africa. It simultaneously provides a clear juxtaposition with destabilizing actions undertaken by Russia. This also shifts the basis of competition to the arena of good governance on which Moscow does not have an appealing model and away from the practices of opaque contracting and propping up of authoritarian governments in which Russia has the advantage.

## References

- Burger, J. (2018, November). The Return of Russia to Africa. *The New African*, pp. 14-21.
- Foy, H., Astrasheuskaya, N., & Pilling, J. (2019, January 22). Russia: Vladimir Putin's Pivot to Africa. *The Financial Times*.
- Giles, K. (2013). *Russian Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute.
- Luhn, A., & Nicholls, D. (2019, March 3). Russian Mercenaries Back Libyan Rebel Leader as Moscow Seeks Influence in Africa. *The Telegraph*.
- Plichta, M. (2018, November 28). France and Russia Fiddle While the Central African Republic Burns. *World Politics Review*.

## Chapter 23. Weaponizing Peace: Colombia's Demobilized FARC as a Lever of Russian Influence

Dr. Barnett S. Koven and Ms. Abigail C. Kamp  
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)  
[bkoven@umd.edu](mailto:bkoven@umd.edu) | [akamp@umd.edu](mailto:akamp@umd.edu)

### Abstract

Russia has routinely engaged in operations in the gray zone—the space between overt military conflict and normal peacetime competition—in furtherance of its revisionist aims. While these actions have been most readily apparent in Russia's near abroad, their reach is in fact global. Nonetheless, the ways in which Russia exerts itself in areas farther afield, where it cannot effectively project military force and/or leverage ethnically Russian local populations, are distinct. This contribution begins by explaining why Russia would be interested in intervening in Colombia, given its extremely close security and economic relations with the US, as well as its desire to retaliate against the US for its perceived meddling in Russia's traditional sphere of influence (e.g. Ukraine). It then examines how Russia may shift from tacitly supporting Colombia's FARC insurgents on the battlefield to exploiting fissures relating to the peace process at the ballot box.

### Introduction

In recent years, Russia has routinely engaged in operations in the gray zone – the space between overt military conflict and normal peace time competition – in furtherance of its revisionist aims. These actions have been most readily apparent in Russia's near abroad. For example, in 2014, Russia skillfully leveraged all elements of national power to quickly annex Crimea, while also engaging in a less well executed campaign in Donbas, eastern Ukraine (Vasilyeva, 2018). Nevertheless, these activities are not limited to Russia's traditional sphere of influence. For example, Russia also attempted to sway public opinion and otherwise influence the outcome of pivotal elections throughout Western European and North American democracies. These attempts have included attempts to compromise electronic voting systems, as well as sophisticated disinformation campaigns (DiResta, et al., 2018).

Electoral meddling offers Russia an inexpensive way to effectively impose asymmetric costs in parts of the world where Russia cannot a) effectively project military force or b) leverage the support of large ethnically Russian and potentially supportive local populations. Indeed, Russia's disinformation campaign to influence the 2016 US presidential election clearly explicates this point. Irrespective of if (or to what extent) Russian efforts swayed the outcome of the election, they undoubtedly had (and continue to have) a strong psychological impact on American voters and have generated significant political controversy (DiResta, et al., 2018).

Beyond targeting the US and Western European democracies, Russia has strong incentives to pursue similar campaigns in Latin America. By asserting its presence in a historically US-dominated area, Russia's influence campaigns fit into its overall strategy of reducing America's global influence and creating a more multipolar international paradigm. Indeed, the former Commander of US Southern Command, General John Kelly (2015) testified before Congress, that Russia is “attempt[ing] to erode US leadership and challenge US influence in the Western Hemisphere” (p. 8-9). It may also be the case that Russia is incentivized to meddle in Latin American affairs as retribution for US involvement in Eastern Europe, and particularly in Ukraine. To this end, the Director General of the Russian

International Affairs Council, Andrey Kortunov, recently stated, “that if you mess in our backyard, you should keep in mind that we can mess in your backyard as well” (“On GPS,” 2019).

We have also already seen Russian efforts to influence the outcomes of Mexico’s 2018 elections. Mexico’s 2018 election was one of the largest elections in Mexican history, with over 3,400 positions open at the federal, state and local levels (Ngo, 2018). In the presidential race, the Russian campaign favored Andrés Manuel López Obrador – commonly known by his initials, AMLO – a leftist candidate who made comments perceived as anti-American during the primary. US officials raised concerns about the potential for disinformation and hacking of the election by nefarious actors. Former National Security Advisor, Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster is quoted as stating, “we’ve seen this really sophisticated effort to polarize democratic societies...You’ve seen actually initial signs of it in the Mexican presidential campaign already” (Richardson, 2018). In the run-up to the election, bots and trolls circulated disinformation – such as the rumor that Mexican citizens would have to re-register to vote in the elections – on social media networks. Russian media, such as RT, ran extensive content that was highly favorable for AMLO in the months preceding the election (Ghitis, 2018). While AMLO won the presidency by a 30-point margin, this outcome was likely more a reflection of voters’ discontent with record levels of violence and corruption versus Russian meddling (Ribando Seelke and Gracia, 2018; Ngo, 2018). Nevertheless, Mexico was an extremely logical target for Russia given that it is the US’s second-largest export market, third-largest trading partner, and one of its most important regional security partners, to say nothing of the border that the two states share. Should we expect similar meddling in Colombia?

## Colombia

Since the start of Plan Colombia in 1999, the US and Colombia have maintained an exceedingly close partnership. Indeed, Colombia is considered the hallmark of US efforts to build partner capacity (Ramsey, 2009). So much so that the US has leveraged Colombian trainers and Colombian facilities to build partner capacity in dozens of third countries, a process known as triangulated security cooperation (Tickner, 2014, p. 1). Moreover, the US and Colombia maintain close economic ties.

Consequently, it is not surprising that Russia has historically tried to exert influence in Colombia. Previously, Russia pursued influence in Colombia through at least tacit, indirect support to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia; FARC). The FARC emerged in 1964 and rose to become Colombia’s largest Marxist-Leninist insurgency. At its height, the FARC numbered just under 21,000 armed combatants and controlled approximately 40 percent of Colombian territory – an area roughly the size of Switzerland (McCaughan, 2001; Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, 2010). Russian arms dealers provided extensive support to the FARC. Indeed, perhaps the world’s most famous arms dealer, Viktor Anatolyevich Bout, was arrested as part of a US Drug Enforcement Agency undercover operation launched after learning that the FARC was seeking to acquire Russian made surface-to-air missiles (Falconer, 2008). Following the operation, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov publicly intervened to declare Bout’s innocence and to attempt to prevent his extradition to the US. Bout was previously involved in a high profile case wherein Peruvian military aircraft were used to airdrop 10,000 Kalashnikov’s into FARC controlled territory in the Colombian jungle (Graham, 2011).

Unfortunately for Russia, continuing to – at least tacitly support – arming the FARC is no longer an option. In 2016, after years of trying negotiations, the FARC and the government of Colombia reached a peace agreement. That said, the peace deal has generated fissures in Colombian politics, which can be easily exploited by Russian disinformation campaigns. First, the public referendum on the peace accord failed by a razor thin margin (49.8% in favor, 50.2% opposed). This was principally due to

concerns regarding the extremely weak nature of the transitional justice regime and the fact that former FARC fighters would not only be allowed to run for political office, but would in fact be guaranteed seats in Colombia's congress (Koven, 2016). The former Commanding General of the Peruvian Army, Otto Guibovich, who has studied the issue closely, pontificated that the FARC had managed to reverse Clausewitz' oft cited quote that "war is the continuation of politics by other means," noting that "politics would be the continuation of their [the FARC's] war through other means that begin with congressmen and delegates in the parliament" (O. Guibovich, interview with author, October, 17, 2016). A minimally revised agreement was ultimately ratified not by the Colombian people but by the legislature and supreme court.

The divisive nature of the peace process affords Russia three avenues for continued leverage in Colombia. First, electoral meddling in support of the FARC's political ambitions. Indeed, former US defense officials suggested that Russia did attempt to meddle in Colombia's 2018 elections. Moreover, in January 2018, then-Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos stated that Colombia was preparing for cyberattacks from abroad related to the elections (El Colombiano, 2018). Before the Congressional elections in March 2018, Colombian Defense Minister Luis Carlos Villegas announced that four cyberattacks aimed to shut down Colombia's National Voter Registry (DW, 2018). Colombian intelligence agencies also documented almost 60,000 attacks against the National Civil Registry Website, the agency responsible for identifying and issuing identification documents to Colombian citizens.

Another potential avenue for providing electoral support to the FARC is misinformation. To this end, Russia Today en Español (RT) launched in 2009 and Sputnik media launched a Spanish channel in 2014. One source estimates that RT and Sputnik have region-wide media penetration (Fonseca, 2018). For example, RT alone maintains agreements with well over 300 cable TV providers in the region (ibid.; Farah & Eustacia Reyes, 2016).

Second, and relatedly, even if the aim is not specifically to advance the political plight of the FARC, the divisive nature of the peace process continues to be a key campaign issue. Russian can use its media penetration and social media presence for disinformation campaigns designed to keep these divisive narratives at the forefront during future Colombian elections.

Third, the new administration of President Iván Duque vowed that it would modify the peace deal. Whether or not it is able to do so remains to be seen, but even slow-rolling implementation – which is certainly possible – could undermine the agreement (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Doing so would incentivize thousands of former FARC fighters to again take up arms. It is already the case that the FARC's 1<sup>st</sup> Front vowed not to demobilize and to continue the fight (Koven, 2016). In addition, Colombia's last remaining leftist insurgency, the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* or ELN), as well as transnational criminal organizations, such as the First Capital Command are eager to welcome former FARC guerrillas into their ranks. If the peace fails dramatically, Russia could always return to tacitly supporting the provision of weapons and other material support to Colombian subversives.

### Options for US Response

Recognizing that Russia has strong incentives to continue to leverage the Colombian peace process to intervene in Colombian domestic politics, what avenues exist for a US response? In the short-term, US policy makers should be alert to the impact of potential disinformation campaigns on nations with close, polarized elections, like Colombia. Russia may try to manipulate the media environment, particularly social media, and hack into election systems if possible. Depending on the country-

specific context, the US could offer to share information about potential cyber threats and provide technical assistance to secure information infrastructure. In this case, given the close security cooperation between the US and Colombia, this is especially likely to be an option. The threat of disinformation on social and traditional media networks is more insidious. The best long-term strategy against disinformation is to foster robust traditional media and credible government organizations that have the authority to debunk disinformation that spreads on social media.

## References

- BBC. (2018, March 12). *Colombia election: Farc fails to win support in first national vote*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-43367222>
- Beittel, J. S., and Gracia, E. Y. (2018, July 12). *Colombia's 2018 Elections* (CRS Report IF10817). Retrieved from the Congressional Research Service website: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10817.pdf>
- Daher, J. (2018, September 27). Three Years Later: The Evolution of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria. *The Atlantic Council*. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/three-years-later-the-evolution-of-russia-s-military-intervention-in-syria>
- DiResta, R., Shaffer, K., Ruppel, B., Sullivan, D., Matney, R., & Fox, R... Johnson, B. (2018, December 17). The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency. *New Knowledge*. Retrieved from <https://disinformationreport.blob.core.windows.net/disinformation-report/NewKnowledge-Disinformation-Report-Whitepaper-121718.pdf>
- DW. (2018, March 08). Detectan ataques cibernéticos a entidad electoral de Colombia. Retrieved from <https://p.dw.com/p/2tzoE>
- El Colombiano. (2018, January 22). Santos advierte que podría haber ciberataques en las próximas elecciones. Retrieved from <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/politica/posibles-ataques-ciberneticos-en-las-elecciones-de-2018-en-colombia-DK8048731>
- Falconer, B. (2008, March 18). Viktor Bout's Last Deal. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/03/viktor-bouts-last-deal/>
- Felbab-Brown, V.. (2018, July 24). "Death by Bad Implementation? The Duque Administration and Colombia's Peace Deal(s)." *The Brookings Institution*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/07/24/death-by-bad-implementation-the-duque-administration-and-colombias-peace-deals/>
- Farah, D. and Eustancia Reyes, L. (2016). Russia in Latin America: A Strategic Analysis. *PRISM*, 5(4) pp 100 – 117. Retrieved from [https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism\\_5-4/Russia%20in%20Latin%20America.pdf](https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-4/Russia%20in%20Latin%20America.pdf)
- Fonseca, B. (2018, July 24). Russian Deceptive Propaganda Growing Fast in Latin America. *Dialogo Digital Military Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/russian-deceptive-propaganda-growing-fast-latin-america>

- Graham, Ronan. (2011, November 8). How Viktor Bout Fell for the DEA's FARC Trap. *Insight Crime*. Retrieved from <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/how-viktor-bout-fell-for-the-deas-farc-trap/>
- Ghitis, F. (2018, January 11). A Mexican presidential candidate is getting an unexpected boost from Trump— and Putin. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/01/11/a-mexican-presidential-candidate-is-getting-an-unexpected-boost-from-trump-and-putin/?utm\\_term=.4875bb036a0f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/01/11/a-mexican-presidential-candidate-is-getting-an-unexpected-boost-from-trump-and-putin/?utm_term=.4875bb036a0f)
- Koven, B. (2016, November 04). "Give Peace a Chance"? Explaining Colombia's (Failed Peace Process with the FARC." *START*. Retrieved from <https://www.start.umd.edu/news/give-peace-chance-explaining-colombia-s-failed-peace-process-farc>
- McCaughan, M. (2001, August 15). FARC's 16,000 guerillas control 40% of Colombia. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/farc-s-16-000-guerrillas-control-40-of-colombia-1.322568>
- Negroponte, D. (2015). Russo-Latin American Arms Sales. *Americas Quarterly*. Winter 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.americasquarterly.org/content/russo-latin-american-arms-sales>
- Ngo, M. (2018, July 01). The 2018 Mexican Election, explained. *Vox*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/6/30/17514176/mexico-2018-president-election-lopez-obrador>
- On GPS: Why is Russia in Venezuela?* [Video file]. (2019, March 29). Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2019/03/29/exp-gps-0331-kortunov-on-venezuela.cnn>
- Pachon, E. (2017, August 27). President Santos: A Success or Failure? *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*. Retrieved from <http://www.coha.org/president-santos-a-success-or-failure/>
- Gen. John F. Kelly, Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, United States Marine Corps Commander, United States Southern Command. Senate Before the 114th Congress Senate Armed Services Committee (Washington: U.S. Senate, March 12, 2015). Retrieved from [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Kelly\\_03-12-15.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Kelly_03-12-15.pdf)
- Ramsey, R. III. (2009). From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque: The Colombian Security Force Experience, 1998-2008. *Combat Studies Institute Press*. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.179.1003&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Ribando Seelke, C. & Gracia, E. Y. (2018, July 17). *Mexico's 2018 Elections: Results and Potential Implications* (CRS Report IF10867). Retrieved from the Congressional Research Service website <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10867.pdf>
- Richardson, D. (2018, January 08). H.R. McMaster Warns of Russia Disinformation Attacks in Mexico Election. *Observer*. Retrieved from <https://observer.com/2018/01/h-r-mcmaster-warns-russia-disinformation-attacks-mexico-election/>
- Semple, K. & Franco, M. (2018, May 01). Bots and Trolls Elbow Into Mexico's Crowded Electoral Field. *New York Times*. Retrieved from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/01/world/americas/mexico-election-fake-news.html>

Tickner, A. (2014). Colombia, the United States, and Security Cooperation by Proxy. *Washington Office on Latin America*. Retrieved from <https://www.wola.org/analysis/colombia-the-united-states-and-security-cooperation-by-proxy/>

Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, Instituto de Estudios Geoestratégicos y Asuntos Políticos. (2010, September 01). "Evaluación de la política de defensa y seguridad democrática, 2002 - 2010."

Vasilyeva, N. (2018, November 26). Russia's conflict with Ukraine: An explainer. *Military Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/11/26/russias-conflict-with-ukraine-an-explainer/>

Zissis, C. (2018, June 27). Poll Track: Mexico's 2018 Presidential Election. *Americas Society/Council of the Americas*. Retrieved from <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/poll-tracker-mexicos-2018-presidential-election>



## PART V. WHAT CAPABILITIES DOES THE US NEED TO EFFECTIVELY RESPOND TO RUSSIAN GRAY ZONE ACTIVITIES?

### Chapter 24. Defining the Competitive Zone to Aid Identification of Critical Capabilities

Dr. Belinda Bragg  
NSI, Inc.  
[bbragg@nsiteam.com](mailto:bbragg@nsiteam.com)

#### Abstract

This chapter summarizes the findings from an earlier SMA effort focused on gray zone conflicts. One of the initial conclusions of this project was the importance of establishing a consensus definition of the gray (or competitive) zone, before moving on to examination of indicators and warning (I&W) and capabilities. Without a shared operational definition of the problem space, coordination between the varied groups working this problem, and the development of doctrine is not possible. When considering the capabilities the US requires to respond effectively to actions in the competitive zone, many of the teams highlighted the central role of populations in the success or failure of gray activities and strategies. They suggest that success in the gray zone hinges on the ability to influence populations, and state and non-state actors, and minimize the influence of actors inimical to US interests. Consequently, a better understanding of the human / cognitive domain, enabling the creation of effective narratives, is identified as critical to US success.

#### Responding to Russian Gray Zone Activities

In 2016, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) requested a Strategic Multilayer Assessment effort “to determine how the US Government (USG) can identify, diagnose, and assess indirect strategies, and develop response options against associated types of gray zone conflicts.” This piece summarizes the findings from that project<sup>8</sup> that touch on the capabilities the US needs to respond effectively to gray zone activities. To set these findings in context, however, we must first briefly consider both how gray zone was defined, and what motivates actors such as Russia to operate in it.

#### Why Defining the Gray (Competitive) Zone Matters

We cannot advance our understanding of gray zone challenges if we cannot integrate the work that is going on across the various commands and DoD offices. This requires a carefully crafted and widely accepted definition of what is in, and what is out, of the gray zone. Developing early I&W also requires the various groups working this problem to systematically and consistently measure gray activities against a shared operational definition. Finally, doctrine developed to address gray zone challenges will be most effective if it is based on a consistent definition. Before the question of necessary

---

<sup>8</sup> Individual team reports and the [integration report](#) for SMA’s “Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: A Multi-Agency Deep Dive Assessment” can be found on the [SMA publications page](#).

capabilities can be addressed, therefore, a consensus definition of the gray zone, specific enough to guide further work in this area, is required.



Figure 2: SMA Gray Zone Definition

The SMA team definition of the gray zone, of gray zone strategies and gray zone activities (above) focuses on clearly articulating the upper and lower thresholds of the gray zone. That is, the threshold beyond which steady state or acceptable competition becomes a gray zone action, and the point or conditions that signal that gray actions have crossed over into direct military conflict. Distinguishing between gray actions and gray strategies was shown in work from this effort to be critical both in identifying and responding to gray zone challenges.

## Why Is Russia “Going Gray”?

We can not assume that all powerful states are satisfied with the status quo. The use of gray actions and strategies can be taken as a signal that an actor is dissatisfied with an aspect of the international system that those norms reflect and support. Norms and norms violations emerge as central to how we conceptualize the gray zone, and why we seem to find these actions and strategies so resistant to US current deterrent and response strategies. Russia has shown through military actions in Ukraine and Crimea, and wider political influence operations, its willingness to openly flout international rules and norms to achieve its strategic goals. In other instances it has challenged the assumed universality of international norms supporting civil rights and liberties and positioned itself as the champion of rule of law. Such was the case with Russia’s criticism of US support for the Arab Spring and other pro-democracy social movements, and evocation of sovereign legitimacy in its support of the Assed Regime in Syria.

*"[W]e have Russia as a competitor that is willing, and did, break international law," ... and "I think Russia will continue to press against the international norms."*

Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, commander of USEUCOM and Supreme Allied Commander of NATO Allied Command Operations, March 2017, House Armed Services Committee

To the extent that existing international norms reflect the interests of the US and Western European states, violations of these norms could signal intent to decrease US influence over the actions of other state and non-state actors. Indeed, Russia seems to be interested in establishing an entirely different set of rules of the game<sup>9</sup>. In addition to a willingness to unequivocally violate existing international rules and norms, Russia has attempted to establish alternative international institutions, especially economic, to counter the dominance of existing Western institutions, such as the European Union.

## How Should the US Respond?

The SMA project teams identified several factors that can contribute to effective US response to gray strategies and activities.

### Determine Intent to Avoid Unintended Consequences

Understanding why actors are violating norms (e.g., boundary testing, system breakage) reduces the probability of unintended escalation and informs the development of deterrent measures. Intent and attribution are inherently problematic in the gray zone. However, mistakenly attributing aggressive intent when an action is taken in ignorance of the consequences, or in self-defense, may lead to interpreting an action incorrectly as gray and thus potentially threatening. A response based on faulty interpretation may be perceived as aggressive as well as unprovoked and increase tensions and the probability of unwanted escalation. Conversely, interpreting as benign an action that is in fact part of a gray strategy risks missing the window of opportunity for derailing that strategy before it becomes a done deal.

### Stay Engaged and Respond Early

Inaction in the face of low-level gray actions can, over time, create a “new reality” that threatens US interests and security. At that point, reversion to the status quo ante will likely require much greater, and more costly actions, and may not be possible without the use of military force. Part of the reason Russia is choosing to operate in the gray zone is its perception that the US will not respond to lower

<sup>9</sup> More detailed discussion of Russia’s worldview and attitude toward the US and the west can also be found in the 2016 SMA project Drivers of Conflict and Convergence in Eurasia in the Next 5-25 Years *Integration Report* and team reports.

level actions for fear of triggering escalation. US failure to develop early, effective response options reinforces this perception. An enduring, proactive presence and consistent messaging across all USG agencies is a significantly superior approach to taking select actions in response to Russian aggression. This approach would be aided by the DoD expanding its definitions of maneuver and objectives to better account for the human aspects of military operations.

### What Capabilities Does the US Need?

*In today's information age, we must recognize that the essential key terrain is the will of a host nation's population...[This] permits us to gain the trust of skeptical populations, thus frustrating the enemy's efforts and suffocating their ideology."*

Gen J. N. Mattis, USMC, Foreword to Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications 2008

Engagement with population across multiple arenas (economic, political, media and others) is a defining characteristic of many gray actions and all gray strategies. Gray zone actors are consistently engaging with populations within and outside their borders, in efforts to effectively set the narrative for both their own actions and motivations, and those of the US. Unless and until the US does the same, it will be at a disadvantage in

addressing gray zone challenges. Across all aspects of gray zone identification and response, one central theme emerges from the work done for this project: The US needs to think more broadly and deepen our understanding of the human / cognitive domain. We cannot afford to ignore populations, or engage with them only once a crisis has erupted.

A richer understanding of the operational environment provides the essential context for identifying those actors that are likely to engage in behavior the US considers to be gray, and a potential threat to US and/or partner nation interests. Understanding the drivers and buffers of stability within specific regions and countries can help analysts and planners identify actors that are likely to be vulnerable to another actor's gray actions and strategies. It can also help identify the actors they are vulnerable to in specific areas (e.g. domestic political influence by Russia, or economic pressure or reward from China). For any response or deterrent action taken by the US and partner nations to be effective, we also need to be able to anticipate with greater accuracy the likely population response (at the group level, not just the state level) to our actions.

Figure 2 highlights the aspects of the gray zone on which the SMA team analyses indicated the US and partner nations should build understanding. It also shows the areas in which the analyses suggest the US should further develop in order to improve both I&W and responses to gray zone challenges.

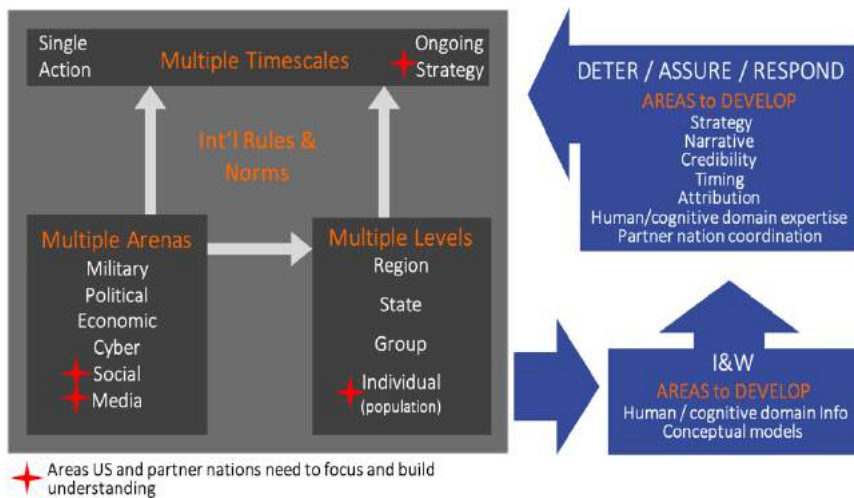


Figure 3: US Capability Gaps for Addressing Gray (Competitive) Zone Challenges

## Deeper Understanding of the Human/Cognitive Domain

When considering capabilities in the context of gray zone challenges, we need to think first in terms of information. Information provides a richer understanding of the operating environment and emphasizes the human/cognitive domain. Specifically, the US must:

- Broaden its understanding of the strategic and operational environments to better incorporate the human / cognitive domain
- Consider the non-military arenas and non-state level (see Figure 2) of the gray zone when developing I&W, and deterrence and response options
- Think beyond purely kinetic responses and develop ways to shape the international environment to reduce the motivation for actors to engage in gray activities in the first place. This will require addressing the broad question of the sustainability of a global system built on norms that are not implicitly accepted by all major powers
- Build trust and credibility with partner nations to enable greater coordination of effort in collective gray zone deterrence and response activities, as well as earlier I&W or gray zone activity against vulnerable partners
- Narratives are not the only tool for building influence. Explore other (non- military) levers of power the US can use to increase its influence without violating or undermining international norms

*“Combining a deep understanding of the environment and a realistic appraisal of the relevant partner relationships with the policy aim, allows commanders and staffs to derive ... feasible, productive military options that lead to sustainable and acceptable outcomes.”*

Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, 13 Apr 2017 draft

## Develop Clear and Compelling Strategic Narratives

- The US lacks a compelling “story” to present as a counter to competing narratives. We need to better articulate US interests and strategy to both ourselves and others
- Establish the extent to which the target population trusts the US, and have in place strategies to bolster that trust when it is low, prior to engaging in any narrative messaging
- US messaging (and objectives) must be consistent across the USG agencies working in specific regions and countries. This will require coordination and communication across agencies

## Conclusion

The findings from the SMA Gray Zone Project suggest that the capabilities to effectively respond to gray activities are, in some ways, as fluid as those activities themselves. Russia’s gray activities and strategy continue to evolve and adapt, so any capability to respond must itself be adaptable. Rather than focus on specific means (which will continue to change), US capabilities should focus on ends such as containing Russian influence and maintaining an international system consistent with US interests.

Toward this end, much of the SMA teams' discussion and findings regarding response options in the gray zone coalesce around the role of influence. In particular, how the US can increase its ability to influence international state and non-state actors, and minimize the influence of actors potentially detrimental to the status quo, or to US interests specifically. For this, we need a better understanding of the human / cognitive domain, which can only be achieved with a combination of richer information and conceptual models and frameworks to guide search and interpretation.

## Chapter 25. Required US Capabilities for Combatting Russian Activities Abroad

Mr. Jason Werchan  
USEUCOM Strategy Division & Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI)  
[jason.s.werchan.civ@mail.mil](mailto:jason.s.werchan.civ@mail.mil)

### Abstract

Russia's vertical decision form of governance gives it both significant flexibility and a competitive edge over the US when it comes to conducting gray zone activities. To effectively counter their efforts, it is imperative the Executive Branch identifies a lead federal agency for comprehensive gray zone activities to generate a true whole-of-government effort. This lead agency would be responsible for the overall planning, coordination, execution, and assessment of comprehensive US actions in the gray zone. The Department of State Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs is an ideal candidate. In addition to clearly outlining inter-agency gray zone roles and responsibilities, the US must redouble efforts to reduce European dependence on Russian energy and discourage future Sino-Russian alliance by developing a robust capability to foster distrust and unease between Russia and China.

### Understanding Russian Gray Zone Efforts

The chief capability the United States needs in competing with Russia in the gray zone is understanding its vertical decision-making and how to effectively compete given the derived distinct advantages of that structure. Russia's closed approach provides President Putin with significant flexibility in implementing activities in the gray zone. Russia's current governance arrangements do not allow for open discussion of foreign and domestic policy alternatives, and it is unlikely to enact the structural and constitutional changes needed to address enduring economic and social deficits. Russia defines activities in the gray zone as zero-sum. These activities include threatening other states militarily, or compromising their societies, economies, and governments by employing a range of means and methods to include propaganda, disinformation, and cultural, religious, and energy coercion. While further foreign adventures may have limited appeal to the average Russian citizen, the Kremlin's actions in the Kerch Strait in November 2018 demonstrated its willingness to act boldly even without popular support or elite consensus. Russia actively pursues influence in all regions of the world. It is executing active and at times aggressive foreign and security policies in its self-proclaimed near abroad, Afghanistan, and Syria. It has a growing capacity to exercise malign influence in Europe and abroad, including in the United States.

While the United States has extensive experience in contributing to European security by maintaining close relationships with our European allies and partners, it still lacks a broad understanding of Russia's gray zone capabilities and intentions as they are pursued around the globe and in multiple domains below the level of armed conflict. The US Government should support not only the production of additional analytic capability, but programs that produce the linguistic, cultural, and historic knowledge that underlie good policy as it applies to Russian actions and interests in the gray zone. The US Government must continue to study these issues and promote innovative approaches to Russian actions below armed conflict. This will enable leaders across all elements of national power to better shape, execute, and assess strategic choices based on a common understanding of Russian decision making to achieve their gray zone strategic objectives.

## Whole of US Government Response

Arguably the greatest weakness of the US Government to effectively compete with Russia below the level of armed conflict is the lack of a coherent and unified whole-of-government effort. The US democratic, federal system of government hinders the ability to effectively plan, coordinate, and execute a comprehensive strategy across all federal government agencies with equities in succeeding the gray zone. To accomplish this type of planning and strategy development would require decisions to be made, and funding to be coordinated, across all branches of the federal government. As a first step, it also would require bureaucratic changes.

The Executive Branch must choose a lead federal agency responsible for the overall planning, coordination, execution, and assessment of US comprehensive actions in the gray zone. Given that Russian gray zone activities, by definition occur below the level of armed conflict, and though global in nature, center around Europe and nations in their near abroad, it follows that the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (DoS/EUR) should be designated as that ideal lead federal agent. Beyond this designation, the Executive Branch would also need to empower the DoS/EUR with appropriate authorities and funding to achieve this mandate.

Once designated as the lead agency for overseeing planning and execution of comprehensive US operations, activities, and investments below the level of armed conflict DoS/EUR can coordinate an inclusive strategy for identifying, countering, and competing with Russia in the gray zone. As the lead federal agency, the State Department could facilitate development of a comprehensive strategy for coordinating the numerous elements of the US Government with equities in competing with Russia below the level of armed conflict, as well as an inclusive understanding of the funding, diplomatic, and technological requirements to execute that strategy.

A key element of this approach should include advancing the authorities, funding, and charter of the Russia Influence Group (RIG). The RIG is an interagency network co-led by DoS/EUR and US European Command (USEUCOM). It is dedicated to understanding and countering Russian influence operations in Europe by using a whole-of-government approach. Beyond the State Department and USEUCOM, the RIG has expanded to include participation from other agencies to include the FBI, US Cyber Command, various agencies of the Intelligence Community, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the Global Engagement Center (GEC). While the RIG supports a larger US national strategy of information operations, its current efforts are limited to the European theater of operations. The RIG has made significant progress in addressing and countering Russian malign influence by synchronizing efforts to compete in the information space in ways in which the US Government has not always been effective. As a result, the efforts, mandate, funding, and authorities of the RIG should be expanded to allow it to effectively counter Russian malign efforts in the gray zone beyond the European theater. This should include consideration of expanding the RIG globally for a coordinated US whole-of-government effort to counter Russian gray zone efforts.

## Discouraging a Grand Sino-Russian Alliance

Both Russia and China view the United States as a larger threat than either views the threat from the other. The United States must have the tools to disrupt a deepening partnership between the nations, and specifically, the shared goals and aspirations they seek through gray zone activities. As a result of its geopolitical isolation, Russia has turned to China as a growing and necessary key strategic partner. The drivers of this growing partnership include common objectives and values; perceived shared vulnerabilities in the face of US and Western pressures; and perceived opportunities for the two powers to expand their influence at the expense of the US and allied powers seen to be in decline.



Russia and China share a fear of, and common hostility toward the US and its system of alliances. They share an affinity for authoritarian stability, and aligned views on opposing international norms regarding human rights, cyber, and space. Russia and China also share overlapping approaches to the gray zone intended to leverage asymmetric tools to counter US military superiority.

To counter what appears to be a growing alignment of Chinese and Russian strategic interests, the US must have the capability to effectively foster distrust and unease between the Russia Federation and China. This includes the ability to foster inherent Russian distrust of China's expanding power highlighted by Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative of economic, commercial, and infrastructure projects in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. This should include a specific focus on promoting unease where Chinese economic growth efforts challenge Russian dominance in their perceived near abroad. As a specific example, a whole of government effort to foster Russian distrust of China's growing interests and expansion in the Arctic could result in fissures to Russian/Chinese relations.

### European Dependence on Russian Energy

The United States requires increased authorities and resources to counter Russian energy extortion of the European nations most reliant on Russian oil and gas exports. These authorities and resources should prioritize securing shipping lanes and commerce globally to allow for the free flow of crude oil, liquid fuels, coal, and greater quantities of liquid natural gas (LNG). Although Department of Defense operational units are not dependent upon Russian energy, several European allies and partners are alarmingly reliant on Russia as a source of energy, and are subject to coercion and harassment by the Kremlin to meet Russian operational and strategic interests. Overall, Russian energy supplies meet more than a third of Europe's total natural gas demand, with Eastern European and Balkan countries generally most reliant on Russia. Thirteen Eastern European countries rely on Russia to provide 75% or more of total natural gas imports, and many of these countries have no domestic natural gas production. Russia also provides Europe with roughly 32% of its total energy imports, with five countries (Belarus, Bulgaria, Finland, Lithuania, and Poland) reliant on Russia for more than 70% of their total imports. Russia has used this dependence as a tool to affect US partner and ally decision-making, or as a punitive response to decisions made by nations not aligned with Russian interests. Russian presence, market share, and ownership in European energy sectors are often followed by illicit activities, bribery, and corruption.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### RDML Jeffrey J. Czerewko

Rear Admiral Jeffrey Czerewko is a native of Saginaw, Michigan and a graduate of the US Naval Academy. He also holds a master's degree from the National War College.

At sea, he deployed aboard USS Enterprise (CVN 65) with Attack Squadron -75 (VA-75) flying A-6E Intruders. He flew F/A-18C Hornets on USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 68) with Strike Fighter Squadron-81 (VFA-81), USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67) and USS George Washington (CVN 73) with VFA-136. He deployed twice with USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) as commanding officer of Strike Fighter Squadron 146 (VFA-146). He flew F/A-18Cs, F/A-18E/Fs and EA-18Gs while serving as commander of Carrier Air Wing 2 (CVW-2) while assigned on USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) as strike warfare commander for Carrier Strike Group 9.



Ashore, Czerewko's tours include VFA-106 as a fleet replacement squadron instructor pilot and assistant safety and assistant training officer; electronic warfare branch chief with the Joint Staff, J 39 deputy director for Global Operations; resource sponsor for Naval intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities as director of battlespace awareness (N2N6 F2); acting director of the Digital Warfare Office on the Navy Staff and most recently chief of staff for Commander, Naval Air Forces.

Additional tours of duty include a tour with the Naval Special Warfare Development Group and as battle director for the Combined Air and Space Operations Center, Al Udeid, Qatar.

He is the recipient of various personal awards and unit decorations and received the Navy and Marine Corps Leadership award in 2002 and 2004.



### Dr. John Arquilla

Dr. John Arquilla is a Distinguished Professor of Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School where he has taught in the irregular warfare program since 1993. He is best-known for having predicted, back in the mid-'90s, the rise of terrorist, insurgent, and transnational criminal networks. His books include *Networks and Netwars* (2001), *The Reagan Imprint* (2006), and *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits* (2011). He contributes regularly to *The New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Politico*.

### Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya

Anna Borshchevskaya is a Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East. She is also a Ph.D. candidate at George Mason University. In addition, she is a fellow at the European Foundation for Democracy. She was previously with the Atlantic Council and the Peterson Institute for International Economics. A former analyst for a US military contractor in Afghanistan, she has also served as communications director at the American Islamic Congress. Her analysis is published widely in publications such as *Foreign Affairs*, *The Hill*, *The New Criterion*, and the *Middle East Quarterly*. Until recently she conducted translation and analysis for the U.S. Army's Foreign Military Studies Office and its flagship publication, *Operational Environment Watch*, and wrote a foreign affairs column for *Forbes*. She is the author of the February 2016 Institute monograph, *Russia in the Middle East*.



Her areas of expertise are Russia's Middle East policy, US-Russian relations, and Russian foreign policy. She holds a M.A. from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and a B.A. from the State University of New York at Geneseo.

### Dr. Belinda Bragg



Dr. Belinda Bragg is a Principal Research Scientist for NSI. She has provided core support for DoD Joint Staff and STRATCOM Strategic Multi-layer Analysis (SMA) projects for the past six years. She has worked on projects dealing with nuclear deterrence, state stability, US-China and US-Russia relations, and VEOs. Dr. Bragg has extensive experience reviewing and building social science models and frameworks. She is one of the two designers of a stability model, (the StaM) that has been used analyze stability efforts in Afghanistan, state stability in Pakistan and Nigeria, and at the city-level to explore the drivers and buffers of instability in megacities, with a case study of Dhaka. Prior to joining NSI, Dr. Bragg was a visiting lecturer in International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station. Her research focuses on decision-making, causes of conflict and political instability, and political uses of social media. Dr. Bragg earned her Ph.D. in political science from Texas A&M University, and her BA from the University of Melbourne, Australia.

## Mr. Pavel Devyatkin

Pavel Devyatkin is a Research Associate at The Arctic Institute, where his research areas include Russia's Arctic strategy, extractive industries, defense and security, and maritime shipping. Between 2017 and 2018, he managed the Institute's flagship publication, The Arctic This Week, which is read weekly by thousands in over ninety countries.

Devyatkin's expert opinion on Russia's Arctic strategy has been cited and quoted in numerous academic and media publications. His recent research is on the inclusion of the Arctic in China's Belt and Road Initiative.



Prior to joining The Arctic Institute, Devyatkin worked as an analyst of environmental issues in Eastern Europe and Central Asia at the United Nations. Devyatkin holds a master's degree in International Development from the London School of Economics. Devyatkin is also a graduate of University College London, where he studied Russian politics and economics. Devyatkin is a New Yorker of Russian ancestry.

## MAJ Adam Dyet



Strategic Analyst: South Asia/Central Asia, China/Russia

MAJ Dyet assumed his duties as a strategic analyst within the Strategy, Plans, and Policy Directorate in August 2017.

He is a former logistics officer, transferring to Functional Area 59 (Army Strategist) in 2016. He has over 12 years of total active duty service, with command at the company level in a cavalry squadron. Other notable assignments include: Provincial Reconstruction Team Sharana S4, Operations/Logistics Officer for Joint Task Force-Port Opening operations in support of operations in Haiti and Diego Garcia, and Brigade S4 for the 1<sup>st</sup> Stryker Brigade Combat Team. MAJ Dyet's overseas experience includes deployments in support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan, Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, Haiti, Operation Spartan Shield, Kuwait, steady state operations in South Korea, and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM from Diego Garcia.

MAJ Dyet's military education includes the Transportation Officer Basic Course, Combined Logistics Captain's Career Course, Command and General Staff College, Defense Strategy Course, Basic Strategic Art Program, and the Joint Forces Staff College. This is his first long term joint assignment at the strategic level. He previously served with joint staffs supporting transmodal movement of a Stryker brigade to Afghanistan in Diego Garcia in 2009, and during earthquake relief efforts during Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE in 2010.

MAJ Dyet's civilian education includes a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Arizona and a Master of Arts in International Affairs from the University of California San Diego.

### Dr. R. Evan Ellis

Dr. Evan Ellis is a research professor of Latin American Studies at the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute with a focus on the region's relationships with China and other non-Western Hemisphere actors, as well as transnational organized crime and populism in the region.

Dr. Ellis has published over 240 works, including the 2009 book *China in Latin America: The Whats and Wherefores*, the 2013 book *The Strategic Dimension of Chinese Engagement with Latin America*, the 2014 book, *China on the Ground in Latin America*, and the 2018 book, *Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean*.



Dr. Ellis has presented his work in a broad range of business and government forums in 27 countries four continents. He has given testimony on Latin America security issues to the US Congress on various occasions, has discussed his work regarding China and other external actors in Latin America on a broad range of radio and television programs, and is cited regularly in the print media in both the US and Latin America for his work in this area.

Dr. Ellis has also been awarded the *Order of Military Merit José María Córdova* by the Colombian government for his scholarship on security issues in the region.

Dr. Ellis holds a PhD in political science with a specialization in comparative politics.

### Mr. Daniel J. Flynn



Mr. Dan Flynn was selected to be the first Director of IC Net Assessments in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in August 2018. In this position, Mr. Flynn is responsible for developing forecasts and comparative assessments to identify emerging challenges and opportunities for US intelligence capabilities.

Prior to his current assignment, Mr. Flynn was the Director of the Global Security Program for the National Intelligence Council's (NIC's) Strategic Futures Group. In this position, he led national-level assessments of long-term and crosscutting military-security issues for senior US policymakers and defense officials. His work informed the development of US national security and defense strategies, including the 2018 National Defense Strategy. He also was an advisor to several Defense Science Board studies.

Mr. Flynn also participated in writing several of the NIC's *Global Trends* reports, including the 2017 *Global Trends: Paradox of Progress*.

From 2004 to 2005, Mr. Flynn served as a senior staff member for *The President's Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*. His duties included leading the Commission's research on the capabilities of the IC to support future US military operations, perform strategic assessments, and conduct scientific and technical analysis.

Mr. Flynn is a “Distinguished Graduate” of the National War College earning an M.S. in National Security Strategy. He also earned a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering from Boston University. Mr. Flynn is an ODNI “Plank Holder.”

### Dr. Daniel Goure

Dr. Goure is Senior Vice President with the Lexington Institute, a nonprofit public-policy research organization headquartered in Arlington, Virginia. He is involved in a wide range of issues as part of the institute’s national security program.

Dr. Goure has held senior positions in both the private sector and the US Government. Most recently, he was a member of the 2001 Department of Defense Transition Team. Dr. Goure spent two years in the US Government as the director of the Office of Strategic Competitiveness in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He also served as a senior analyst on national security and defense issues with the Center for Naval Analyses, Science Applications International Corporation, SRS Technologies, R&D Associates and System Planning Corporation.



Prior to joining the Lexington Institute, Dr. Goure was the Deputy Director, International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. At CSIS, Dr. Goure was responsible for analyses of: US national security policy, the future of conflict and warfare, the information revolution, counter-proliferation, and defense industrial management. He directed analyses of emerging security issues with a special emphasis on US military capabilities in the next century.

Dr. Goure also has done extensive consulting and teaching. From 1990 to 1991 he led a study for the US Institute of Peace on deterrence after the INF Treaty. Dr. Goure has consulted for the Departments of State, Defense and Energy. He has taught or lectured at the Johns Hopkins University, the Foreign Service Institute, the National War College, the Naval War College, the Air War College, and the Inter-American Defense College. From 2001-2007, Dr. Goure was an adjunct professor in graduate programs at the Center for Peace and Security Studies at Georgetown University, and an adjunct professor at National Defense University from 2002-2009 — teaching a Homeland Security course at both.

Dr. Goure is a well-known and respected presence in the national and international media, having been interviewed by all the major networks, CNN, Fox, the BBC, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Christian Science Monitor, the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times. He has been published extensively in over two dozen journals and periodicals. He is also an NBC national security military analyst.

Dr. Goure holds Masters and Ph.D. degrees in international relations and Russian Studies from Johns Hopkins University and a B.A. in Government and History from Pomona College.

### Ms. Abigail C. Kamp



Abigail Kamp is a Research Assistant for the Political Instability, Counterterrorism and Gray Zone Portfolio at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), located at the University of Maryland (UMD). In her current role, she studies a wide range of topics including US-Colombia relations during the development and execution of Plan Colombia, misalignment of US counterterrorism efforts across the interagency, and community-based violence prevention and intervention efforts.

Prior to graduate school, she supported a variety of federal clients as a consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton. While there, she drafted two Congressional reports on military personnel issues and managed the coordination process to ensure timely delivery to Capitol Hill. She was also a research assistant on the Immigration and Homeland Security team at the Bipartisan Policy Center where she wrote extensively about US immigration and border security policies. Ms. Kamp holds a BA in International Relations from the George Washington University and was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Natal, Brazil. Currently, she is a Robertson Fellow pursuing a master's degree at UMD's School of Public Policy, where her research focuses on the evolution of US security assistance in Africa and Latin America.

### Dr. Roger Kangas

Dr. Roger Kangas is the Academic Dean and a Professor of Central Asian Studies at the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, a U.S. Department of Defense regional center. Previously Dr. Kangas served as a Professor of Central Asian Studies at the George C. Marshall Center for European Security in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany; Deputy Director of the Central Asian Institute at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies; Central Asian Course Coordinator at the Department of State's Foreign Service Institute; Research Analyst on Central Asian Affairs for the Open Media Research Institute in Prague, Czech Republic; and as an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Mississippi.



Dr. Kangas has been an advisor to the Combatant Commands, NATO/ISAF, and various US government agencies on issues relating to Central and South Asia, Russia, and the South Caucasus. He has written refereed articles and book chapters, as well as lectured to a range of audiences, on these topics. He is also an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and a Visiting Fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Dr. Kangas holds a B.S.F.S. in Comparative Politics from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and a Ph.D. in Political Science from Indiana University.

### Dr. Mark N. Katz



Mark N. Katz (Ph.D., MIT) is a professor of government and politics at the George Mason University Schar School of Policy and Government. He has written primarily about Russian foreign policy, especially toward the Middle East, for over 35 years. During 2017, he was a visiting scholar first at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (January-March), and then at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki (April-September). During 2018, he was a Fulbright Scholar at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London (January-March), and was then the 2018 Sir William Luce Fellow at Durham University in the UK (April-June). Links to many of his publications can be found at [www.marknkatz.com](http://www.marknkatz.com).

### Dr. Barnett S. Koven

Barnett S. Koven is the Training Director, a Senior Researcher, and the Political Instability, Counterterrorism and Gray Zone Portfolios Lead at the University of Maryland's (UMD) National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center of Excellence. He is also the Founder and CEO of BSK Consulting, L.L.C., a boutique consultancy specializing in practitioner education and mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) research in support of national security practitioners and policy-makers. In addition, Koven is a Fellow at the Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy at Florida International University, a Professorial Lecturer in Political Science & International Affairs at the George Washington University (GWU), an Associate Member of the Graduate Faculty and a Lecturer in Public Policy at the UMD, an Adjunct Presenter at the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School and a Quantitative Social Scientist at Performance Systems, LLC. He received his Ph.D., M.Phil. and M.A. in Political Science, as well as a B.A. in International Affairs and Latin American and Hemispheric Studies from the GWU. Koven also holds a Certificate in Conflict Analysis from the United States Institute of Peace and a Certificate in Advanced Security in the Field from the United Nations System Staff College.



Koven has conducted extensive overseas research in conflict and post-conflict zones. His work employs cutting-edge quantitative and qualitative methods to answer pressing defense and homeland security questions. Specifically, he focuses on issues pertaining to counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, countering violent extremism, counter-narcotics, gray zone conflict, security cooperation, organized criminal violence, weapons availability and conflict onset, post-conflict reconstruction, and the material and non-material sources of military power. Koven has received research funding from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the U.S. Department of State, the DHS and the National Nuclear Security Administration, as well as from the Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy, the GWU and the UMD. A complete list of journal articles, book chapters and policy publications can be found on his personal website: [barnettkoven.weebly.com](http://barnettkoven.weebly.com).



In addition to his aforementioned academic affiliations, Koven regularly instructs Combating Terrorism Seminars at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Charleston, SC. He has also lectured during Joint Special Operations University's Special Operations Forces Interagency Collaboration Course, the Defense Intelligence Agency's Advanced Counterterrorism Analyst Course and overseas as part of the Diplomatic Security Service's Global Anti-terrorism Training Assistance/Special Program for Embassy Augmentation and Response Executive Forum on Foreign Terrorist Fighters Consultation. In addition, Koven has taught at the National Reconnaissance Office as part of the Executive Master of Public Management Program. Moreover, he is also a frequent presenter during the various lecture series and conferences curated by the Strategic Multi-layer Assessment Branch of the DoD, as well as to myriad other US government and university audiences. Finally, Koven routinely provides terrorism analysis on national and international media broadcasts.

Beyond academia, Koven is the Vice President and Director of Events at the Godparents of the Children of Instituto Mundo Libre, a non-profit organization providing safe housing, rehabilitation and vocational training to homeless children in Peru. In addition, Koven is a Board Member at Mindot, a non-profit educational platform for developing the next generation of local leaders and agents of social change. Finally, he is an Advisor at Concordia, a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding public-private partnerships.

### Dr. Jeremy W. Lamoreaux



Jeremy W. Lamoreaux is a professor of international studies and political science at Brigham Young University – Idaho. His research focuses on relations between the West and Russia, specifically as played out in NATO and the EU. Geographically, his focus is primarily on the Baltic States. He has published in *European Security*, *European Politics and Society*, *Geopolitics*, *Journal on Baltic Security*, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, *Palgrave Communications*, and with *Routledge* and *Rodopi*. His current research focuses on the EU-Russia relationship post-Brexit.

### Dr. Marlene Laruelle

Marlene Laruelle, Ph.D., is an Associate Director and Research Professor at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University. Dr. Laruelle is also a Co-Director of PONARS (Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia) and Director of GW's Central Asia Program. She has been working on Central Asia's regional environment, China's presence in the region, and the "Eurasian" dimension of Russia's foreign policy for the past two decades. She is currently a co-PI on a three-year project, *Russian, Chinese, Militant, and Ideologically Extremist Messaging Effects on United States Favorability Perceptions in Central Asia*, funded by the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Army Research Office/Army Research Laboratory under the



Minerva Research Initiative. She will release “Envisioning Opportunities for US-Russia Cooperation in and with Central Asia,” co-authored with Andrei Kortunov, as a Harvard US-Russia Working Group paper in April 2019.

### Dr. Christopher Marsh



Dr. Marsh is a senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University, USSOCOM, where he conducts research on global special operations forces with a particular focus on Russian SOF, including strategy and foreign policy. He also serves as the president of the Special Operations Research Association and editor of *Special Operations Journal*, published by Routledge. Prior to joining JSOU, Marsh was a Professor of National Security and Strategic Studies at the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). Before that, Dr. Marsh taught irregular warfare, global terrorism, and COIN at the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field, Florida. From 1999-2011 Dr. Marsh taught at Baylor University, moving up the ranks from assistant professor to full professor. Dr. Marsh holds the Ph.D. in political science from the University of Connecticut, in addition to having completed graduate study at Moscow State University. He conducted much of his dissertation research at the Russian Academy of Science, and later was a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University. Dr. Marsh was also a visiting fellow at Tsinghua University (Beijing) in 2001, where he conducted research on political and social change in China. Dr. Marsh is the author of five books, including *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors*, co-authored with Nikolas Gvosdev of the Naval War College. Dr. Marsh has also published more than 60 journal articles and chapters in edited collections, as well as editing – with Ruslan Pukhov – *Elite Warriors: Special Operations Forces from Around the World*. He is currently writing a book on Russian grand strategy.

### Dr. Robert Person

Dr. Rob Person is an Associate Professor of International Relations at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, where he teaches courses in Russian and post-Soviet politics, international relations, and comparative politics in the Department of Social Sciences. Additionally, he serves as Director of Curriculum for West Point's International Affairs Program, as well as Director of Research for the Department of Social Sciences. Dr. Person's research focuses on the foreign and domestic politics of Russia and the former Soviet states. He has published extensively on regime support, mass mobilization, hybrid warfare, and the international relations of the post-Soviet states. His current book project, in progress, examines Russian grand strategy in the 21st century. Dr. Person holds a Ph.D. in political science from Yale University and an MA in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies from Stanford University. He is also a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a Resident Fellow at West Point's Modern War Institute. Visit Dr. Person's website at <https://www.robert-person.com/> and follow him on Twitter [@RTPerson3](https://twitter.com/RTPerson3)



### Ms. Nicole Peterson



Nicole Peterson is an Analyst who assists in qualitative research and strategic analysis in support of Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) efforts primarily focused on national security issues and Department of Defense (DoD) concerns. She has contributed to NSI's Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa®) and discourse analyses during her time at NSI. Nicole coordinates SMA's speaker series, which encompasses a broad range of topics from radicalization of populations and violent extremist organizations to artificial intelligence. She is also the publisher of SMA's weekly newsletter, which summarizes SMA speaker sessions, outlines upcoming events, and disseminates relevant publications. Nicole began her career at NSI as an undergraduate intern for its commercial sector and was subsequently promoted to an associate analyst for its government

sector in 2016. She graduated with honors from the University of San Diego where she received a BA in applied mathematics and a minor in accountancy.

### Mr. Roman "Comrade" Pyatkov

Roman Pyatkov is the Russia Subject Matter Expert and Senior Analyst at Headquarters Air Force, Checkmate at the Pentagon. His work focuses on providing analysis, courses of actions, and recommendations to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force on how to employ Airpower in support of the National Defense Strategy and National Military Strategy. Prior to joining Checkmate, he was working on the Joint Staff Russia team as a political-military planner for a variety of Russia focused strategic documents. He is a former F-16 pilot and has an M.A. in International Relations and Conflict Resolution.



### Dr. John Schindler



Dr. John R. Schindler is a historian, strategist and former intelligence official. He served for more than a decade with the National Security Agency as both a GS civilian and as a U.S. Navy officer, as a senior intelligence analyst and as a counterintelligence officer specializing in Russia and Eastern Europe. He worked extensively on the operational connections between counterespionage and Russian Active Measures. He was technical director of NSA's largest operational division and received numerous awards for his intelligence work. He was also a professor of strategy at the Naval War College for nearly a decade. He is a national security columnist for *The Observer* and *Spectator USA*. A Ph.D. in history (McMaster, 1995), Dr. Schindler is currently writing on his fifth and sixth monographs and has published widely in both scholarly and popular

fora on intelligence and military affairs. He is active on social media, including the well-known Twitter feed [@20committee](#), devoted to intelligence and security issues, with more than 270,000 followers.

### Ms. Malin Severin

Malin Severin is a Swedish analyst currently seconded by the Swedish Armed Forces to the UK MoD's think tank *Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre*, DCDC. As part of the DCDC Futures Team she works with Strategic Foresight, covering trends and developments in Europe, Russia, as well as issues relating to the future of governance. Prior to joining DCDC she worked at the Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI, where she focused her research on issues relating to 'grey zone' challenges, early warning and Total Defence. Malin has a background in journalism and political risk analysis, and has also worked at the Swedish Embassy in Washington, DC.



She holds a MA in War Studies from King's College London, a MSc in Political Science from Lund University, and a MA in Journalism from Uppsala University.

### Dr. Thomas Sherlock



Thomas Sherlock is a professor of political science at the United States Military Academy at West Point and has served as program director of comparative politics 2005-2007 and 2011-2012. He received his doctorate in political science from Columbia University and teaches courses on comparative politics, democracy and democratization, and the politics of the post-Soviet region. His book, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*, was published in 2014 in an expanded, translated edition in 2014 by Rosspen (Moscow), the leading academic publisher. He is the co-author of *The Fight for Legitimacy: Democracy vs. Terrorism* and the co-editor of two volumes: *What Is the Worst that Can Happen? The Politics and Policy of Crisis Management*; and *Confronting Inequality. Wealth, Rights, and Power*. Thom has contributed chapters to several edited volumes and his articles have

appeared in numerous journals, including *Comparative Politics*, *Washington Quarterly*, *National Interest*, *Problems of Communism*, *Ab Imperio*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Prepodavanie istorii i obshchestvovedeniia v shkole* (Russia), *Rossiia v global'noi politike* (Russia), and *Zovnishni spravy: ZS* (Ukraine).

Thom's opinion pieces have appeared in the *New York Times* (international edition), the *Washington Post* (*the Monkey Cage*) and other news outlets. He has served as a consultant or project manager for the Carnegie Council, the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Open Society Foundations (Ukraine), and EUROCLIO in The Netherlands, among other institutions. He has given invited presentations at Columbia University, Yale University, Wesleyan University, TRADOC, the U.S. Air Force Academy, the US European Command (EUCOM) and other academic and government institutions. Thom frequently conducts field research in post-Soviet space, including large-N national surveys and focus groups in Russia. His current research, which is supported by grants from the Minerva Initiative, examines the character of Russian nationalism; popular and elite assessments of Russian history; and the quality of democratic values in Russia.

### Dr. Joseph Siegle

Dr. Joseph Siegle is the Director for Research at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. In this capacity he tracks Africa wide security trends. His research focuses on the political economy of security and development and the challenges of political transitions. Prior to joining the Africa Center, Dr. Siegle was the Douglas Dillon Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, a senior research scholar at the University of Maryland's Center for International and Security Studies, and a senior advisor at the international consulting firm, DAI. He has also served in various field capacities in Africa, Asia, and the Balkans with the international NGO, World Vision, and was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Liberia.



### Dr. Robert Spalding III



Dr. Rob Spalding is an accomplished innovator in government and a national security policy strategist. He has served in senior positions of strategy and diplomacy within the Defense and State Departments for more than 26 years. He was the chief architect of the framework for national competition in the Trump Administration's widely praised National Security Strategy (NSS), and the Senior Director for Strategy to the President. Dr. Spalding is globally recognized for his knowledge of Chinese economic competition, cyber warfare and political influence, as well as for his ability to forecast global trends and develop innovative solutions.

Dr. Spalding's relationship with business leaders, fostered during his time as a Military Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, allowed him to recommend pragmatic solutions to complex foreign policy and national security issues, which are driving positive economic outcomes for the nation. Dr. Spalding's groundbreaking work on competition in Secure 5G has reset the global environment for the next phase of cyber security in the information age.

Dr. Spalding is a skilled combat leader, promoter of technological advances to achieve improved unit performance, and a seasoned diplomat. Under Dr. Spalding's leadership, the 509<sup>th</sup> Operations Group—the nation's only B-2 Stealth Bomber unit—experienced unprecedented technological and operational advances. Dr. Spalding's demonstrated acumen for solving complex technological issues to achieve operational success, was demonstrated when he led a low-cost rapid-integration project for a secure global communications capability in the B-2, achieving tremendous results at almost no cost to the government. As commander, he led forces in the air and on the ground in Libya and Iraq. During the UUV Incident of 2016, Dr. Spalding averted a diplomatic crisis by negotiating with the Chinese PLA for the return of the UUV, without the aid of a translator.

Dr. Spalding has written extensively on national security matters. He is currently working on a book concerning national competition in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. His work has been published in *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The American Interest*, *War on the Rocks*, *FedTech Magazine*, *Defense One*, *The Diplomat*, and other edited volumes. His Air Power Journal article on *America's Two Air Forces* is frequently used in the West Point curriculum.

Dr. Spalding is a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute and a Life Member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He has lectured globally, including engagements at the Naval War College, National Defense University, Air War College, Columbia University, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory and other Professional Military Educational institutions. Dr. Spalding received his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in Agricultural Business from California State University, Fresno, and holds a doctorate in economics and mathematics from the University of Missouri, Kansas City. He was a distinguished graduate of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, and is fluent in Chinese Mandarin.

### Dr. Richard Weitz

Richard Weitz is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Political-Military Analysis at Hudson Institute. His current research includes regional security developments relating to Europe, Eurasia, and East Asia as well as US foreign and defense policies.

Before joining Hudson in 2005, Dr. Weitz worked for shorter terms at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Defense Science Board, Harvard University, and other research institutions, and the U.S. Department of Defense, where he received an Award for Excellence from Office of the Secretary of Defense.



Dr. Weitz is a graduate of Harvard University (Ph.D. in Political Science), Oxford University (M.Phil. in Politics), the London School of Economics (M.Sc. in International Relations), and Harvard College (B.A. with Highest Honors in Government), where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He is proficient in Russian, French, and German.

Dr. Weitz has authored or edited several books and monographs, including *Assessing the Collective Security Treaty Organization* (2018); *Promoting US-Indian Defense Cooperation* (2017); *Enhancing the Georgia-US Security Partnership* (2016); *Parsing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises* (2015); *China and Afghanistan After the NATO Withdrawal* (2015); *Reforming US Export Controls Reforms* (2015); *Turkey's New Regional Security Role: Implications for the United States* (2014); *Rebuilding American Military Power in the Pacific* (2013); *Global Security Watch—China* (2013); *War and Governance: International Security in a Changing World Order* (2011); *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow* (2010); *Global Security Watch—Russia* (2009); *China-Russia Security Relations* (2008); *Mismanaging Mayhem: How Washington Responds to Crisis* (2008); *The Reserve Policies of Nations* (2007); and *Revitalising US–Russian Security Cooperation: Practical Measures* (2005); and two volumes of *National Security Case Studies* (Project on National Security Reform, 2012 and 2008).

Dr. Weitz has also published in such journals as *Survival*, *Jane's Intelligence Review*, *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, *The Washington Quarterly*, *The National Interest*, *NATO Review*, *Global Asia*, *Arms Control Today*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Defense Concepts*, *Pacific Focus*, *Asan Forum*, *Journal of Defence Studies*, *Small Wars Journal*, *WMD Insights*, *Parameters: U.S. Army War College Quarterly*, *Naval War College Review*, *World Affairs*, *China Brief*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, and *Yale Journal of International Affairs*.

The commentaries of Dr. Weitz have appeared in the *International Herald Tribune*, *Baltimore Sun*, *The Guardian*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Times*, *Forbes*, *Wall Street Journal* (Europe),

Japan Times, and many Internet-based publications such as WashingtonPost.com, Foreign Policy, YaleGlobal, The Diplomat, EurasiaNet, Project Syndicate, Real Clear Defense, The Hill, Roll Call, Middle East Times, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Apostrophe, and World Politics Review. He has also been quoted in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, Time Magazine, Sunday Express, Science Magazine, and other prominent newspapers and magazines.

### Mr. Jason Werchan



Jason Werchan is a Strategy Program Manager for the Strategy Division and Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI) assigned to the Headquarters of the United States European Command (USEUCOM). He was the Command's primary liaison for the Strategic Multilayer Assessment studies on Russia and the Gray Zone. His duties include developing the USEUCOM Commander's Theater Strategy, Campaign Plan, and annual Congressional Posture Statement. He is the Command's primary inject for inputs into various Defense Department strategic documents to include the National Military Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Contingency Planning Guidance. Mr.

Werchan entered Civil Service in January 2015 after retiring as a Colonel from the USAF. In his last assignment he served as the Chief of Strategy for USEUCOM. He entered the Air Force in May of 1989 after receiving a commission through the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Texas A&M University. During his AF career, he served as an instructor and evaluator navigator in the RC-135, E-8C and T-1A aircrafts. He has also been a student and an instructor at the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College and was a fully qualified Joint Staff Officer. He has held multiple staff positions at the Pacific Air Forces and the Air Education and Training Command Headquarters to include Branch Chief for Strategic Plans for Education and Training and ISR Operations in the PACOM AOR. He also served as Chief of the Education and Training Command's Future Learning Division, and as the Deputy Commander for the 479th Flying Training Group at Pensacola NAS overseeing the AF's new Combat Systems Officer (CSO) training pipeline. In 2011 he served as the deputy commander of the Kabul International Airport (KIAI) ISAF base installation. He holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Texas A&M and a master's degree in managerial economics from the University of Oklahoma. His military awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal and Defense Meritorious Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster.