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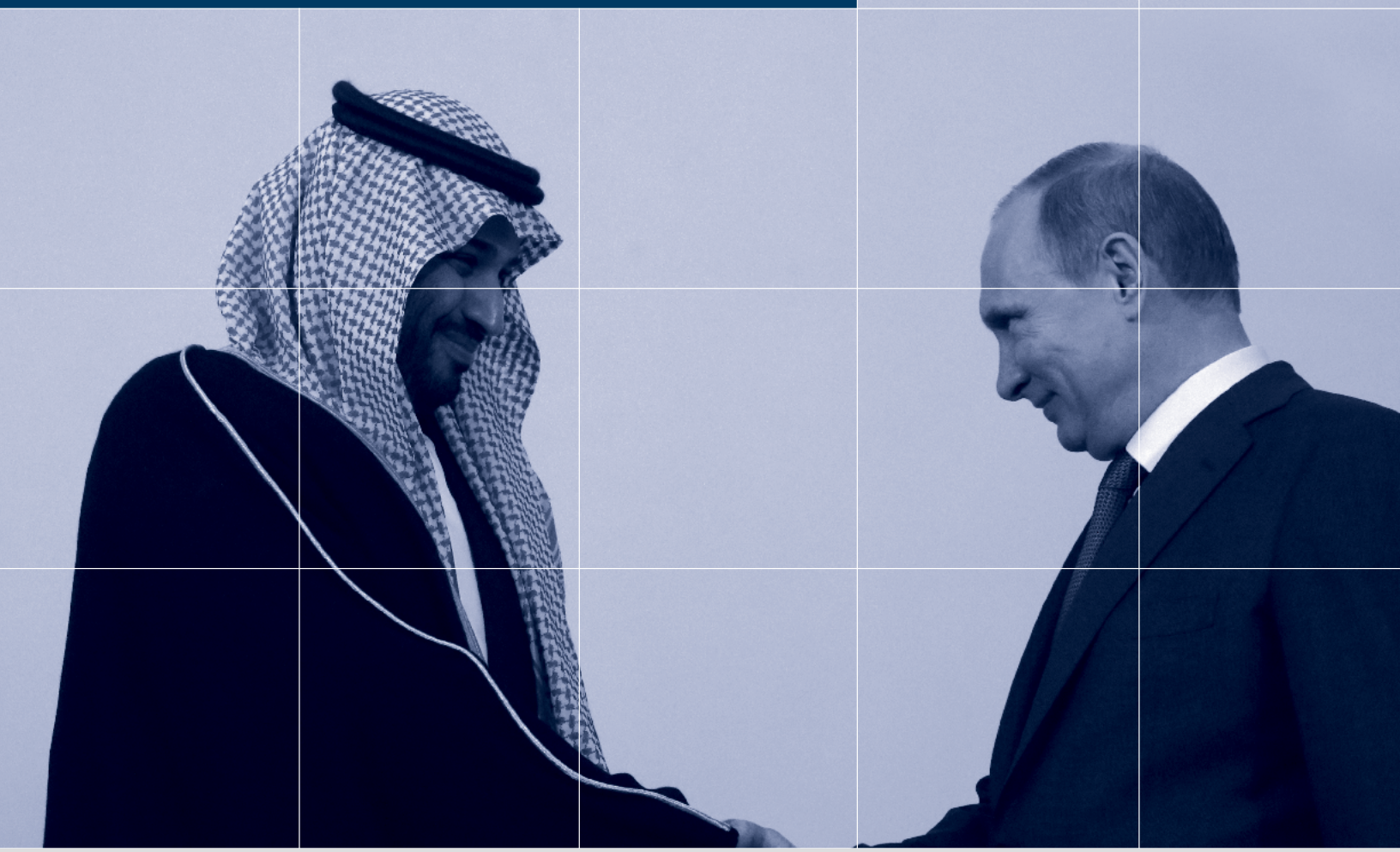

THE RETURN OF GLOBAL RUSSIA

An Analytical Framework

Paul Stronski and Richard Sokolsky

DECEMBER 2017

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The authors would like to thank Andrew S. Weiss, Eugene Rumer, Ann Himes, Nicole Ng, Ryan DeVries, and Cooper Hewell for their invaluable assistance in preparing this paper.

About Carnegie's Return of Global Russia Project

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is launching a major two-year analytical project entitled The Return of Global Russia: A Reassessment of the Kremlin's International Agenda, which focuses on Russia's new activist foreign and military policies. After a two-decade lull, the Kremlin, since 2012, has assiduously sought to expand Russian influence beyond its immediate neighborhood to the far abroad, a geographic scope that includes Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and even Latin America. The project will cast a spotlight on several dimensions of this often poorly understood facet of Russian foreign policy and the tools Moscow is using to advance its interests.

This project has five chief objectives. First, this initiative will examine the doctrinal, historical, and ideological foundations of Russian international activism; its geographic scope; and the domestic political drivers and key interest groups championing these initiatives. The study will address the actual impact that the Kremlin is having in far-flung locales and the extent to which these moves seek primarily to demonstrate Russia's impact on the world stage in order to compensate for lackluster socioeconomic conditions at home.

Second, it will map the tool kit available to Russian policymakers—including 1) economic and energy, 2) political and cultural, 3) digital media and cyber, and 4) military and security instruments—which encompasses both newly acquired tools and those Moscow developed during the Cold War. Some of these tools are relatively cheap, and their use often goes unnoticed as the attention of the United States and its allies is drawn to larger global issues and areas where a growing vacuum of Western power has emerged.

Third, this project will look at whether or to what degree U.S. interests are being threatened and to what extent Russia's heightened activism has produced significant gains for Russian foreign policy and increased Moscow's standing inside the countries where these new tools are being utilized.

Fourth, it will assess how Moscow is adapting to growing governmental and public scrutiny of its activities in the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and increased alarm in Europe about Russian activities and the risk of continued meddling in various countries.

Finally, this initiative will examine what is at stake for the United States and its allies if Russian actions go unchallenged, while also seeking to identify potential areas of overlapping U.S. and Russian objectives.

This paper will be followed by a series of in-depth regional case studies, a historical overview of similar Soviet-era foreign policy tools, and proposals for various Western policy response options.

Summary

Since 2012, Russia has been conducting a sophisticated, well-resourced, and, thus far, successful campaign to expand its global influence at the expense of the United States and other Western countries. Moscow has pursued a host of objectives, such as tarnishing democracy and undermining the U.S.-led liberal international order, especially in places of traditional U.S. influence; dividing Western political and security institutions; demonstrating Russia's return as a global superpower; bolstering Vladimir Putin's domestic legitimacy; and promoting Russian commercial, military, and energy interests.

Though its foreign actions are often opportunistic, Russia increasingly aims to create a multipolar world in which it plays a more prominent role. Moscow's national security establishment broadly supports this international outreach, which will likely remain an enduring feature of Russian foreign policy. Washington and its allies must carefully judge Russian actions case by case and respond in concert when possible.

The Kremlin's International Agenda

- Moscow has relied on relatively inexpensive diplomatic, military, intelligence, cyber, trade, energy, and financial tools to wield influence and expand its global footprint.
- The Kremlin has capitalized on Western missteps and growing anti-establishment sentiments in Europe and North America.
- Russia will likely continue trying to fill global power vacuums resulting from U.S. President Donald Trump's "America First" foreign policy.

Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy

Formulating an effective response to Russia's global activism will be challenging. To do so, U.S. policymakers should consider four broad points:

Ask the first-order question. How do Russia's actions affect U.S. interests and foreign policy goals? In some areas, Russian activities have damaged U.S.

interests, but elsewhere their impact has been symbolic rather than substantive. Russian activity should not be conflated with Russian success.

Weigh costs and benefits. Russia's approach has had mixed results. Its investments in the Middle East have paid off handsomely. But in Europe, Russian actions have mobilized Western governments to counter them. Notably, Moscow has fewer resources than the West, serious domestic problems, and no real allies.

Avoid overreacting. Not every instance of Russian activism threatens the U.S.-led international order or U.S. security. At a minimum, Washington and its allies should expose Moscow's tactics. More robust responses are justified when important U.S. and allied interests are threatened—and when Washington has realistic, sustainable means to thwart Moscow's ambitions without exacerbating the situation.

Leverage partnerships and eschew a one-size-fits-all approach. There is no cookie-cutter solution for countering Russian adventurism. Washington need not bear this burden alone; it should develop tailored strategies with other actors to deter, contain, and, if necessary, roll back Russian influence operations.

Introduction

For much of the post–Cold War era, the United States and Europe paid little attention to Russia's efforts to expand its political, economic, and military influence abroad. The West saw these efforts as relics of the Cold War, primarily confined to Russia's immediate neighborhood but largely absent or at least ineffective elsewhere. The effects of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's internal challenges, and Moscow's stated desire for integration with the West sharply constrained the Kremlin's interest and capacity to project its influence on a global scale and diminished the West's interest in Russian foreign policy and its global activities.

However, since Vladimir Putin returned to the Russian presidency in 2012 after a four-year stint as prime minister, Russia has engaged in a broad, sophisticated, well-resourced, and—to many observers—surprisingly effective campaign to expand its global reach. To advance its diverse objectives, Moscow has relied on a wide array of diplomatic, military, intelligence, cyber, trade, energy, and financial tools to influence political systems, public attitudes, and elite decisionmakers in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These objectives include, first and foremost, undermining the U.S.-led liberal international order and the cohesion of the West; enhancing Putin's domestic legitimacy by demonstrating Russia's status as a global superpower; promoting specific Russian commercial, military, and energy interests; and tweaking the United States' nose in areas of traditional U.S. influence.

Russia has engaged in a broad, sophisticated, well-resourced, and—to many observers—surprisingly effective campaign to expand its global reach.

The Kremlin launched this campaign in response to the 2012 mass protests in Moscow, apparently convinced that Western democracy promotion initiatives had instigated these demonstrations to destabilize Russia itself and promote regime change.[1] In 2014, following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the start of its undeclared war in Ukraine, this counteroffensive intensified and took on new qualities.

Whereas previously the bulk of Russian efforts had focused on defending Moscow's claimed "sphere of privileged interests" around its periphery, the new

campaign has sought to damage the international image of Western democracy, exacerbate the internal tensions within Western political and security institutions, and expand Russia's global reach at the expense of Washington and its allies by playing on Western missteps in different parts of the world. For the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the United States is facing a Russia that is not, in former president Barack Obama's memorable phrase, a mere "regional power," but rather one that is actively trying to project its influence and establish a presence well beyond its periphery.[2]

Despite Moscow's shift in strategy, the United States and its European partners are increasingly focused on their own domestic challenges and regional crises in Asia and the Middle East. Russia is keen to exploit increased opportunities in the resulting vacuum, using both hard and soft power, to expand its influence and presence and to take advantage of Donald Trump's presidency, marked by his embrace of an "America First" foreign policy and:[3]

- a retreat from long-established U.S. leadership in upholding the rules-based international order Washington helped create after World War II;
- an abandonment of democracy promotion and rule of law as elements of U.S. foreign policy;
- a return to isolationism and a rejection of nation-building efforts to redirect U.S. resources needed at home;
- a dismissal of multilateral cooperation and a devaluation of long-standing U.S. alliances;
- the worst domestic political crisis in the United States in many decades;
- and, most importantly, a refusal to acknowledge the challenge posed by Russian adventurism.

Finding examples of Russian global activism is easy. Assessing its motivations, consequences, and effectiveness is not. Specifically, it can be hard to tell whether a given Russian behavior is meant to actively undermine the liberal political and economic order that has flourished under U.S. leadership or whether it is designed primarily to shore up Putin's domestic standing and to create timely economic opportunities for domestic Russian constituencies that support his regime.

Finding examples of Russian global activism is easy. Assessing its motivations, consequences, and effectiveness is not.

Likewise, framing a coherent and effective U.S. response to Russia's increased global activism will be challenging. The risk of doing too much or too little is real, and getting the answer right entails asking a series of challenging questions. Is Moscow's behavior largely symbolic or does it threaten the interests of the United States or its closest allies? What is the cost to U.S. interests of Russia's efforts to gain geopolitical and economic toeholds beyond its immediate

neighborhood? When should Russian actions trigger a strong U.S. response? Which Russian activities may risk overreach and pushback? What are the best ways to measure the impact—both in Russia and the West—of Moscow's recent global activism?

Identifying the key drivers of Russia's global activism and providing an overview of Moscow's many efforts to expand its global influence is a useful and important way to begin formulating appropriate and effective responses to these behaviors. In some areas, Russian activities have damaged Western interests, but in others their impact has proven to be more symbolic than substantive. Not every far-flung Russian initiative should be viewed as part of a global zero-sum competition between the United States and Russia, and the costs to Russia of some of these efforts could exceed the benefits Moscow hopes to gain. Policymakers should seek to assess the interests that a given Russian behavior is seeking to advance, which policy tools Moscow is employing, which U.S. interests are being undermined, and which U.S. policy tools would constitute the most effective response.

The West and the Rest

Russia's global activism can be divided into four geographic regions. While there may be some uncertainty about the drivers at play in each of these regions, there is little uncertainty about the considerable momentum behind these efforts. In general, Moscow's ordering of priorities aligns closely with the proximity of the region to Russia, as well as with Russian threat perceptions.

First are Moscow's efforts to retain its influence or counter Western influence in the states of the former Soviet Union. In its immediate periphery, Moscow aims to firm up its hold on its neighbors to prevent additional countries from aligning too closely with the West, and to preserve a buffer zone of pro-Russian or, at least, neutral states around it. In countries that have already turned away from Russia—Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—Moscow seeks to undermine their political transitions, court their publics, and prevent their true integration with Western political, economic, or security structures. Moscow also is keen to shore up its influence in Central Asia, a region increasingly dominated economically by China.

The second category consists of Moscow's efforts to undermine the Western and transatlantic institutions it considers its principal adversaries—the United States, the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Moscow has attempted to exploit their internal divisions and challenges as well as the uncertainty about Washington's commitment to its allies and partners since President Donald Trump's embrace of the "America First" agenda. Moscow's anti-Western actions are motivated by a widely held view in the Russian security establishment that the administrations of former

presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush actively sought to weaken Russia domestically, undermine its influence internationally, increase its isolation, and carry out regime change around Russia's periphery and even in the country itself. Russian leaders apparently have decided to do to the West what they believe the West has done to them.

Third, Russia is engaging in a campaign to gain or regain influence in other places where the Soviet Union once held sway. In the Balkans, for example, Russia plays the nationalist and Christian Orthodox cards to complicate Western efforts to integrate these countries into European structures. In the Middle East, Russia seeks to protect its longstanding equities in Syria and to convey its purported great power status to domestic and international audiences, as well as its capacity to act beyond its immediate neighborhood and gain a foothold in what is seen as a traditionally U.S. sphere of influence.

The final category consists of Russian efforts to gain influence in parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Some of these efforts involve forming coalitions of rising powers willing to challenge the Western-dominated international system; elsewhere, Moscow tries to cultivate authoritarian leaders and take advantage of frictions between the United States and some of its traditional allies or partners. In Latin America, in particular, Moscow hopes to embarrass Washington and show that it too can make a foray into its main global adversary's backyard.

In the Beginning, There Was the Near Abroad

The breakup of the Soviet Union left Russia with little appetite and few resources to pursue old Soviet ambitions in various far-flung corners of the world. The ideology behind those ambitions had been discredited, and the means to support them were gone. At this juncture, Moscow's diplomacy focused primarily on the former Soviet space and was dictated by immediate security requirements and the agenda of settling post-Soviet divorce affairs, in particular the return to Russia of nuclear weapons that had been located in former states of the Soviet Union, the settling of former Soviet debt, and the disposition of Soviet assets.

In retrospect, there can be little doubt that Moscow did not accept its former Soviet neighbors as fully sovereign and independent. In the early post-Soviet years, however, it had relatively few levers to influence them and was forced to take advantage of what was available: control of their access to international markets, economic blockades, the residual Soviet military presence in their territories, and the sponsorship of separatist movements and unrecognized regimes within their borders. The clearest expression of Moscow's view of its neighbors came somewhat later, in 2008, when then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev asserted his country's claim of veto power over the domestic policy decisions of these countries, describing them as Russia's sphere of "privileged interests."[4]

New Toolbox, Old Tools

As Russia's economy recovered from its post–Cold War doldrums and its foreign and security policy could command greater resources to pursue its objectives, Moscow's tool kit expanded, was tested, and was perfected throughout Russia's immediate neighborhood.

The first set of tools Moscow has employed are economic measures such as preferential trade terms, discounts on its oil and gas exports, debt relief, and financial bailouts. In the former Soviet Union, for instance, Russia has used its growing economic clout to acquire key pieces of its neighbors' infrastructure—including telecommunications, railroads, electricity grids, and power stations—so as to gain further leverage over their economies and politics. This trend is seen clearly in Armenia.[5] As for debt relief and financial bailouts, Moscow offered Kyrgyzstan a multibillion-dollar bailout in 2009 in an effort to shut down the U.S. Transit Center at Manas—the only U.S. military base in the region and an irritant for Moscow.[6] After years of using Moscow's pressure and financial incentives to increase the rent it charged to Washington for the facility, Kyrgyzstan ultimately acceded to Moscow's wishes and closed the base in 2014.[7]

Similarly, in 2013, in an obvious attempt to keep Ukraine in Russia's orbit, Putin offered a $15 billion bailout package to then Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych as a reward for not signing an Association Agreement with the EU.[8] That was the costliest known move by the Kremlin in support of its claim to a "sphere of privileged interests." Before that, Armenia, Belarus, and Tajikistan had all benefited from Moscow's bailouts, favorable arms deals, and heavily discounted energy deliveries, which often resulted in Moscow's acquisitions of key assets in these countries.

A related step that Russia took to solidify its position in former Soviet states was the creation of a union with Belarus, although both countries retained control over their own domestic and external relations. Putin elevated Eurasian integration to a top foreign policy priority in 2012, and Moscow has stepped up diplomatic efforts to ensure Russia's position at the heart of a broader economic and trading bloc, which eventually is meant to include all former Soviet states. This bloc—the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)—was formally established by treaty in May 2014 and initially included Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Armenia and Kyrgyzstan joined in 2015.

In addition to securing Russian economic dominance throughout the former Soviet space, the EEU is also meant to serve as a counterweight to the EU. Armenia came under strong Russian pressure to reject an Association Agreement with the EU and to join the EEU instead. Russia allegedly threatened to weaken its military support for Armenia, likely by ending discounted weapons sales and other means, if it signed the pact with the European Union—an indication that Moscow is willing to withhold or provide military assistance to assert its interests in another country. Russia also tightened

restrictions on migrants from non-EEU members working in Russia, a threat meant to pressure wavering migrant-dependent countries, including several in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, into joining the bloc.[9] Recognizing that this could cripple its remittance-dependent economy, Kyrgyzstan became the fifth EEU member in 2015. This pressure on Kyrgyzstan to join the EEU also may have been motivated by Russia's desire to secure its hold on a country that is attracting significant Chinese investments.

Despite Russian inroads, there has been pushback in the region to Moscow's efforts to dominate the EEU. Some members have complained about Russian pressure to establish one-sided trade arrangements within the bloc that favor Moscow's economic interests, even though Russia offered them discount prices on energy exports and a handful of other preferential deals. Such concessions help bind these economies to Russia over the long run. Moscow's ambitions for the EEU are not limited to trade. Future plans include steps toward financial and monetary integration, possibly leading to the establishment of a monetary union or even a common currency.[10] In its plans for the EEU, Russia assigned Ukraine, the second-most populous country and one of the largest economies in the post-Soviet space, a critical role. Ukraine's refusal to join the EEU and the breakdown in Russian-Ukrainian relations after the fall of the Yanukovych government in 2014 dealt a major blow to Russia's EEU ambitions. This failure appeared to stiffen the Kremlin's resolve to keep other ex-Soviet states in its declared exclusive sphere of influence.

Gradually, Moscow's economic and commercial influence has proven increasingly useful as an adjunct to a second tool—the Kremlin's relatively successful efforts to exert political and cultural influence in other states. The Christian Orthodox faith that Russia shares with some of its neighbors and other cultural ties are such sources of influence. Politically speaking, Russia has astutely taken advantage of corrupt oligarchic networks in key target countries across Eurasia to enhance its own leverage over leaders and other elites, while at the same time rewarding Russian businesses close to the Kremlin. This enables Moscow to embed and promote Russia-friendly politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen in these states' decisionmaking structures. Moreover, Soviet-era KGB ties to the security services of nearby countries have allowed Russian and Russia-friendly intelligence officers to penetrate these networks.

Russia has widely practiced this cultivation of friendly political parties, politicians, and business elites in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine. Despite Azerbaijan's productive history of economic and security cooperation with the United States in the 1990s and 2000s, Kremlin-friendly figures in senior positions of the Azerbaijani government and security services have issued broadsides against the West and stoked color revolution fears among many of their fellow elites. These individuals have exacerbated recent frictions between Baku and Washington, and they constitute a powerful anti-Western constituency inside Azerbaijan.

A third important means the Kremlin uses to promote its interests are the digital tools it employs in the information space, which include traditional and social media, entertainment, and cyber operations. Russia's dominant position and the role of the Russian language as the *lingua franca* in former Soviet states have given Moscow a wide opening to reach audiences across the entire post-Soviet world. Moscow has used Russian-language media as a powerful information operations tool.

The Kremlin has relied on these tools to influence public opinion in neighboring states and to shape narratives about a wide range of issues, including history, politics, and foreign and security policy, in a light favorable to Russia. Russian narratives are disseminated not only in news and information broadcasting but also in entertainment programming—a sector in which Russia excels. Moscow also organizes media and journalism training courses across the South Caucasus and Central Asia to orient the next generation of Eurasian reporters toward Russia. Given the cultural orientation toward Moscow evident among many Eurasian media elites, these narratives often get picked up and reformatted into local languages by state broadcasters and news outlets across the region.

Moscow's fourth tool covers military and security cooperation, a category that includes security alliances, military training and assistance, and arms sales. Russia's pursuit of a sphere of influence in Eurasia has also entailed efforts to develop and operationalize structural arrangements designed to tie neighboring states to Moscow in economic, political, and security terms and to ensure Russia's regional dominance.

With few resources at its disposal, Moscow sought to bind its former satellites by way of the legacy military ties and organizations inherited from the Soviet Union. A crucial element of this was the establishment of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 1992. The CSTO provided Russia with a vehicle for preserving some of its residual military presence in former Soviet states. Over time, the practical manifestation of these ties has been the military bases Russia has maintained in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Russian training and equipment that still serves as the core of CSTO countries' arsenals. Beyond this, although Russia's military base in Tajikistan is not formally under the CSTO umbrella, Moscow has long pushed for a greater CSTO operational presence in the country, particularly along the Tajik-Afghan border region.[11] The CSTO conducts periodic military training exercises.[12]

As Moscow has recovered in the new century, its old tool kit has once again become useful, particularly since it encountered new innovations like the internet and social media.

None of these tools are new. Moscow used them all elsewhere throughout the Cold War, perfecting and making them standard elements of its foreign policy. Most, if not all, fell into disuse as Russian foreign policy imploded after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But as Moscow has recovered in the new century,

its old tool kit has once again become useful, particularly since it encountered new innovations like the internet and social media, which allow Russian media narratives to cross borders and reach larger networks at relatively minimal cost. Eurasia in large part has been the testing ground for adapting these tools to modern technologies and contemporary geopolitical realities.

Beyond Eurasia

2014 was a watershed year in Russia's relations with the West, as well as in Moscow's overall foreign policy agenda. The crisis triggered by Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea had far-reaching consequences across the entire spectrum of Russian activities abroad.

Previously, Russian foreign policy goals had been confined largely (albeit far from exclusively) to the territory of former Soviet states. The Kremlin's chief goal was to protect Russian influence in these countries and fend off the West—specifically the perceived encroachment of NATO and the EU on Russia's exclusive sphere of influence; essentially, Russian policy was defensive by nature, seeking to protect this sphere. From that perspective, Russia saw even the annexation of Crimea as a defensive move, intended to keep a satellite—Ukraine—from leaving its orbit. Farther afield, Russian support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's embattled regime aimed to protect Russia's last remaining foothold in the Middle East.

The global reach of Russian foreign policy is broader now than is often appreciated.

The global reach of Russian foreign policy is broader now than is often appreciated. After 2014, the horizons of Russian foreign policy shifted considerably, as the scale and scope of its activities expanded both geographically and operationally, but the toolbox has been largely the same. One illustration of this is the way Moscow aspires to exert influence through various multilateral organizations with member states and affiliated partners both from Russia's post-Soviet neighborhood as well as throughout Asia, Europe, and the Middle East (see table 1).[13]

Table 1. Members and Partners of Russia-Friendly Multilateral Organizations

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)	Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	
MEMBER STATES	***MEMBER STATES***	***MEMBER STATES***	***MEMBER STATES***	***DIALOGUE PARTNERS***
Armenia	Armenia	Armenia	China	Armenia
Belarus	Azerbaijan	Belarus	India	Azerbaijan
Kazakhstan	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	Cambodia
Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyzstan	Nepal
Russia	Kyrgyzstan	Russia	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Tajikistan	Moldova		Russia	Turkey
	Russia	***SELECT FREE TRADE NEGOTIATIONS***	Tajikistan	
OBSERVERS	Tajikistan	Vietnam (FTA completed in 2015)	Uzbekistan	***ASPIRING OBSERVERS AND DIALOGUE PARTNERS***
Afghanistan	Uzbekistan	Egypt (in progress)		Bangladesh
Serbia		India (in progress)	***OBSERVERS***	Egypt
		Iran (in progress)	Afghanistan	Iraq
		Israel (in progress)	Belarus	Israel
		Mongolia (in progress)	Iran	Maldives
		Serbia (in progress)	Mongolia	Syria
		Singapore (in progress)		Ukraine

Sources: The official websites of these multilateral organizations and various related media reports (see endnote 14)

The EU and NATO in the Crosshairs

Having long embraced the narrative that the West was seeking to weaken and remove the Russian regime, the Kremlin evidently decided that what goes around comes around.

Some elements of this campaign were not new and predated Moscow's Syrian gambit by several years. The Baltic states, for instance, firmly in the Western camp after joining NATO and the EU, have been under sustained Russian pressure—arguably because Moscow sees them as the most vulnerable link in the Western alliance. The perceived vulnerability of the Baltic states is likely due to their shared borders with Russia, Russian neuralgia about them joining the West, relatively loose financial regulations that have facilitated the flow of Russian money into these countries, and ethnic Russian minority populations, especially in Estonia and Latvia. With mixed results, Russia has tried to cultivate prominent ethnic Russians as well as Russian political and cultural organizations. Most of the Russians in the region traditionally have relied on Russian media.[14] The most notorious instances of Russian meddling in the Baltics are what came to be known as the Russian-encouraged Bronze Soldier

riots that took place in Estonia in April 2007, and a cyberattack that shut down the country's electronic infrastructure and has been widely attributed to Russian hackers thought to be acting on behalf of the Russian government.[15]

While these are the most notorious episodes of Russia's harassment of its Baltic neighbors, they are far from unique occurrences. The existence of such practices has long included staples such as Russian violations of Baltic airspace, various trade boycotts and cutoffs, efforts to promote Russia-friendly politicians, Russian financial flows into the Baltic states' political and business circles, and persistent propaganda to undermine these countries' domestic stability and their confidence in the EU and NATO.[16] Russian pressure on the Baltic states has only increased since the breakdown in East-West relations in 2014, with Russia using its political, economic, and information tools in the region. These realities have reinvigorated efforts by the Baltic states to reach out to their Russian-speaking populations and firm up state and societal resilience, and this situation has also led to a greater NATO presence in the region.

At the same time, Moscow has harnessed its economic, political, and information tools to target a dramatically expanded list of European countries, including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom (UK), and many other EU and NATO member states. Russian state-directed media outlets like RT and Sputnik, for instance, produce content in a variety of languages and play a major role in disseminating pro-Moscow views beyond Russia's borders (see table 2).[17] These countries have been subjected to a stream of information and disinformation operations, cyberattacks, and other attempts by Russian agents to influence their domestic political affairs. All these activities seem to have been designed to undermine public confidence in major national and pan-European institutions. As in other such situations, Russia has not been the cause of the major problems facing Europe. But its operatives have been quick to amplify and capitalize on the opportunities that European discontent has created.

Table 2. Language Services of Russia-Backed News Outlets

RT Television	RT News (print)	Sputnik News (print)	
Arabic	Arabic	Abkhaz	Kurdish
English	English	Arabic	Kyrgyz
French*	French	Armenian	Latvian
Spanish	German	Azerbaijani	Lithuanian
	Russian	Belarusian	Moldavian
	Spanish	Chinese	Ossetian
		Czech	Persian
		Dari	Polish
		English	Portuguese
		Estonian	Serbian
		French	Spanish
		Georgian	Tajik
		German	Turkish
		Italian	Uzbek
		Japanese	Vietnamese
		Kazakh	

Source. RT and Sputnik News

*Note: According to a March 2017 *New York Times* article, RT Television's French language service will launch by the end of 2017. Steven Erlanger, "What is RT?," *New York Times*, March 8, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/world/europe/what-is-rt.html.

In Germany, where the general public was struggling to adjust to the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East, Russian news organizations sought to stir up popular discontent with Chancellor Angela Merkel's lenient refugee policy. At the time, Merkel had emerged as the leader of the transatlantic community's efforts to support Ukraine against Russian aggression. The most infamous episode of Russian disinformation involved a false story about a Russian-German girl abducted by Syrian refugees.[18] The story was spread not only by the familiar Russian culprits—RT, Sputnik, and countless anonymous internet users—but also by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The speaker of the Russian Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, has pursued ties with Germany's nationalist anti-immigration upstart party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which became the third-largest party in the Bundestag after the country's September 2017 general election. Volodin met with AfD chairwoman Frauke Petry in Moscow to discuss "interparty cooperation," while the AfD reached out to Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany for support, fielding several of them as candidates that spouted anti-migrant messages.[19] There have been reports of direct financial ties between Russia and some AfD leaders, and Russian-controlled media outlets gave strong support to far-right personalities and activities in the run-up to the German election.[20] AfD's youth wing

reportedly has been in talks to create formal ties with Russia's Young Guards, a counterpart sponsored by Moscow's ruling party, United Russia.[21]

Meanwhile, evidence was uncovered of Russian attempts to influence the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK. In the aftermath of the vote, which dealt a serious blow to the EU and raised many questions about its future, a British parliamentary commission speculated that Russian or Chinese hackers may have hacked the Brexit vote.[22] Moreover, the leading British advocate of quitting the EU, Nigel Farage, has been a welcome guest on RT broadcasts.[23] British investigative journalists recently also unearthed possible connections between Russian financial sources and a close Farage ally, who was a prominent donor to the Leave campaign.[24] Although she avoided weighing in directly on potential ties between Russia and Brexit, British Prime Minister Theresa May, in November 2017, publicly accused Russia of "weaponizing information" in various attempts to influence elections across the West.[25]

Similarly, in France's 2017 election, the Kremlin favored the far-right National Front's presidential candidate, Marine Le Pen, who campaigned on an anti-EU platform. Putin received her personally at the Kremlin amid the French presidential campaign, and her party also received financial backing—in the form of loans—from various Russian entities. A French investigative website published party documents indicating that Le Pen sought Russian money in early 2016 to finance her presidential run.[26] In addition, her principal opponent, Emmanuel Macron, was the target of multiple stories intended to discredit him—stories that have been traced to Russian fake news operatives. The Macron campaign's computer servers also were broken into just before the vote by hackers believed to be associated with Russia—a tactic also used in the United States.

Likewise, Russia appears to have taken steps to influence an April 2016 referendum the Netherlands conducted on whether to ratify the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine. In the months preceding the referendum, the Dutch public was subjected to a fake news campaign conducted by a group claiming falsely to be an émigré Ukrainian organization, which, in reality, included a number of Russians. In the end, Dutch voters voted against the agreement.[27]

In all four of these cases, Russian proxies did not create the conditions favoring political candidates opposed to the EU. Rather, those conditions were products of each country's domestic politics and popular anxieties toward Brussels. But in all these situations, the Kremlin did aggressively seek to exploit these sentiments. Using economic, information, and political influence tools, Moscow tried to leverage these social and cultural cleavages in Europe to undermine the EU's cohesion, sow confusion within EU and national structures, and undercut the EU's ability to act on behalf of a united Europe.

In addition to these highly publicized Russian efforts to sow discord and cultivate ties with anti-EU politicians in major European countries, Moscow has also undertaken an extensive campaign to court other European far-right and

far-left, anti-establishment, and anti-EU political parties and movements. For instance, United Russia has established ties with Italy's Five Star Movement.[28] Its leader, popular comedian Beppe Grillo, has been a vocal critic of sanctions on Russia. Five Star leaders have also publicly supported Russian actions in Syria and opposed the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, which, if constructed, would compete with Russia's South Stream pipeline.[29] Meanwhile, news portals with ties to Russia and Russian-affiliated online bots have tried to incite Catalan separatism; Russia's RT and Sputnik reportedly used Spanish-language social media accounts tied to Venezuela to promote negative images of Spain in the immediate days before the October referendum on Catalonian independence.[30] Twitter accounts linked to Julian Assange and Edward Snowden—both of whom have become frequent figures in Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns—also were particularly active in promoting the idea of Catalonia's secession from Spain, as were Moscow-friendly, Spanish-language news outlets.[31]

As these many examples illustrate, Russia has a history of trying to stoke or at least take advantage of separatist tendencies in Eurasia, Europe, and North America. It has backed secessionist movements as a tool to embarrass, sow discord in, or gain leverage over its neighbors (in the cases of Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine) or potential adversaries (in the cases of the United States and its European allies), by taking steps such as providing public platforms and possible financial support to separatist movements from several Western countries.[32]

Furthermore, in recent years, Hungary's retreat from EU norms and openly antagonistic relationship with Brussels have presented the Kremlin with another ripe opportunity to expand its influence in EU politics, this time through a major Central European country that has exhibited a tendency to engage in nationalistic and illiberal politics. Brussels has repeatedly criticized Budapest for the increasingly anti-democratic policies of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The affinity between Orbán and Putin has been well-documented.[33] According to recent reports, several NATO and EU governments have raised concerns about the risk that Russian security services may have penetrated the Hungarian government.[34] Regardless of how well-founded these concerns may be, they generate friction within NATO and complicate the EU's ability to formulate a coherent Russia policy.

Moreover, Russia has deployed the same economic tools in Hungary that it has used so frequently in dealings with its neighboring former Soviet states, focusing initially on the energy sector. Hungary imports about 90 percent of its natural gas from Russia and relies on Russian state-owned companies to fuel its nuclear power plants, which generate almost half of the country's electricity.[35] This dependency likely will increase given a Russian-financed plan to expand the Soviet-era PAKS nuclear station that would involve new and upgraded Russian technology. Valued at $12.5 billion, Hungarian and Russian officials made the deal behind closed doors without a transparent tender, raising

concerns in Brussels and among the Hungarian opposition about corruption and the potential risk of illicit financial flows to Hungarian government elites.[36] Similar concerns have been raised about a recent nontransparent tender given to a Russian company to modernize the metro system in Budapest.[37]

Russia also continues to cultivate ties with Turkey. Both Washington and Brussels have criticized Ankara for rising authoritarian tendencies and the closure of space for civil society under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Washington's support for Syrian Kurdish fighters and minorities also rankles Ankara, given its own struggle with Kurdish insurgents and Kurdish terrorism inside Turkey. By contrast, Russian-Turkish relations recovered surprisingly quickly from their 2015–2016 low point after a Turkish fighter jet downed a Russian plane near the Turkish-Syrian border. Russia has tried to court Turkey with calls to enter the EEU and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Much of Turkey's engagement with the EEU and SCO seems to be about sending a signal to the West. Russia apparently hopes to use Turkey, like Hungary, to cause difficulties for and dissent within NATO.

Moscow and Ankara are growing closer. The two governments lifted all but a few trade restrictions in late spring 2017. Russian investment in a Turkish nuclear power plant and the Turkstream gas project, if fully implemented, would increase Russia's role in Turkish energy markets.[38] Ankara's recent decision to buy Russia's S-400 air defense system is a coup for the Russian arms industry and for the Kremlin, stoking dissent within NATO and highlighting Turkey's status as a problematic ally for the West.

Firming Up Toeholds in Old Haunts

Beyond Russia's efforts to maintain its sway in post-Soviet states and to weaken the institutional underpinnings of the EU and NATO, Moscow has also sought to reestablish and expand its presence in regions where it enjoyed greater influence during the Cold War, including the Balkans, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia.

The Balkans

The Balkans are important to Moscow for several reasons—access to the Mediterranean Sea, the region's potential as a conduit for Russian energy exports that can bypass other troublesome transit countries, an arena where Russia has attempted to stop NATO and EU expansion, and an area of vulnerability for the West given the region's still unfinished efforts at reconciliation and reconstruction after the Yugoslav Wars. Moscow has deployed a wide array of soft and hard power instruments in the Balkans, including traditional diplomacy, information and cultural tools, economic levers, and covert means.

The Balkans represent a target-rich environment for Russia owing to the region's complicated legacy and diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic ties. The

region has presented Moscow with a unique opportunity to expand its influence by exploiting the unfinished business of reconstruction after the ruinous wars of the 1990s. Moscow has two important interrelated advantages that make it well-positioned to project influence there—the long history of Russian involvement in the region's turbulent past in support of fellow Slavs and shared Christian Orthodox faith. For example, Putin visited an Orthodox monastery at Mount Athos in Greece in 2016, Montenegrin Orthodox priests have been engaged in the anti-NATO campaign, and Russian Orthodox Church functionaries have courted their Serbian Orthodox counterparts.[39]

Serbia—with its conflicted post-Yugoslav legacy, complex politics, and aspirations to join the EU—is the biggest, but not the only, potential target of Russian attempts to shore up its influence in the Balkans. Meanwhile, Bosnia and Herzegovina has a delicate internal balance and is arguably the most vulnerable country where Russian interference can do the most damage. Russia has provided financial and diplomatic support to Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, including the quiet backing of his controversial 2016 independence referendum for Republika Srpska, the country's majority Serbian entity.[40] Moscow also appears to be behind efforts to inflame tensions between ethnic Croatian and Bosnian political leaders in the country.

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The tiny republic of Montenegro also emerged as a key target in light of Russia's ultimately unsuccessful attempts to thwart its accession to NATO. In a remarkably bold move, a group of Russian, Serbian, and Montenegrin operatives attempted a coup against the government of then prime minister Milo Djukanović.[41] The coup failed, but the episode demonstrated the lengths to which Moscow was prepared to go to compete for influence with the West in the Balkans and to signal its displeasure about NATO and EU expansion there. And while the European Reassurance Initiative increased NATO's military presence on the alliance's Eastern flank, Russia's actions in the Balkans highlight the need for NATO to step up intelligence and information sharing about Russian intentions and activities in the region.

Although Russia's lackluster economic performance has constrained its ability to use the economic card in its dealings with the Balkans, it has used energy as a policy instrument there. In Greece, Moscow used a gas pipeline deal and vague promises of financial assistance to make inroads as the impoverished country struggled to manage its massive debt burden. In Serbia, too, Moscow has relied on its pipeline diplomacy both to show its economic appeal and to thwart the EU's campaign opposing the Russian pipeline project there.[42] (See table 3 for an overview of these various Russian-financed energy projects in various European countries.)[43]

Table 3. Select Russian Energy Projects and Proposals

Project Name	Project Description	Notable Dates
TurkStream	The TurkStream gas pipeline includes two proposed lines. The first is under construction and will deliver gas from Russia to Turkey. The second is a proposed expansion to deliver gas from Russia to Southern/Southeastern Europe, but Gazprom has not yet determined the final destination or route.	Russia and Turkey signed an intergovernmental agreement in 2016.
Nord Stream 2	The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline will deliver gas from Russia to European customers via Germany. Five European energy firms (ENGIE, OMV, Royal Dutch Shell, Uniper, and Wintershall) agreed to cover 10 percent of the investment each, and Gazprom will cover the remaining 50 percent.	Gazprom and European energy firms signed a financing agreement in 2017.
Czech Nuclear Power Plants	The Czech government approved plans in 2015 to expand its existing nuclear power plants. In 2016, Rosatom proposed that it participate in the project by supplying a Generation III+ reactor and potentially offering financing.	Rosatom expressed interest in the project in 2016.
Paks Nuclear Power Plant	The expansion of Hungary's Soviet-era Paks nuclear power plant calls for building two additional power units.	Rosatom and MVM signed a contract for building the power units in 2014.
Hanhikivi-1 Nuclear Power Plant	A nuclear power plant will be constructed at Hanhikivi. Rosatom will provide financing, the reactor, and atomic fuel.	Rosatom and Fennovoima signed documents on the plant construction in 2013.
Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant	A nuclear power plant will be built at Akkuyu. Rosatom will build and own 51 percent of the plant and the remaining shares will be owned by a Turkish business consortium. Rosatom will also operate the station.	Russia and Turkey signed an intergovernmental agreement in 2010.

Sources: Gazprom and Rosatom public documents and various related media reports (see endnote 43)

*Note: The estimated cost of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project was converted from U.S. dollars to euros based on the prevailing exchange rate on December 5, 2017.

The Middle East

The Middle East also has witnessed a resurgence of Russian activism, particularly in Syria, Libya, and Egypt.

In Syria, the October 2015 deployment of Russian air and ground forces constituted a major escalation of Russian support for the Syrian government and the first combat deployment of Russian military personnel beyond its periphery in the history of post-Soviet Russia. Prior to this, Russian support for Assad had been largely limited to diplomacy, financial aid, intelligence sharing, and the delivery of weapons and equipment. Russia also has long maintained military and intelligence facilities in Syria, which would have been at risk if the Assad regime had collapsed.[44]

Many Russian and foreign analysts forecast that Russia could suffer substantial casualties in Syria, and they initially saw the deployment as a significant risk for the Kremlin. Instead, the military campaign there proved a major success

European Parties Involved	Key Russian Investor	Estimated Cost	Project Status (as of October 2017)
The Turkish government (and potentially other European partners)	Gazprom	11.4 billion euros	Construction on the first line (to Turkey) commenced in May 2017 and is scheduled to be completed in 2018. Possible routes for the second Southern Europe extension would pass through Italy via Greece, or alternatively through Bulgaria, Hungary, and Serbia. The second extension is scheduled to be completed in 2019.
Five European energy companies	Gazprom	9.5 billion euros	The project is scheduled to be completed by 2019.
The Czech government	Rosatom	undetermined	Rosatom is expected to submit a formal bid for the project, pending a future Czech government tender.
A Hungarian power company (MVM)	Rosatom	12.5 billion euros	Construction is slated to begin in 2018.
A Finnish power company (Fennovoima)	Rosatom	7 billion euros	Construction is projected to begin in 2019.
The Turkish government	Rosatom	16.9 billion euros*	Construction is expected to begin in 2018.

in several important respects. Russia suffered few casualties, and Moscow reinserted itself politically and militarily in the Middle East and Mediterranean in a way it had not been present for nearly a generation. The Russian military demonstrated its newly acquired capabilities after many observers had long since written it off as a fighting force, likely enhancing Russia's ability to market its weapons in the region and beyond. Moreover, the Kremlin sent a powerful message to prospective partners as well as all others that, unlike the United States, it was a reliable ally that would decisively come to its clients' rescue. And most importantly, Russia was able to prevent the collapse of the Assad regime, stopping what it claimed was an illegal U.S. operation. Moscow has long accused Washington of using democracy promotion efforts worldwide and especially around Russia's periphery to topple regimes it does not like, citing both the various so-called color revolutions across Eurasia as well as the Arab Spring uprisings that began rocking the Middle East in 2011.[45]

With the successful operation in Syria still under way, the Kremlin did not wait long to seize another opportunity to expand its footprint in Libya. The civil war that broke out in the aftermath of NATO's 2011 intervention and the overthrow of former leader Muammar Qaddafi's regime presented a new opportunity for Russia to insert itself into a power vacuum. The Kremlin had long been sharply critical of NATO's intervention in Libya, accusing it of regime change under the guise of a humanitarian intervention and of not having the stomach to finish the job when the going got tough. Amid the chaos of Libya's civil war, Russia has struck a partnership with a powerful warlord, Khalifa Haftar, whom France and the United States also have tried to cultivate as a local partner.[46] Moscow dispatched its sole aircraft carrier to Libya's shores in a very public show of support.[47] Russia's engagement with Haftar and actions in Libya help it claim a seat at the table in the future when the fate of the country is decided, as well as a foothold to plant the Russian flag.

In Egypt, the Kremlin did not take long to extend an offer of partnership to President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's government. The Obama administration's on-again off-again treatment of Sisi over his government's human rights record presented the Kremlin with an opening to court its former client. This has entailed visits by Putin to Cairo and by Sisi to Putin's residence in southern Russia, joint military exercises in Egypt, and promises of a major arms deal at a time when the United States had suspended its arms deliveries to Egypt.[48] And

in another sign of Russia's growing presence and the United States' declining influence in Egypt, Cairo and Moscow announced a preliminary agreement in November 2017 that would allow Russian combat aircraft to use Egyptian bases and air space.[49]

In Syria, Libya, and Egypt, Russia has demonstrated its rejuvenated military muscle, diplomatic agility, ability to muster considerable resources in support of its policy, and a near-total lack of scruples in pursuit of its strategic objectives. Elsewhere in the region, Moscow has mounted diplomatic offensives aimed at Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.[50] The Kremlin has employed a variety of means, including visits by senior officials, energy diplomacy, the pursuit of trade and economic ties and investment opportunities, arms sales, and civilian nuclear energy projects to expand Russian influence and presence, signaling that Russia is returning to the Middle East as a major power and plans to stay for the long run. (Figure 1 offers a sense of Russia's expanded security presence in the Middle East, the Black Sea, and nearby former Soviet states.)

Figure 1. Select Russian Military Installations Abroad

Southwest Asia

Southwest Asia is another theater of Russia's campaign to regain its Soviet-era global influence, especially in Afghanistan. As Kabul remains on the West's list of unfinished business, Moscow has been enhancing its influence there. Growing instability in Afghanistan, particularly in the north near the border with the former Soviet countries of Central Asia, has emerged as an important concern for Russia.

The Kremlin has harbored long-standing doubts about the prospects of the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan. As a hedge against the potential failure of U.S. efforts, Moscow appears to have expanded its contacts with the Taliban, provided it with machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons, funneled financial assistance covertly, and shared low-level sensitive information.[51] This move would mark a major shift in Russia's longtime approach to Afghanistan; since 2001, Moscow had been treating the Taliban as a threat to regional security.

Russia has partnered with China, Iran, and Pakistan to host high-level talks on Afghanistan's security without the United States or NATO present. These diplomatic moves appear designed to marginalize Washington, further hedge against the possibility of a Taliban victory, and shore up Russian influence not only in Afghanistan but also throughout Central and South Asia, where China's clout is growing.[52] In addition to its stepped-up activity in Afghanistan, Moscow has also increased its engagement with Pakistan, whose government has endorsed Russian contacts with the Taliban.[53]

Russia's prospects for resolving the Afghan conflict appear quite limited. However, as in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans, Moscow is using the situation to expand its influence, ensure a seat at the table, and obtain a foothold if there is a settlement in the future.

Expanding Russia's Global Reach and Partnerships

Beyond Moscow's other efforts to improve its geopolitical position, Russia has also taken steps to cultivate and enhance its relationships with a host of countries throughout the world, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The Asia-Pacific region has been the focal point of a Russian diplomatic pivot that intensified following the breakdown of Moscow's relations with the West since 2014; this trend has mostly centered on Russia's pivot to China. Diplomatically isolated and subjected to Western economic sanctions, Moscow shifted the focus of its foreign policy from integration with Western economic structures to integration with China. However, given the large imbalance in power between Russia and China, Moscow—which possesses the weaker hand in the relationship—has sought to expand its ties with other nations in the Asia-Pacific region, although many of these efforts are largely symbolic.

Russia has aimed to improve trade, economic, and diplomatic ties with both South Korea and Japan, but its outreach to these two U.S. treaty allies—which are also two of China's main trade partners—has been only moderately successful. The unresolved issue of the Japanese-claimed territories that the Soviet Union occupied at the end of World War II is a major barrier to better Russian-Japanese relations. Despite dangling before Tokyo the prospect of resolving the issue, or at least of making some progress toward a compromise solution, the Kremlin has been unwilling to take concrete steps and likely only used it as a ruse to break out of its isolation.[54]

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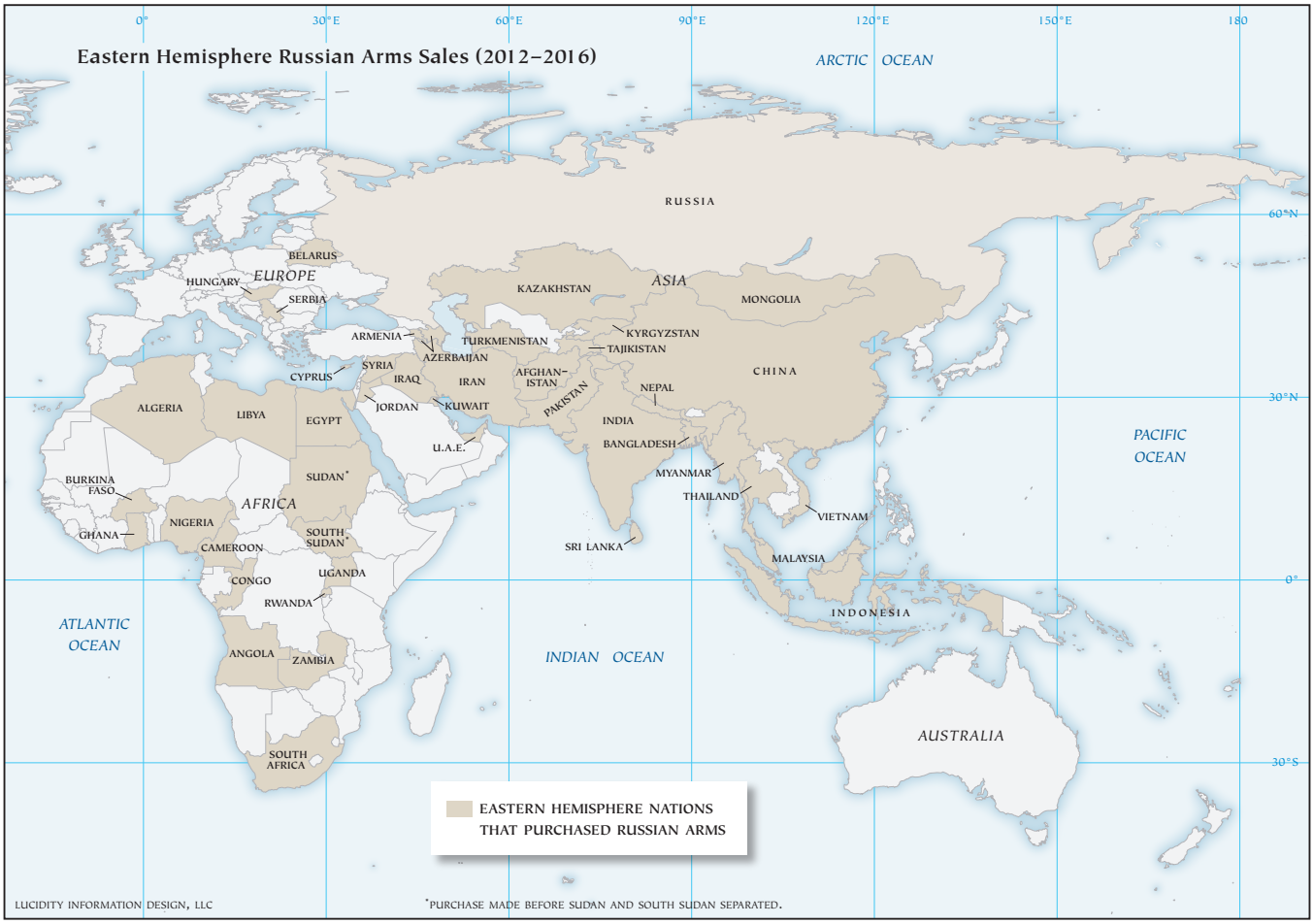
Meanwhile, the tense situation on the Korean Peninsula has complicated Moscow's relations with Seoul and Tokyo, as both have looked to Washington as their indispensable ally in resolving the crisis.[55] U.S. actions—the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system to South Korea and pressure on North Korea in response to its provocative behavior—have raised tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Russia's desire to maintain its close partnership with China also complicates Moscow's outreach to Tokyo and Seoul.

In South and Southeast Asia, Moscow has sought to expand ties with India, Pakistan, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The striking feature of Russia's outreach so far has been its pursuit of opportunities seemingly at the expense of the United States rather than efforts to actively diversify its links in the region beyond China. Moscow's most notable move has been its courtship of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, whose abysmal human rights record and open defiance of Washington made him a ready target for Moscow.[56] As in the case of the suspension of U.S. arms sales to Egypt, when Washington stopped the sale of 26,000 assault rifles to the Philippines, Moscow rushed into the resulting vacuum. Russia deployed two warships to the country in January 2017 and held talks with Manila about conducting joint military exercises. The deployment and proposed military exercises appear to be an effort to market Russian arms and defense technology as alternatives to U.S. arms. Russia already has freely provided some weapons for Philippine anti-terrorist operations, and Duterte reportedly wants to purchase more, including helicopters and small arms.[57] Meeting on the sidelines of the November 2017 Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit, Duterte and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev pledged to increase bilateral trade ties, as well as military and security cooperation.[58] It remains to be seen, however, how far Duterte will pursue a Russian connection given his continued interest in forging closer ties with China and the apparent mending of U.S.-Philippine relations during President Trump's recent visit to the region. (See figure 2 for a depiction of the countries in the Eastern Hemisphere to which Moscow has sold arms.)

Figure 2. Eastern Hemisphere Russian Arms Sales (2012–2016)



Africa is another region where Moscow has made quiet gains, although Russia's geopolitical maneuvering in the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific theaters has largely occupied most Russia watchers.

Moscow's activities in Africa have not focused much on fueling the continent's economic development or addressing the problems it faces. Instead, the Kremlin has focused on expanding Russia's web of diplomatic relationships and seeking opportunities to benefit Russian commercial and strategic interests in ways that have sometimes exacerbated existing governance challenges. On the political front, Moscow sees African countries as useful for shoring up support for its positions in international organizations. In the UN, for instance, many African countries either rejected or abstained from voting on the 2014 UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia for annexing Crimea, due to economic reasons and fears of Russian retaliation.[59]

Economically speaking, Russian energy companies, banks, and defense industry firms covet Africa's economic potential, but they came relatively late to the game and cannot compete with China's footprint there. From 2005 to

2015, the total value of trade between Russia and African countries increased from $3.5 billion to $9.6 billion.[60] Russia invested in oil refineries, natural resource endowments and the mining industry, fisheries, and various infrastructure projects in Guinea, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and several other countries.[61] As it has done in Central Asia, Moscow has provided debt relief to several African countries—writing off debt dating back to the Soviet era—often in return for loyalty in international fora.[62] Between 2008 and 2012, Moscow offered various African countries a total of $20 billion in debt relief; notably, Russia forgave $4.7 billion of Algerian debt in 2006 and $4.5 billion of Libyan debt in 2008.

The legacy of old Soviet ties to various African countries has been useful to Moscow for reestablishing these relationships in the twenty-first century. Many African leaders and politicians were educated at Soviet institutions during the Cold War. United Russia has sought to build ties with various political parties and movements across the continent.[63] These efforts have helped facilitate contact between Russian officials and African politicians, and have created leverage in African politics with the help of occasional financial assistance. Corruption appears to be an important element of many Russian financial and commercial deals in countries like South Africa and Uganda, a pattern that may extend to Moscow's relationships elsewhere in Africa.[64]

South Africa has emerged as one of Russia's most reliable partners in Africa. It was invited to join the BRICS and has been actively courted by the Kremlin; Putin has tried to use the BRICS as a counterweight to the U.S.-led international order. Putin personally has lavished attention on South African President Jacob Zuma, getting him to sign a $76 billion deal to build a series of nuclear power plants in South Africa in violation of the country's laws. The deal triggered a major scandal in South Africa and widespread allegations of corruption.[65]

Western media outlets' coverage of the scandal has focused on the powerful Gupta family's ties to Zuma and several high-profile Western businesses that were implicated.[66] However, Zuma's long-standing Russian ties and his dealings with Moscow have received relatively little attention. The former African National Congress government's intelligence chief received military and intelligence training in the Soviet Union.[67] He apparently has developed a close personal relationship with Putin, who hosted him in Moscow at Russia's 2015 military parade commemorating the anniversary of World War II. Zuma reportedly brought with him his minister of state security.[68] Three weeks later, he signed the nuclear deal with Russia.

South Africa is important to Russia's quest to push back at the U.S.-led international order. It is one of the continent's largest economies, and its successful post-apartheid transition should secure it a prominent place in that order.[69] Yet by trying to pull South Africa away from Western norms and encourage its backsliding on rule of law, free market principles, and democratic practices,

Moscow hopes South Africa can be part of a coalition of rising powers willing to challenge the Western-dominated international system.

The Latin American Connection

Lately, Russia has also stepped up its activities on the other side of the Atlantic—most clearly in Venezuela. Long a thorn in the side of the United States, the country has teetered on the brink of bankruptcy after years of economic mismanagement and U.S.-imposed sanctions. While China traditionally has been one of Venezuela's lenders of choice, Moscow too has long courted the administrations of former president Hugo Chávez and current President Nicolás Maduro for both commercial and geopolitical reasons. Like China, Russia has emerged as a critical lifeline for the embattled Maduro government. In November 2017, the Russian government announced an agreement to restructure $3 billion in loans to Venezuela to help ease Caracas's debt burden—an essential lifeline after China ceased providing the country with new loans.[70]

For years, Russia pursued arms deals, oil contracts, and high-profile diplomatic engagement with the Chávez regime. Between 2001 and 2011, it sold $11 billion worth of arms to Venezuela.[71] The giant Russian state oil company Rosneft has invested over $14 billion in Venezuela's oil and gas sector.[72] Chávez visited Russia eleven times before he died in 2013. Cultivating such a friendship in Washington's backyard appears to be Moscow's symbolic consolation prize for having Washington meddle in its near abroad. In short, Moscow and Caracas have found common cause in standing up to Washington. Having reportedly defaulted on some of its obligations already, the Maduro government may have no choice other than to accept deals that will be exceedingly generous to Russia but offer the lifeline Caracas needs.[73]

Assessing Russia's Global Activism

Moscow's redoubled efforts to deepen its global footprint raise the question of what kind of return Russia has reaped—and will continue to reap—on this investment. The record is mixed. Russia's growing global activism is real, but Washington should keep it in perspective and avoid overreactions based on flawed or exaggerated judgments about Russia's ability to sustain the gains it has made or to make new and significant inroads in countries and regions that it has yet to penetrate.

Russia's increasing global activism poses a major challenge to the U.S.-led international order and to the key pillars that sustain it.

Russia's increasing global activism poses a major challenge to the U.S.-led international order and to the key pillars that sustain it. Moscow's key priorities are to weaken Euro-Atlantic security, political, and economic institutions and to undermine European unity and U.S. global influence. Russia's attempt to sway the U.S.

election was probably meant to discredit and undermine public confidence in the U.S. political system and electoral process, as well as to tarnish the country's image globally. The current U.S. political crisis leaves a weakened Trump administration unable to develop—let alone advance—coherent foreign or domestic policy agendas. The state of U.S. politics has benefitted the Kremlin, and the administration's delays in developing new U.S. policies in various regions creates vacuums of retreating Western power that Russia, China, or other states can use to their advantage. At the same time, Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election has made it far more difficult for the Trump administration to take actions to improve U.S.-Russian relations.

Russian global activism without exception has one common feature: Russia has not established the underlying conditions that it has been trying to capitalize on. Rather, Moscow has opportunistically exploited conditions that are either indigenous to their respective countries and regions or products of local dissatisfaction with the West writ large or the West's own unfinished business. For example, Russia's ability to increase its penetration of and influence over European national governments, economies, and societies going forward will hinge to a great extent on whether these governments and the EU are successful in addressing the economic, political, and sociocultural problems that have given rise to pro-Russian populist, nationalist, and anti-establishment sentiments. Washington's ability to positively affect these dynamics in Europe is marginal at best, although it could easily exacerbate existing problems and hand Moscow greater opportunities to undermine the European order—with short-sighted trade and climate change policies and reckless anti-EU rhetoric.

In the Middle East and North Africa, there is no doubt that Russia has improved its geopolitical position, but the sustainability of its approach remains an open question. Moscow has been successful, most notably, in preventing the collapse of the Assad regime and putting itself (along with Iran) in the driver's seat for determining the ultimate outcome of the Syrian civil war. At the same time, however, Russia's ability to help stabilize and reconstruct the country is limited, and there is no assurance that large-scale fighting will not resume in the future. Its prospects to bring an end to the violence and restore stability and security in Libya or Afghanistan are equally doubtful. In these war-torn countries, Russia's approach is neither a factor for stability nor sustainable development.

And while Russia may have raised its diplomatic profile and expanded its arms sales, economic engagement, and energy opportunities in the Middle East, it is hardly on the cusp of supplanting U.S. dominance in the region. Moscow's support for Assad constrains its ability to strengthen relations with the Sunni Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf, although some Gulf states have come to the realization that the Syrian opposition has been defeated and now speak of an inclusive peace process.[74] Moscow's desire to protect and advance its important equities with Iran also will hamper Russian influence in

the region, although that did not stop Saudi King Salman from visiting Russia and allegedly trying to bridge differences over Iran.[75] That visit indicates that the Saudis now recognize they need to deal with Russia on regional issues, even if a Riyadh-Moscow partnership is unlikely to blossom anytime soon.

Meanwhile, Russia's prospects for expanding its web of relationships in Southeast Asia remain uncertain at best and seem to depend more on U.S. and Chinese moves in the region than on its own actions. If Washington continues to disengage, as it has by abandoning the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Moscow may be presented with new opportunities for engagement, though it will have to compete with a more powerful Beijing in this neighborhood and will want to constrain its activism to avoid a confrontation with China. It certainly did not go unnoticed that while Philippine President Duterte responded favorably to Russia's openings, he also traveled to Beijing and was rewarded with over $20 billion worth of financing and investment pledges—a feat that Russia would have a hard time matching.[76]

Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Moscow's relationships may be complicated by its embrace of China.[77] Several countries in the region, particularly the Philippines and Vietnam, are wary of China and its posture in the South China Sea, where Russia conducted joint naval exercises with China in September 2016, shortly after an arbitration court in The Hague ruled in favor of the Philippines' claim against China. This sent a signal to the region whose side Moscow was on.[78] Putin's overt support for China's position also had an anti-U.S. dimension, for it was framed as an argument that regional neighbors should resolve territorial disputes without involving outside powers.[79] Ironically, this stance could further limit Russia's reach in Southeast Asia. If the process of U.S. disengagement from the region continues, Southeast Asia will likely have little choice but to seek greater accommodation with China, and Russia may be the odd man out.

It is an open question whether Moscow will be able to sustain an effective foreign policy with the necessary material wherewithal and vision to present its leadership as an alternative to the U.S.-led international order.

In some instances, Russian activities have more symbolic than real meaning for its global aspirations, and they can easily be exploited by governments it is courting to extract diplomatic or economic concessions from Moscow. For example, the Kremlin's outreach to the Philippines and Serbia, both of which wish to maintain and strengthen their ties with the West, could very well end up in that category. Nor is Russia immune from overreaching or incurring blowback, particularly when it comes to the ways that the United States and Europe have responded to Russian efforts to divide them. To be sure, Russia has succeeded in trying to limit Ukraine's Western integration and domestic reform efforts. It also has exacerbated strains in transatlantic unity and highlighted the lack of coherence in U.S. and European policies toward Eurasia. But, at the same time, Russian aggression in Ukraine and threats to

other European states have triggered a real debate in NATO—for the first time in a generation—about the need to muster military capabilities to defend its eastern flank. Russia's annexation of Crimea and instigation of armed conflict in eastern Ukraine have even unnerved many of Russia's closest allies and damaged Russian soft power in Eurasia. Lastly, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has cemented the latter's Western orientation and driven a stake through the heart of Moscow's dreams of integrating Ukraine into the EEU.

Similarly, Russia's intervention in the 2016 U.S. presidential election certainly fueled political dysfunction, but it also backfired by creating a political firestorm that has weakened Trump's ability to reset relations with Moscow and strengthened, rather than removed, sanctions against Russia. The Russian-engineered political debacle in the United States helped firm up European resilience to and awareness of Moscow's tactics and growing economic power in several EU or NATO countries.

In light of this blowback, it is an open question whether Moscow will be able to sustain an effective foreign policy with the necessary material wherewithal and vision to present its leadership as an alternative to the U.S.-led international order. Previous Russian efforts to show global or regional leadership—through BRICS, the CSTO, and the EEU—have all floundered. Based on this track record, Russian efforts to push the EEU beyond the borders of Eurasia—through free trade agreements (FTAs) or discussions about potential membership bids by Iran, Turkey, and others—appear highly likely to meet the same fate. In fact, the recent diplomatic spat between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in which Astana closed the border and denied access to Kazakh markets of some Kyrgyz food products for "phytosanitary reasons," highlights the EEU's dysfunction and poor track record of promoting Eurasian integration.[80]

Theoretically, Washington's backtracking on free trade has given Moscow an opening vis-à-vis traditional U.S. trading partners to present itself as a champion of free trade principles. Moscow is publicly pushing, for example, FTAs between the EEU and India, Indonesia, Israel, Mongolia, Singapore, and South Korea.[81] However, without China's economic heft, Moscow may find that its attempts to position itself as a champion of free trade border on irrelevance. Such initiatives may stoke unease in Washington or Brussels that Moscow could be successful in cultivating ties with these countries. But such an outcome appears highly unlikely given Moscow's lackluster economic performance and the modest size of its economy. Most of these countries are far more likely to orient their trade policies toward China or conclude agreements with each other or other neighbors.

All of that said, it would be wrong to conclude that Russia lacks a strategy or the resolve to expand its global reach. Russia aims to increase its clout, refurbish its image, and assert itself on key international issues where retreating Western power has created vacuums. Moscow aspires to challenge the Western

political, economic, and security institutions—around which much of the current international system is based—that it claims pose threats to Russia's own interests. The Kremlin is determined to exploit opportune targets, and it has considerable resources that it can deploy in an agile, decisive manner when opportunities arise. The dire state of Russia's relations with the West means that Moscow has less to lose internationally by making bold foreign policy moves; such actions are popular at home and broadly supported by Russia's national security establishment. Moreover, Moscow so far has avoided overextending itself militarily, economically, or politically. It has cast its diplomatic net far and wide, displaying a clear propensity to take advantage of opportunities left behind by the West. To many observers, Russia seems almost indiscriminate in its choice of partners.

Moscow is animated by an aspiration that has guided it for some two decades: a multipolar world presided over by a constellation of major powers that includes Russia.

Perhaps, most importantly, Moscow is animated by an aspiration that has guided it for some two decades: a multipolar world presided over by a constellation of major powers that includes Russia. This vision is the exact opposite of the unipolar world that the Kremlin has charged Washington with trying to build and sustain since the end of the Cold War. Successive Russian governments over the past quarter century have pursued this vision with considerable skill and determination. There is no indication that this will change in the foreseeable future.

But beyond challenging this global order, Russia at this point offers no viable alternative to it. Moscow's efforts to insert itself directly into Ukrainian or Syrian affairs is not enhancing regional stability or leading to any sustainable solution to either conflict, raising questions about whether Russia has long-term exit strategies for either conflict or if it is willing to sustain a long-term commitment to help either country make difficult and costly political and economic transitions.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Russia's growing global activism raises the questions of how and when the United States should respond. Given Moscow's emergence as a serious adversary, the severe strains in the U.S.-Russian relationship, and Russia's toxicity in U.S. domestic politics, the Trump administration is likely to come under pressure to respond whenever and wherever Moscow seeks to expand its influence. However, it would be a mistake to see every instance of Russian global activism, wherever it occurs, as a threat to the U.S.-led international order or the United States itself. The impulse to respond by seeking to prevent the proverbial dominoes from falling should be tempered by an assessment of how Russia's actions affect U.S. foreign policy goals, interests, and priorities. Ignoring or downplaying Russian activities when a firm response is warranted will only

encourage and embolden Moscow to act more aggressively. But overreacting to Russian actions could exacerbate regional tensions and make conflicts more difficult to resolve or to deescalate. The creation of a new Cold War dynamic would provide a political boost to the Kremlin's legitimacy at home and a shot in the arm to the domestic Russian constituencies that stand to benefit from conflict with the West. Judgment, patience, and restraint will be required.

In short, the overarching question is this: Does Russia's growing global activism represent a temporary, expedient tactical response to manage and counter specific U.S. activities, or a more enduring, systematic reorientation of Russia's foreign policy toward achieving long-term strategic and geopolitical goals at the West's expense? Depending on the circumstances, the exact nature of the U.S. response to Russian activities will vary, particularly the tools—diplomatic, economic, informational, and military—that Washington and its partners employ. These determinations should therefore be judged on a case-by-case basis. Before deciding on a specific response, U.S. policymakers need to address the following questions about the scope, nature, and consequences of particular Russian activities and potential countermeasures so as to help inform these choices:

When possible, the United States should seek to share the burden of countering Russian actions.

- What interests is Moscow seeking to advance and what goals is it seeking to achieve?
- What U.S. interests and objectives, if any, are being threatened? How much relative weight does each country give to their respective interests?
- What policy tools is Russia employing to achieve its ends? How effective and how costly is Moscow's use of these means?
- What new and existing policy tools, if any, can and should the United States and its partners use unilaterally or multilaterally to build up resilience at home and abroad and to counter Russian influence? How effective and how costly are these countermeasures?
- How is Moscow likely to respond to various U.S. countermeasures? What are the prospects for managing the risks of escalation and other unforeseen consequences?

While Russia did not cause and will not solve many of the problems and challenges confronting a large swath of the world, Moscow will continue to seek to exploit them for its own narrow gain, and its involvement could make them worse. Nonetheless, to paraphrase former U.S. president John Quincy Adams, Washington should not go abroad looking for Russian bears to destroy every time Moscow makes a move.[82] In most cases of Russian interference in the political systems and institutions of democratic countries, the U.S. and its allies should publicly expose Russian activities and call out Moscow for the

specific subversive tools it is using. Tougher and more aggressive U.S. responses to Russia's global activities should only be implemented when the Kremlin's actions threaten important U.S. and allied interests, and when Washington has realistic, practical, and sustainable means to thwart Russian ambitions without making a given situation worse.

When possible, the United States should seek to share the burden of countering Russian actions. The Trump administration's distaste for pursuing multilateral cooperation and confronting Moscow notwithstanding, when the above conditions are met, Washington should develop tailored strategies to work with and through allies, partners, nearby states, and regional organizations to deter, contain, and, if necessary, roll back Russian attempts to undermine key U.S. and Western interests.

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