

Rethinking the Regional Order for Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia



Samuel Charap, Jeremy Shapiro, Alyssa Demus

Perspective

EXPERT INSIGHTS ON A TIMELY POLICY ISSUE



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Russia and the West agree on very little these days. But they seem to have found one solid point of accord: Their current relations are the worst that they have been since the end of the Cold War. U.S. President Donald Trump says that they are at a dangerous low.¹ Russian President Vladimir Putin agrees that relations have gotten worse in the last year.² German Chancellor Angela Merkel believes Putin is already fighting a new cold war and is trying to reconstitute the Soviet Union.³ The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy asserts that Russia seeks to reduce U.S. influence in the world globally, create a rift between the United States and its allies and partners, and interfere in the domestic political affairs of countries around the world.⁴

Both sides also agree that this new cold war is potentially extremely damaging, given each side's nuclear arsenal and well-established capabilities for international action. The original Cold War, which some today look back on with nostalgia, was a time of deep strategic uncertainty, costly proxy wars, and extraordinary peril. The ending of the Cold War without a nuclear exchange did, to a degree, reflect effective

statesmanship and well-crafted policy. But as numerous near misses—from the Cuban Missile Crisis to the Able Archer episode—demonstrate, this success was a result of luck as well as of strategy. Given the extraordinary potential consequences if things were to go wrong—namely, nuclear Armageddon—a protracted period of high tensions with Moscow is not an experiment we should seek to repeat.

The Cold War was also extremely destabilizing worldwide. Bipolar confrontation was the lens through which the United States and the Soviet Union viewed every aspect of their respective foreign policies. They ultimately imported that rivalry into nearly every region of the world, fueling seemingly endless proxy wars in such diverse locales as Guatemala, Angola, and Vietnam. As *The Economist* reported,

[B]y the end of [the Cold War], civil war afflicted 18 percent of the world's nations . . . When the [Cold War] ended, the two enemies stopped most of their sponsorship of foreign proxies, and without it, the combatants folded. More conflicts ended in the 15 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall than in the preceding half-century.⁵

Indeed, as relations between Russia and the West have deteriorated over the past several years, new proxy conflicts have broken out in Georgia; Ukraine; and, arguably, in Syria.

More broadly, this new cold war undermines the possibility of joint action to address shared global challenges. The functioning of multilateral diplomacy depends to a significant extent on a basic level of comity among the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. That level of comity between Russia and the West is gone. Constructive interaction within the United Nations and elsewhere will thus depend on the ability of governments to compartmentalize—i.e., not allowing confrontation on one front to prevent cooperation on another. This is difficult for bureaucracies at the best of times.

While Russian and Western diplomats did work together on the 2015 deal to constrain Iran's nuclear program, tensions have led to a lack of cooperation on a range of matters that have nothing to do with the dispute over the regional order. These breakdowns in cooperation include Moscow's boycott of the U.S.-led Nuclear Security Summit of March–April 2016, its renunciation of the Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement in October 2016, and the suspension of joint counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan. As time goes on, both sides—and the rest of the world—will continue to lose out due to missed opportunities for cooperation.⁶

Both the West and Russia are ill-equipped to fight a new cold war. Russia is economically weak and susceptible to social unrest. It can ill afford even its current level of military spending, much less the spending needed for a new arms race. The West is divided on whether to confront Russia in part due to the rise of pro-Russian political forces within mainstream parties.⁷ The one certain victor in such

a confrontation is China, which should give both sides pause before putting their energies into another global competition with each other.

Despite these clear drawbacks, however, there is little new thinking about how to change course to avoid such a suboptimal outcome. Trump began his presidency, as did the previous two U.S. Presidents, with a stated commitment to improving U.S.-Russia relations. All three Presidents acknowledged that confrontation between Russia and the West would be dangerous for both sides and would be a serious impediment to achieving other U.S. objectives. At the start of their terms, each man believed that, for all the distrust and historic enmity, Russia and the West had few conflicting core interests and multiple reasons to work together on issues such as terrorism, arms control, and stability in the Middle East. The Trump administration came into office after the Ukraine crisis, Moscow's intervention in Syria, and the interference in the 2016 elections, which had already raised tensions higher than at the start of any previous administration. However, there was a strong argument that this new period of conflict needed at least to be better managed to avoid a spiral of escalation.

The Trump administration seems to have abandoned the effort to improve relations with Russia even more quickly than its predecessors did. In 2017, the United States imposed new sanctions against Russia for meddling in the U.S. election, approved the sale of weapons to Ukraine, and continued the tit-for-tat struggle over expelling diplomats and closing diplomatic compounds that began under then-President Barack Obama. By the end of Trump's first year in office, then-National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster was referring to Russia as a rival power that was "engaged in a very sophisticated campaign of subversion to affect

our confidence in democratic institutions, in democratic processes—including elections.”⁸

In part, the continued deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations reflects the constraints posed by the investigations into Russia’s role in the elections. But more broadly, it reflects a deep-seated consensus in U.S. foreign policy circles that Russia seeks to undermine the liberal international order, stymies U.S. efforts at stability in Syria and Eastern Europe, and refuses to allow its neighbors to join Western institutions. Moscow’s efforts to interfere in the elections hardened a bipartisan hawkish position on Russia that now extends far beyond the national security establishment.

Likewise, the Russians blame virtually every domestic problem on Western subversion. They have invaded two of their neighbors that got too close (in their view) to the West and meddled in elections in the United States and Europe. They also have returned to the Cold War playbooks by engaging in provocative and dangerous incursions into Western airspace, increasing submarine patrols in sensitive areas, and overtly mapping Western infrastructure.

Overall, both sides distrust each other fundamentally, view each other as attempting to interfere in each other’s domestic politics, and think the other is inherently aggressive and expansionary. In short, the West and Russia are afraid of each other. Each side’s fear of the other’s aggressive intent has proven stronger overall than hope that common interests can provide a basis for cooperative relations. The result is a cycle of increasing tensions that seems to be inexorably leading to a new cold war.

This political environment means that breaking the cycle will require a new intellectual framework that can confront what really divides Russia and the West: the

Both sides distrust each other fundamentally, view each other as attempting to interfere in each other’s domestic politics, and think the other is inherently aggressive.

status of what we call the “in-between states”—Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan—and the broader regional order as it relates to them (see Figure 1).

Russia has long insisted that it had a special role to play in its immediate environs. An early articulation of this came in a 1995 presidential decree,⁹ but a more-recent inflammatory formulation was made in 2008 by then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, when he referred to the region as one “in which it has privileged interests.”¹⁰ The West’s refusal to grant Russia a negotiation on this basis, and particularly its decisions to integrate several of Russia’s neighbors into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU),

FIGURE 1
Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia



confirmed the view of many in Moscow that the West was intent on subjugating Russia.¹¹ Indeed, even Russian meddling in Western domestic affairs stems to some degree from this dispute over the regional order and the insecurity it generates.¹² Conversely, Moscow's outright refusal to accept its neighbors' membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions reinforces the view of Russia as a revisionist power intent on overthrowing the liberal international order.

Tellingly, when Merkel first met Trump at the White House, she was reportedly intent on convincing him of Russia's threat to the West. Rather than focus on Russia's military posture toward NATO, its intervention in Syria, interference in domestic politics, cyberattacks, or arms control treaty violations, she made her case for containing

Russia based on Moscow's actions in the in-between states. According to press reports, she unfurled a map of the Soviet Union from 1982, with an overlay showing the now-independent states where Russia exerts influence today. "Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine—he is either trying to get those countries back into his realm or, if he's not able to, he at least makes sure those countries are totally unattractive to the West," she reportedly said about Putin.¹³

The U.S. administration has apparently been convinced, deciding that the resolution of the Ukraine crisis is the primary criterion for improving U.S.-Russia relations. As then-U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson put it in July 2017, "making progress and ultimately solving the crisis

here in Ukraine and restoring the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine is required in order for the U.S. and Russia to improve its relationships between the two of our countries.”¹⁴ The in-between states are now the primary source of Russia-West mutual distrust and their primary theater of confrontation.

Addressing this issue is not simply a question of conflict management. The war in Ukraine, for example, could settle into a so-called frozen conflict, as many other conflagrations in the region have, but Moscow is highly unlikely to agree to a resolution so long as Russia and the West continue to disagree fundamentally on the rules of the road for the region. In other words, the core question at stake in the Ukraine crisis is not primarily whether Kyiv controls the Donbas or not; it is about what constitutes legitimate Russian and Western influence in Ukraine. The same is generally true of the other conflicts in the region. Until they find agreement on the regional order, Russia and the West will most likely be unable to resolve these conflicts.

Given the current level of mistrust and conflict between Russia and the West, a new understanding on the regional order is a big lift. But it is also clear that the alternative is a costly, extended confrontation that neither side wants.

Methodology

This Perspective employed a mixed-method approach to examine the regional order and consider alternatives. This included a review of the relevant international relations scholarship, examination of primary and secondary sources, and the commissioning of an original public opinion survey. For the latter, the research team worked with a survey expert to design questions and contracted with

independent polling organizations in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia. Many of the ideas presented here were also discussed with the other members of the working group that was convened in the context of this project.¹⁵

Moving Beyond the Past and Addressing the Challenges of the Present

An accurate diagnosis of what has gone wrong in the region is, of course, relevant to avoiding a negative outcome. But we cannot escape the fact that any act of diagnosis is necessarily a political one, and neither Russia nor the West are likely to alter their official views of the other’s responsibility for the current state of affairs. Therefore, while determining which side is at fault is an important moral and historical exercise, it will not restore the ability of the regional order to deliver public goods.¹⁶ For that, we need to find compromises that all sides can support, regardless of their divergent views of the past. They can all maintain their national prerogatives to assign blame for past misdeeds as they see fit regardless of the diplomatic solutions they reach.

The purpose of this Perspective is to explore what those solutions could be. Our objective is to outline a regional order that would reduce the ruinous Russia-West contestation and increase the security and prosperity of the affected regional states. By *order*, we mean

the body of rules, norms, and institutions that govern relations among the key players . . . An order is a stable, structured pattern of relationships among states that involves some combination of parts, including emergent norms, rulemaking institutions,

The prospect of further enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic institutions, once a key factor in creating security and prosperity, has become a source of instability.

and international political organizations or regimes, among others.¹⁷

Today, the regional order is defined by the existence of two rival sets of institutions, or even blocs: the Western or Euro-Atlantic NATO and the EU on the one hand, and the Eurasian or Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on the other. While Armenia and Belarus are (often reluctant) members of the latter, and Ukraine, Georgia and, to a lesser extent, Moldova have ambitious integration aims with the former, the loyalties of all six in-between states are contested by Russia and the West. Both blocs leave open the prospect of incorporating the in-between states either through formal membership or deep

integration. There is no regular dialogue between the rival institutions, and the other mechanisms designed to create order—the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the NATO-Russia Council, and the Council of Europe—have failed to do so, as amply demonstrated by the wars in several of the in-between states in recent years and the breakdown in Russia-West relations.

In the 1990s, the concept of a regional order in Europe was often conflated, both by adherents and opponents, with the idea of codifying the West’s geopolitical victory in the Cold War by spreading its security blanket and institutions throughout the territory of the former communist bloc. To this day, many in the West see regional order through the lens of the democratic transitions in East Central Europe (ECE). To a significant extent, NATO and EU enlargement *were* linked to the relative success of those transitions.

Notwithstanding this history, today’s circumstances differ dramatically than those of the 1990s. The prospect of further enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic institutions, once a key factor in creating security and prosperity in ECE, has become a source of instability farther east, as demonstrated by Russia’s willingness to use force in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 to block the enlargement process. This level of violent contestation over the regional order suggests that a compromise between the parties, not the outright victory of either side, will be necessary. Our proposed modification of the regional order will not seek to replicate the transformative successes of the 1990s and early 2000s. Nor will it grant Moscow the “sphere of influence” many say it is seeking. Neither side would achieve their maximalist ambitions or even further enlarge their preferred institutions. Instead, our proposal would create a more solid foundation for stability and thus prosperity in the region.

As noted above, the dramatic deterioration in Russia-West relations has not been good for the West, Russia, or the world at large. But it has been worst for the countries in between. Their political and economic futures have often been held hostage to the larger struggle. Ukraine, the central battleground, has been hit the hardest. It has lost control over Crimea and its population of more than 2 million. The fighting in the Donbas has claimed over 10,000 lives. At least 1.8 million Ukrainians have been internally displaced, while over 1.1 million have registered as refugees in Russia.¹⁸ For the country as a whole, the economic burden of the crisis has been extremely heavy, with a near-collapse in gross domestic product and skyrocketing inflation. Russia has transformed both the Donbas war and the other separatist conflicts in the region into geopolitical levers, so that territorial disputes in Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in Moldova over Transnistria, and in Ukraine serve as informal blocks to potential membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions.¹⁹ Therefore, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova are unlikely to restore their territorial integrity so long as Moscow considers that allowing them to do so would facilitate their joining or even more closely integrating with Western clubs. Further, as a result of the unresolved conflicts, trade flows are interrupted and investors remain wary of the in-between states.

Along with blocking resolution to festering conflicts, the contest over the regional order has set back the transition from communist rule. The in-between states all suffer, to varying degrees, from a similar set of post-Soviet pathologies: dysfunctional institutions of modern governance; partially reformed economies that lack fully functioning markets; weak or absent rule of law; and pervasive corruption. While many factors contribute to these disparities,

the contest between Russia and the West contributed to the problems in several key ways. First, Russian and Western willingness to subsidize political loyalty has helped sustain what Joel Hellman termed a “partial reform equilibrium”—a distorted semimarket economy that produces rents for elites but not prosperity for society as a whole—in many of these countries.²⁰ For example, Russia has subsidized Belarus through waivers of oil-export tariffs and below-market gas prices; as a result, Minsk has avoided privatizing major state-owned enterprises and opening up its economy. The contest over the regional order has also added a geopolitical dimension to preexisting political and ethnic cleavages in several of the in-between states. In some cases, the contest facilitates demagoguery: Candidates declare themselves pro-Western to capitalize on the population’s desire for prosperity (which is associated with the West), but when in power these politicians can be just as corrupt as their so-called pro-Russian opponents.²¹

To stop, if not reverse, these dangerous and damaging trends, a negotiation on the regional order is necessary. The next section explores examples of such negotiations from the Cold War period to draw lessons for today. We then put forth a proposal for structuring negotiation and for the phased implementation of a new agreement on the regional order. In brief, this agreement would contain a mutually acceptable framework offer for regional integration of nonmembers—in place of today’s mutually incompatible and destabilizing offers—and for the norms governing the behavior of outside powers toward them. Parties would affirm their commitment to respect the current membership of existing regional institutions and pledge to consult and ideally seek consensus before pursuing any changes to the status quo. The proposal contains a number of

incentives for the in-between states and confidence-building measures to build political momentum. In the following section, we address several commonly encountered objections to negotiating such agreements on the regional order. The last section offers our conclusions.

Historical Precedents

Reclaiming Grand Bargains

Any suggestion of a negotiation with Moscow on the regional order inevitably leads to an accusation that the only possible outcome would be a new Yalta agreement. That document, signed by Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin at the end of World War II, has come to be seen as a sell-out of helpless countries to odious regimes, akin to the Munich agreement of 1938.²² It should be noted that this characterization is tendentious; the Red Army had occupied most of ECE when the agreement was signed, leaving Churchill and Roosevelt with little leverage.²³ Whatever the accuracy of the analogy, Yalta now signifies the granting of a *carte blanche* to the Soviet regime to impose its will on the states of ECE—a Western sin that must never be repeated—while also doing little to stabilize the security environment on the continent as a whole. Therefore, cooperation with Moscow on regional order questions today would, according to this view, require imposing decisions on Russia’s neighbors against their will and would not produce stability.

But even putting aside the question of the accuracy of this interpretation of Yalta, the history of subsequent Cold War-era agreements between the West and the Soviet Union demonstrates that agreements on the regional

order—“grand bargains”—have often been both morally defensible and stabilizing. Even at the height of Cold War enmity and distrust, such agreements at times promoted stability, reduced the danger of conflict, and avoided costly proxy conflicts that would have done grievous harm to the in-between states of the time. We examine three such agreements here: the Austrian State Treaty; the Quadripartite Agreement and related initiatives regarding the German question; and the Helsinki Accords.

Austrian State Treaty

The Austrian State Treaty of 1955 is a key Cold War-era example of adversaries reducing regional instability by finding agreement on elements of the regional order. The end of World War II left Austria an occupied country. As the only state formally annexed by Nazi Germany, Austria presented the Allied powers with a unique challenge—they wanted to ensure the country could return to independence, but in a way that allowed for broader European stability. For this purpose, the Allied powers established the European Advisory Commission (EAC) to provide recommendations on the Austrian question. Following the EAC’s recommendations, they agreed to each occupy different zones in the country.²⁴ However, Austria’s occupation was unsustainable, and its future was uncertain.

The fundamental problem was that the Austrian question was inextricably linked to other issues of strategic importance to both sides.²⁵ Though the West and Soviets had initially agreed to the goal of establishing an independent Austria with a freely elected government in the Moscow Declaration in 1943, each grew insecure about the other’s intentions both regarding Austria and the overall

balance of power in Europe. Neither side wanted Austria to fall into the other's sphere of influence.²⁶

The United States and its allies initiated negotiations with the Soviets over Austria's postwar liberation in 1946. Talks stalled in 1949 and were fully suspended until 1953 due to heightened tensions following the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War.²⁷ Both sides were deeply suspicious of the other's intentions vis-à-vis the future of Austria. The United States feared that Moscow might exploit Austria's weakness following the withdrawal of U.S. troops and try to assert control over the whole country.²⁸ Moscow, having witnessed the strengthening of NATO with the rearmament of West Germany, questioned Western motives in Austria and sought to prevent further expansion of Western influence.²⁹

Despite the mutual mistrust and hostilities that marked Soviet-Western relations at the time, the Western allies and the Soviet Union ultimately agreed to withdraw their troops from Austria in 1955 as part of the Austrian State Treaty. According to the treaty's terms, the occupying powers recognized Austrian independence and territorial integrity, and agreed to the withdrawal of their forces; Austria agreed to secure its people's human rights; and the Soviet Union was also granted economic concessions.³⁰ In a separate but linked step, the Austrian parliament declared the country's permanent neutrality in the form of a constitutional amendment. The Austrian State Treaty thus established a new status quo that was acceptable to all parties and paved the way for a long period of prosperity in Austria, as well as a consolidation of a distinctive Austrian national identity.³¹ For the West and the Communist bloc, the treaty marked a shift from deep uncertainty to stability over a key area of contention in the emerging Cold War.

This step forward in stabilizing postwar Europe was made possible by a series of "incremental conciliatory gestures" that changed U.S. policymakers' perceptions of Soviet intentions.³² However, it took two sets of Soviet moves back from hardline positions to do so. A first set of concessions offered by the Soviet Union in 1953 was not seen as substantial enough in Washington. Scholar Deborah Welch Larson argues that in such cases, when policymakers hold strongly negative preexisting images of others' motives, small concessions may not suffice to earn their trust:

[B]ecause of the distorting prism of rigid images of the enemy, a single conciliatory gesture at the beginning of a tit-for-tat initiative may not be enough to penetrate the target's distrust and elicit reciprocation of cooperation. Instead, several unilateral concessions spread over different issue-areas and involving moderate risks may be necessary to undermine images of bad faith and bolster the position of conciliators within the other state.³³

And indeed, it took Nikita Khrushchev's push to pursue negotiations and soften Soviet positions in order to find agreement. Khrushchev invited Austrian Chancellor Julius Raab to Moscow, and the two states concluded a bilateral memorandum—a key precursor to the State Treaty—that included several significant unilateral concessions by the Soviets.³⁴ Unlike the previous concessions offered by the Soviets in 1953, which did not impose significant costs, the terms included reassurances that would prevent future Soviet attempts to gain control over Austria.³⁵ In less than a month, the treaty was signed.

Larson asserts that the Soviet concessions likely played a significant role in changing some U.S. policymakers'

perceptions of Soviet intentions and easing mistrust, thus facilitating agreement. It is important to note, however, that both sides' perception of the other as an aggressive power persisted after the agreement. As John Foster Dulles said, "[the] wolf has put on a new set of sheep's clothing, and while it's better to have a sheep's clothing on, because sheep don't have claws, I think the policy remains the same."³⁶ Nonetheless, a potential threat to stability in Europe had been effectively resolved, and the agreement reached proved effective at establishing order for nearly 35 years.

The German Question

The 1950s witnessed a variety of failed attempts to negotiate a new postwar status quo in Europe. Many of them focused on the so-called German question, the effort to peacefully unify Germany and integrate it into the European security order.

The West and the Soviet Union had entirely different perspectives on how to answer that question. Western states recognized the need to resolve the German question and prevent the possibility of a resurgent Germany. However, they sought to do so through a defensive alliance with Germany that could curtail future German revanchism and protect Western Europe from Soviet threats.³⁷ Moscow was also deeply concerned about the potential for future German aggression. As such, the Soviet Union viewed Western proposals for German rearmament and inclusion of the Federal Republic of Germany into a Western military alliance as a challenge to core Soviet objectives, particularly the effort to ensure a neutral Germany.³⁸

In the early 1950s, Moscow sought a European security conference to discuss the issue. This proposal was at least in part motivated by Western calls for German rearmament

and the planned accession of the Federal Republic of Germany into the European Defense Community (EDC)—a group of six European states that would have contributed to a pan-European Army.³⁹ Western proposals for German rearmament and inclusion of the Federal Republic of Germany into a Western military bloc fundamentally opposed core Soviet objectives—German neutrality and nonalignment in any political or military alliances.⁴⁰ Archival evidence suggests that Soviet intentions for the European security conference were genuine. Moscow viewed a pan-European security arrangement as a necessary precursor to a peaceful resolution of the German question. In Moscow's view, if the Soviet Union and Western Europe were joined in a security alliance, a unified Germany would not have to pick sides.⁴¹

Though the West recognized the need to resolve the German question, it perceived the Soviets' proposal as an attempt to undermine the West and secure Soviet influence over Europe.⁴² As then-British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden put it: "Soviet proposals appear to resemble some sort of Monroe Doctrine for Europe designed to break up NATO and exclude the U.S. forces from Europe."⁴³

In late 1954, the EDC failed to pass the French National Assembly. Shortly thereafter, the Western powers decided to pursue the accession of West Germany into NATO. This appears to have been an important turning point in negotiations over the status of Germany and European security more broadly. In response, Soviet communications conveyed a new tone: "[I]f these decisions are carried out, it will no longer be possible to regard West Germany as a peaceable state, and this will make the reunification of Germany impossible for a long time."⁴⁴ In May 1955, West Germany joined NATO. Only days later, the

Soviets signed the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance, with the German Democratic Republic and other Eastern European satellite states, thereby forming the Warsaw Pact.⁴⁵

The period between the initial Soviet attempts for a European security conference and the *détente* of the early 1970s witnessed some of the most strained East-West relations of the Cold War. This era was marked by deep-seated mistrust and infrequent interaction. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the issue of Berlin and Germany was the main flashpoint in the Cold War, sparking several stand-offs and the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

Negotiations on the German Question

The two sides returned to negotiations over the German question once *détente* began in the late 1960s. A number of bilateral and multilateral agreements between Western and Soviet bloc states were signed in the early 1970s that provided some stability and created a shared understanding of the status quo regarding this central element of the regional order. The Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw of 1970 between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union and Poland, respectively, formally recognized the Oder-Niese line (postwar Polish-German border), acknowledged the division of Germany, and pledged nonviolence between the states—all long-term objectives of Moscow.⁴⁶

In 1971 the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France signed a Quadripartite Agreement, which formalized the status of Berlin, the rights of the four powers in Berlin, and restored ties between East and West Berlin.⁴⁷ The following year, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic signed the Basic Treaty, in which both German states recognized each

other's sovereignty, thereby allowing their admittance into the United Nations and international community more broadly. In a similar vein, the 1973 agreement between West Germany and Czechoslovakia disavowed all previous territorial claims and "reaffirm[ed] the inviolability of their common frontier."⁴⁸

This series of agreements established a shared understanding of the status quo that helped stabilize the situation until the end of the Cold War. They did not restore trust between the two sides or end the Cold War. But the accords took an area of contestation—which had previously threatened to explode into a wide conflict—off the table in a manner that both sides saw as consistent with their interests.

The Helsinki Final Act

Though the Soviet Union recognized the agreements over Germany as significant achievements, Moscow continued to pursue a pan-European security arrangement. Soviet leaders still believed that a multilateral acknowledgment of the postwar territorial status quo would lend greater legitimacy and formality to the principles agreed to in these arrangements.⁴⁹

Indeed, the broader East-West *détente* was linked, for Moscow, to the European security talks.⁵⁰ The Soviets' "overriding goal" for the talks "was to finalize post-war borders in Europe."⁵¹ It also seems the West recognized the value of formalizing Moscow's postwar territorial gains for the Soviet leadership, particularly for Leonid Brezhnev. It was able to leverage this to incorporate human rights issues into the effort, which became the Helsinki Final Act.

Like the Austrian State Treaty, the Helsinki Final Act, signed exactly 20 years later in 1975, is a case in which the Soviet Union and the West agreed on major elements of

the regional order despite tensions and mutual mistrust. The act (also referred to as the Helsinki Accords) addressed numerous pressing issues, which were organized into four “baskets.” The first basket dealt with issues related to security in Europe; the second with economic and environmental issues; the third with human rights; and the fourth with procedural issues related to the act’s implementation.⁵²

Most importantly, Helsinki codified postwar boundaries, affirmed states’ territorial integrity and sovereignty and mandated nonintervention in states’ internal affairs and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Its third basket asserted freedom of the press and the free flow of ideas and information and affirmed the right to emigration and free travel of people across international borders.⁵³ Helsinki created the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as a regularized dialogue mechanism on regional order issues. It facilitated the Vienna conference on mutual and balanced forces reductions, which, years later, produced the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). Helsinki, as Georges-Henri Soutou notes, “was a turning-point in the Cold War and important moment in establishing a new European order.”⁵⁴

Several factors contributed to the act’s signing. One in particular is the increased communication between East and West in the 1960s and early 1970s. Throughout the two preceding decades, when relations between the Soviet bloc and West had reached their nadir, interactions between the East and West were rare. The dialogue that emerged in the late 1960s was important in two ways. First, face-to-face interactions encouraged the cultivation of relationships on a personal level between representatives of both sides. Second, increased contact provided the East and West with some insight into one another’s cultures, political

and power structures, and interests. That helped dispel some of the preexisting images each side had of the other. The summits held between U.S. President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Brezhnev in the three years preceding the Helsinki negotiations (1972, 1973, and 1974) were important in this regard. But the U.S.-Soviet dialogue went beyond heads of state. Direct and frequent communication between National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin via a secured private channel helped to establish positive personal relations between these key policymakers. In his memoirs, Dobrynin attributes the relaxation of tensions and agreement on many complex issues between the United States and Soviet Union to the open dialogue that the channel promoted.⁵⁵ Additionally, several other channels of communication between Western European states and the Soviet Union opened in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For instance, extensive talks between West German and Soviet officials in the early 1970s helped lay the foundation for key bilateral agreements between the two states, which in turn contributed to the success at Helsinki.⁵⁶

The broad spectrum of issues captured in the act allowed all parties involved to claim victory. The Soviet Union celebrated the act’s signing as reaffirmation of the postwar settlement.⁵⁷ U.S. President Gerald Ford saw the outcome through a different lens. He believed that in agreeing to respect the rights of other states’ sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence, Moscow had pledged to “not do again what it did in the cases of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland.”⁵⁸ In other words, the agreement would prevent acts that undermine the stability of the regional order. In that, he was prescient;

following Helsinki, the Soviet Union did not in fact invade or coercively intervene in its extended European empire.

Both the West and Soviets viewed the Helsinki Accords as the basis for a mutually accepted status quo regarding the regional order. For the Soviets, by signing the Act, the West had legitimized the *territorial* status quo. From the Western perspective, the Soviets had agreed to allow for the free exchange of people, ideas, and information—principles that already were practiced in the West, though not the East. President Ford conveyed this view in remarks on the eve of Helsinki’s signing: “In my judgment, the United States and the open countries of the West already practice what the Helsinki Accords preach and have no intention of doing what they prohibit.”⁵⁹

By taking the question of territorial claims off the table, Helsinki stabilized the Cold War in Europe, reducing insecurity and creating a forum (the CSCE) where all parties could raise their concerns. The CSCE transformed into the OSCE after the Cold War.

The Value of Grand Bargains

This brief history shows that at times during the Cold War, the two sides were able to conclude mutually beneficial agreements regarding the regional order. These efforts were hardly panaceas—they did not build trust and they did not end the Cold War. But they did increase stability and allowed specific countries to avoid some of the more pernicious effects of the superpower competition. And they broadly endured, despite the lack of any sort of enforcement mechanism. They show that even very distrustful and fearful adversaries can reach agreements on the regional order that benefit each other and the countries that are the objects of their competition. They also reinforce the value

of visible concessions and great-power communication in producing agreements.

Committing to a New Status Quo: A Proposal

Mutually Perceived Revisionism

Of course, these Cold War–era agreements were concluded in an international environment that differs dramatically from today’s. Indeed, in the post–Cold War context, smaller countries have recognized that, while they cannot completely determine their own futures, they do not need to accept the diktats of great powers. A negotiation between the West and Russia without the involvement of the affected states could result in instability caused by either popular uprisings or elite resistance. Therefore, the in-between states would need to consent to any agreement reached through the negotiation we propose below; however, this does not mean that they will get everything they want.

Today, however, Russia and the West do not even discuss, let alone agree on, the fundamentals of the regional order, in large part because both sides believe the current conflict to be a result of the other side’s revisionism. In Moscow, EU and NATO attempts to integrate their neighbors (and NATO’s stated intention to make Ukraine and Georgia member states) are seen as an effort to revise the status quo. Russia sees itself as defending against this Western advance. In Western capitals, Russia’s coercion of its neighbors, attempts to expand the institutions it leads, and, as many believe, its activities aimed at undermining the unity and effectiveness of NATO and the EU, all appear highly revisionist. The West sees itself as a bulwark

against these efforts. In short, both sides accuse the other of pursuing revisionist agendas through aggressive actions, while claiming their own actions are aimed at preserving the status quo.

To find an eventual compromise, it is important to understand how states presented with the same set of circumstances can hold such divergent conceptions of it. Political scientist Robert Jervis asserts that decision makers are subject to certain cognitive biases, which affect their perceptions of themselves and others.⁶⁰ Jervis explains how one such bias colors states' characterizations of others' behavior and intent:

States are more likely to overestimate the hostility of others than to underestimate it. States are prone to exaggerate the reasonableness of their own positions and the hostile intent of others; indeed, the former process feeds the latter. Statesmen, wanting to think well of themselves and their decisions, often fail to appreciate others' perspectives, and so greatly underestimate the extent to which their [own] actions can be seen as threats. When their intentions are peaceful, statesmen think that others will understand their motives and therefore will not be threatened by the measures they are taking in their own self-defense.⁶¹

Once a state determines another's motives to be threatening, it is likely to characterize that state's actions, which might appear peaceful to a neutral party, as hostile in intent.⁶² Further, the first state's perception that the other is behaving aggressively despite knowing its intentions are peaceful only reinforces its initial perception of the other as belligerent. According to Jervis, the above dynamics can occur concurrently, resulting in a situation in which both states "are likely to believe that they are cooperating and

that others are responding with hostility."⁶³ This can result in what Jervis refers to as "spirals of misperception."⁶⁴

Jervis's framework can be applied to the current Russia-West conflict over the regional order. Both sides conceive of themselves as upholding the status quo, both view their own motives as defensive, and both implicitly assume their intentions are clear to the other side. Yet Russia and the West perceive each other as aggressive and revisionist.⁶⁵ Jervis's theory suggests that these views of the other side's actions as inherently revisionist could partly be a byproduct of each side's cognitive biases. It is therefore worth testing the proposition that the terms of the order, not the immutable character of the states involved, are at the core of the dispute.

Committing to a New Status Quo

One way for the states involved to address this mutually perceived revisionism is to commit to a new status quo that all relevant parties recognize and accept. The proposal we present here offers the competing powers the possibility to do so, while at the same time not abandon their core principles or core interests. It will nonetheless require compromise and flexibility on all sides.

Both Russia and the West would have to recommit to respecting the current membership of existing regional institutions. In addition, they would have to define a mutually acceptable framework for a nonmember state's regional integration and a template for how both Russia and the West can relate to such a state without producing conflict. The core compromise would be that both Russia and the West would endorse this "third way"—and not membership in their respective institutions—as their preference for

nonmember states' regional integration. This would go a long way toward establishing a functioning regional order.

This third way would augment—*not* replace—existing institutions, such as NATO, the EU, the CSTO, and the EAEU. Specifically, we are proposing a supplemental regional integration framework that is applicable and open to nonmembers of these organizations and accepted and endorsed by their existing members. This would provide a framework to address the security and economic challenges of the nonmembers, while creating rules to govern the behavior of outside powers toward them. It would offer the prospect of stability in the region without altering the makeup or principles of current regional institutions.

To generate our proposals, we draw upon the recent experience of the six countries geographically in between Russia and the West, where the contestation has been particularly acute. It is important to note that all six of these in-between states have varying relations with the existing institutions, and varying ambitions for those relations. But the point is to apply lessons learned here more broadly, not to create a set of *sui generis* institutions for these countries. Instead, our objective is to create a generic template that could in principle be adopted by any state in the Euro-Atlantic region that is not currently a member of an economic or political-military bloc or by one that chooses to exit such a bloc in the future.

There are several reasons to avoid a proposal that is specific to a particular group of states. First, it would be politically counterproductive, since countries generally do not like being singled out in this way. Second, not all of these states are fully “in between”—Belarus and Armenia are members of the Russia-led institutions, while Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have signed Association Agreements

(AAs) with the EU. Third, and most importantly, a universal framework is needed that could be adopted by countries that decide to leave their current institutional “camp” in the future.

As we saw vividly in Ukraine in 2014, when the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of the Donbas followed quickly on the heels of the Maidan Revolution, domestic political change in a contested state can create (or be perceived as creating) sudden, dramatic geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts in that state's orientation, which in turn produces conflict. If all parties could be reassured that the option of fully joining one or the other camp is off the table, contestation would be significantly reduced. Taking such an approach would go a long way toward ruling out sudden, destabilizing shifts.

Steps Toward a Revised Regional Order

Today's circumstances are far from ideal for the purposes of achieving an agreement on the regional order along these lines. The lack of trust, bitter grievances, and accumulated enmity—along with the bloodshed in places like the Donbas—make it a massive political challenge. Indeed, in both Russia and the West, efforts to do so are often labeled appeasement.⁶⁶ The analogy with the 1930s implies that such efforts are worse than useless; they contribute to weakening of national will and reduce a country's readiness to win the inevitable conflict when it finally comes. By this logic, it seems more prudent and certainly more politically advantageous to abandon any effort to avoid that conflict.

But these are precisely the circumstances that necessitate a negotiated order. If Russia, its neighbors, and the West fully trusted each other, there would be no need to create

new rules. Some political scientists argue that security orders are only created “after victory”—i.e., in the wake of a war that has established precisely who can make rules of the road for the next generation or more.⁶⁷ History offers some support for this idea—effective order has usually been imposed by victorious powers, such as the Concert of Europe after the Napoleonic Wars or the Allies after World War II, rather than by negotiation between adversaries.

But as the history of the immediate post-Cold War period demonstrates, even at periods of extreme weakness Russia has rejected Western ideas about regional order as concerns its immediate neighborhood. Therefore, it would likely take a total victory like that of the Allies in World War II for the West to be able to impose its preferred regional order on Russia. In the nuclear age, this essentially implies that we must first inflict the consequences of a strategic nuclear exchange on the world to then impose order upon it. “Victory” over Russia is not a viable path to stability.

Since reaching a new agreement on the regional order is nearly politically impossible today, governments should consider taking a phased approach that would gradually move toward that end. The initial steps proposed below are intended to create fertile ground and momentum for the subsequent, more-ambitious steps by instilling confidence that concessions will not be misused by the other side for later advantage.

The first step would be to establish an informal dialogue among the key players, specifically regarding the regional order. Russia has been asking for some such dialogue for at least a decade, arguing that the current architecture was built for another age.⁶⁸ The West has generally replied that the current European security

institutions—including the pan-European OSCE—are still fit for purpose.⁶⁹ But Russia’s actions over the last decade—the war with Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, the war in the Donbas—have amply demonstrated that these institutions are no longer producing stability. Western leaders may be frustrated that they have to negotiate with the party they blame for the existing order’s breakdown, but international politics is rarely fair or just. If they accept that the order is broken, then Western leaders must also accept that international stability and the security of their nations require that they at least try to fix it.

Similar previous efforts—before the Ukraine crisis—have failed in part because of questions of format and participation. The dilemma here is that inclusivity is often inversely related to productivity. Any set of talks at the OSCE, with its 57 members—any of which can exercise a veto—almost invariably produces deadlock when it comes to the question of regional order. This was certainly the case with the 2009 OSCE Corfu Dialogue. Such a format creates incentives for parties to import all bilateral disputes into the broader negotiation. Issues which are deemed existential by a small number of states, but have less direct bearing on the overall regional order, tend to take the negotiation hostage. Not including them leads to fears of a new Yalta agreement that will decide countries’ fates without allowing them any say. However, inserting them into broader talks tends not only to lead to the end of the talks, but also does nothing to alleviate the specific issue at hand.

A prime example of this dynamic was the downfall of the Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (A/CFE). At the same summit where the treaty was signed in 1999, Moscow made commitments to withdraw its remaining military units in Georgia and Moldova.

Moscow ratified the new treaty, but NATO member states in 2002 adopted a policy of formally linking their ratification of A/CFE to Russia's following through on its commitments, which it was delaying. Soon all meetings on European security between Russia and the West were dominated by this issue. The removal of troops from Moldova came to a halt in March 2004 following the collapse of Russia-led settlement efforts there. In April 2007, Putin declared a moratorium on Russia's implementation of the original CFE agreement, evidently in order to compel NATO members to ratify A/CFE. In December of that year, Russia suspended its implementation of CFE, while no NATO member-state moved to ratify A/CFE.⁷⁰ In the end, linking A/CFE ratification to conflict resolution led to the scrapping of A/CFE, the collapse of the original CFE, and no progress on the conflicts.

In the case of the negotiation we are proposing, those in-between countries that are party to regional conflicts would see any new arrangement purely through the lens of whatever minor advantage or disadvantage it provides them in their respective conflicts. This approach is natural and understandable, but it is also a recipe for paralysis and dysfunctional diplomacy. One of the objectives of the talks we have in mind is to provide a more congenial regional environment for ameliorating, if not resolving, those conflicts. If resolving them is set as a prerequisite for establishing that environment, we could remain caught in the current vicious cycle. The impasse surrounding the Minsk agreements demonstrates this dynamic: Its stipulations will likely remain unimplemented so long as the broader contest continues.

The lesson is that conflict resolution, or at least more effective conflict management, will flow from an agreement

Conflict resolution
will flow from an
agreement on the
regional order, not the
other way around.

on the regional order, rather than the other way around. The practical implication is that informal talks on the regional order should begin with three parties at the table: the United States, Russia, and the EU, along with the OSCE chairperson-in-office as an observer.⁷¹ The chairperson-in-office—the minister of foreign affairs of the country annually designated by the OSCE's members as the rotating chair—would provide two-way communication in the process for the states not represented at the table, particularly the in-between states. This negotiation should begin without preconditions, such as Russian fulfillment of the Minsk agreements or Western promises of no future enlargement of its institutions. Preconditions are a means of trying to create leverage for the negotiation itself, but in this case, they would likely ensure that the negotiation itself never occurs. All issues would be on the table at these talks, so the lack of preconditions would not prejudice the outcome. More fundamentally, actually engaging in talks should not be conceived of as a reward, and so agreeing to open-ended negotiations would not be a concession.

The three-plus-one format expresses the view that the point of the negotiation is to establish a forum where the most important regional actors can discuss such issues and establish not trust, but rather a sense of common purpose. The negotiations would take place under what Yulia Nikitina, in her chapter in the companion volume to this report, refers to as the “Shanghai Spirit,” open-ended negotiations in which the lack of consensus is not viewed as stalemate or an obstacle to further consultations.⁷² This informality underscores that the purpose of the initial stage is not to create treaties or institutions but merely common understandings that can later be discussed with all affected parties for approval or disapproval in the appropriate format.

Simply calling it informal would not ease the fears of many of the in-between states, as well as some in both Russia and the West, that this negotiation represents an effort to impose a new Yalta. One can understand this sentiment, but accepting it implies an impossible negotiation and thus continuing a level of regional insecurity that threatens all the parties and has the most severe consequences for the in-between states. Moreover, the West regularly engages in negotiations and discussions about third parties without their presence at the table. For example, at various stages during the Syria crisis, the United States and Russia have traded drafts of a constitution for that country. The EU provides another example: The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was formulated among EU member states, not in consultation with the eastern partners. In our proposal, the presence of the OSCE chairperson-in-office will provide a link for all interested regional states into the talks.

As noted above, no agreement can be effectively implemented without the consent of the affected countries, and

every country retains the sovereign right to accept or reject any proposals. Therefore, on a regular basis, the three-plus-one representatives would report to the OSCE Permanent Council (the gathering of national representatives to the organization). Assuming the three-plus-one format is able to find agreement, there should be a mechanism to gradually enlarge direct participation in the talks. Once the negotiations move to a formal stage, all parties would have to be at the table.

The second step would be to devise some reciprocal signals for each side to take to demonstrate seriousness of purpose during the negotiation. Both sides should undertake steps that involve “costly signaling,” that is, steps that commit them in the eyes of their respective domestic audiences to advance on a clear and credible course of action. James Fearon refers to this as “[tying] hands”: “creating audience costs that [leaders] will suffer *ex post* if they do not follow through on their threat or commitment.”⁷³

Such signals essentially commit parties to the negotiation itself and create a domestic political cost for abandoning it. Fearon’s large-N empirical studies show that imposing audience costs on the decision “to attack, back down, or escalate” drives rival security actors toward negotiation, and failure to meet negotiated terms itself bears a cost.⁷⁴ These steps would need to be taken reciprocally, of course, but perfect reciprocity is impossible and, more importantly, such signals are aimed as much at domestic audiences as they are at international counterparts. They need not actually affect the power balance between Russia and the West. Signaling, unsurprisingly, is about symbols more than reality.

For the West, the decision to enter the negotiation is itself a costly signal given Western leaders’ adamant

assertion in recent years that no such negotiation was necessary or that better Russian behavior was a prerequisite for holding one; negotiating in itself would thus incur some degree of domestic cost. Russia, in turn, would need to publicly commit to reduce behavior considered provocative by the West—for example, by cutting back exercises near its western frontiers, ending the recent pattern of aerial and maritime patrols in sensitive areas, ceasing the interference in Western domestic politics, or reducing the level of violence in eastern Ukraine.⁷⁵ The West, in turn, can offer sanctions relief if these steps are taken. As Nikitina notes, a further costly signal could be cooperation on extraregional issues, such as postconflict reconstruction and counter-radicalization in the Middle East.⁷⁶ Since cooperation in itself has become so taboo, doing so inevitably will incur a cost.

The third step would be to endorse a set of principles to guide the talks on the regional order. Of course, the very purpose of a negotiation is to discover acceptable trade-offs. It would be impossible to set these out before the talks are finalized, let alone before they begin. However, it should be feasible to outline principles and objectives for the process, so that governments can signal a unity of purpose.⁷⁷

We propose some of the key principles of a potential agreement. Future related RAND publications will investigate these principles in more detail.

- **Multidimensional economic integration.** The EU and the EAEU offer a package of mutually acceptable—not mutually exclusive, as is the current practice—trading arrangements to the in-between states. To achieve this level of cross-cutting ties, it will be essential to make AAs, particularly their component Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade

Area agreements, compatible with economic ties with the EAEU (and vice versa).

- **Multilateral security guarantees.** The EU, United States, and Russia make commitments not to use force to settle disagreements with the in-between states or to interfere in their domestic politics, which would be codified in a resolution of the UN Security Council. These guarantees should be backed up by concrete confidence and security-building measures, such as withdrawal of Russian forces from areas (e.g., the Donbas) where sovereignty is not contested by any party.
- **Mutual acceptance of the current institutional membership status quo.** For Russia, this means committing to accept (and not to undermine) Euro-Atlantic institutions and their current membership. For the West, that means not calling into question the current membership of Russia-led institutions and recognizing—and not, as is current practice, seeking to delegitimize—those institutions. Neither side will encourage future “exits” from either camp.
- **A pledge to consult and ideally seek mutual agreement before pursuing any change to the region’s institutional architecture and forswearing attempts to make unilateral changes to the status quo.**
- **Commitment to negotiate status-neutral mechanisms to alleviate the security, humanitarian, and economic costs of the protracted conflicts in the region.** All parties should provide a guarantee of status neutrality, so that these measures can be implemented without crossing any state’s red lines.

The proposed order would allow for greater prosperity, reduced insecurity, more stability and certainty about the future, and effective conflict management.

Given the current tensions, no party would trust Russia to comply with such pledges; Moscow would also have no confidence in Western assurances. These commitments would need to be borne out by concrete actions. For the West, negotiations will likely have to be combined with elements of coercion in order to succeed. Such a strategy would offer Russia a path toward security in its neighborhood without confrontation with the West, but it would also entail isolation and confrontation if Russia refuses to comply with the new bargain.

Moreover, these principles would need to be applied differently for different states. But if followed, this set of principles would lead to a regional order dramatically superior to today's. This order would allow for greater prosperity through restored trade and investment flows, reduced insecurity for all parties, more stability and

certainty about the future, and effective conflict management. It would also avoid reducing the problem merely to the issue of further NATO enlargement.⁷⁸ While that issue would implicitly be addressed by these principles, our proposal provides a substantive alternative to further enlargement that offers significant benefits for all parties, especially for the in-between states. And while realization of these principles seems like a distant dream, in fact, they are not revolutionary; instead, they acknowledge and make explicit certain realities (e.g., the practical impossibility of further enlargement of Euro-Atlantic or Eurasian institutions for the in-between states) and seek to address the real problems that exist in the region.

As the fourth step, Russia and the West would outline a package of incentives to the in-between states that adopt the third way integration framework. Any agreement between Russia and the West would have automatic economic benefits for the in-between states if both sides ceased to make economic ties with these states part of their geopolitical struggles. But it should also be possible to introduce some additional incentives to states that agree to accept the proposal. The overarching element would be to make the EAEU and the EU arrangements compatible so that countries would not be forced to choose between them. But such benefits are likely to be long term and diffuse, and they may need to be supplemented with specific economic incentives that could inspire the in-between states to accept the compromises inherent in any new agreement on the regional order in the short term. Given the parlous economic state of most of these countries, the possibilities for such incentives, if Russia and the West are on the same page, are numerous. For example, Russia and the West might consider setting up a joint fund through

their respective development banks to identify infrastructure projects, particularly in the energy sector, that both sides can support. The West could offer direct economic assistance, and Russia could extend subsidies. The United States could also suggest enhanced defense cooperation with the in-between states, which presumably would be less of a source of tension once NATO membership is no longer on the table. The objective of these steps would be to make the “third way” more attractive to the in-between states than the options currently being offered.

Finally, the fifth step would be for all concerned parties to endorse an agreement and begin phased implementation. The phased implementation would begin with confidence and security-building measures, including status-neutral measures for the conflict areas, so that all parties, and particularly in-between states, see concrete benefits from the process. There should be an inclusive mechanism of consultation to monitor implementation.

Why This Approach Can Work

There is considerable skepticism that such an effort to reform the regional order can work.⁷⁹ Given the distrust and domestic political opposition on all sides, this skepticism is reasonable. We make this proposal not because we think it would be easy to implement, but because we believe that the obstacles, while considerable, are not insurmountable. Accordingly, this section discusses the principal objections raised to this type of effort to negotiate a mutually acceptable modification of the regional order:

- Russia and/or the United States would cheat on any agreement

- the citizens of the in-between states would never accept such a compromise
- this kind of deal would violate Western commitments and principles
- Russia will accept nothing less than absolute regional dominance.

The Problem of Compliance

It is all well and good to agree on the rules of the road for reestablishing stability, but how does one ensure compliance with the agreements? Both sides believe that the other has frequently broken its word. For example, many in Russia believe that the West broke what they see as its promise not to enlarge NATO and to ratify the A/CFE treaty. The West believes Russia violated its commitment not to use force against Ukraine and is cheating on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, among many other perfidies. U.S. Senator John McCain, for example, has frequently warned against trusting Russia’s, and particularly Vladimir Putin’s, offers of friendship.⁸⁰ Similarly, the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, has said that the United States “would like Russia to cease to exist as a country” and therefore, cannot be trusted.⁸¹ The worry on both sides is that misplaced trust in an agreement will allow the other side to seize an advantage and permanently change the balance between them.

This lack of faith in the other’s word represents a real obstacle to successful negotiations, but the worry mischaracterizes how agreements on regional order issues actually work. The objective is not to create enforceable norms that would coercively restrain great powers, but instead to create *effective* norms that great powers voluntarily respect. As

Nico Krisch has noted, major powers have a complex relationship with international law and international norms.⁸² They typically use such mechanisms as “a means of regulation as well as of pacification and stabilization of their dominance” but when faced with “the hurdles of equality and stability” that international law sometimes imposes, they break the rules. In other words, they obey when it serves their purposes to do so and cease to when it does not.

The sad fact of international life is that there is no prospect of coercively forcing great powers to comply with norms when they have decided those norms are no longer in their interest. No amount of legalistic language will change this amply demonstrated historical reality. The history of both the United States and Russia contains a long litany of breaking both the letter and the spirit of international agreements.⁸³ In this, they share much with the great powers that have gone before them (and with China now).⁸⁴

This history suggests that international agreements on regional order issues should not be conceived of as levers for preventing great powers from engaging in certain behaviors. International agreements shape great powers’ actions by raising the reputational costs of noncompliance and creating incentives to stick to agreed norms. They set standards for behavior. But despite the language of enforceable rules (e.g., “legally binding”) to demonstrate commitments in these documents, if great powers perceive a need to violate these norms, agreements cannot stop them. There is no such thing as an enforcement mechanism that can force a great power to comply with an agreement against its will.

The challenge is to reach an agreement that all states prefer to the current situation, that can evolve with changing times, and that works to foster stability and prosperity. Our proposed reform of the order is not sustained by trust. The

West and Russia will not trust each other anytime soon (and if they did, they would not need a negotiated order). Our proposal would contain a set of norms that all parties see it in their interests to follow, regardless of their views of other parties’ trustworthiness. By codifying commitments, agreements raise the cost of defection from agreed norms, creating disincentives for future violations. But the best guarantee of compliance is an accord that all key players believe to be in their interests. It is just such an accord that we propose.

Is There Support for a Third Way in the In-Between States?

Objections to new thinking on the regional order often stem from assumptions about the willingness of the citizens of the region’s countries to consider alternatives to the status quo. Specifically, the idea that anything other than the prospect of full membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions would be unacceptable to the in-between states is used to squelch any new thinking on this subject. As one prominent commentator writes:

Putin wants a sphere of influence in the former Soviet space, which is just a polite way of saying [he] wants imperial domination over his neighbors. Now, even if it were morally acceptable, which it’s not, and even if this were geopolitically wise, which it’s not, the fact of the matter is it would be practically impossible. It would be practically impossible because such thinking assumes that former Soviet countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have no agency of their own . . . It may come as a surprise to some that Ukrainians, Georgians, and Moldovans have their own ideas about their political futures.

And a not insignificant number of them would resist domination by Moscow, regardless of what kind of new Yalta or new Munich agreement is reached between Russia and the West.⁸⁵

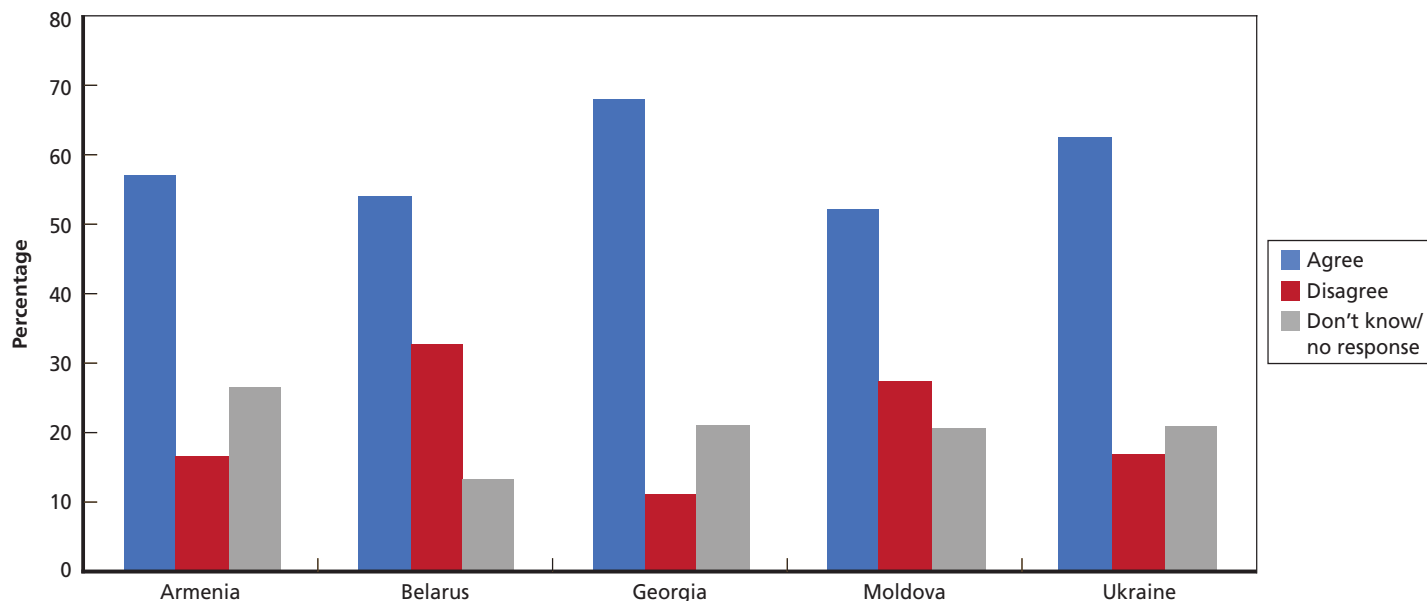
To test these assumptions, we commissioned original polling data on the attitudes of citizens in the region toward these issues in five of the six in-between states: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

First, we wanted to test how relevant citizens of the region think the broader geopolitical conflict is to their own countries' security. Solid majorities in all five countries agree with the statement that tensions between Russia and the West have a detrimental impact on their respective

countries (see Figure 2; the complete results for all questions are available in Appendix A). This suggests that leaders who could play a role in reducing those tensions would be supported at home.

Our main objective was to determine the extent to which there is support for a third way in the in-between states: nonmembership in either Eurasian or Euro-Atlantic institutions, but instead some alternative arrangement that is acceptable to all parties. When asked generically whether they prefer alignment or neutrality, a slight majority of respondents in Georgia (50.6 percent) and a strong plurality in Moldova (48.3 percent) and Belarus (46.7 percent) favored neutrality (see Figure 3); the Belarus result is particularly striking because the country is already part of an

FIGURE 2
Tensions Between Russia and the West Are Detrimental to Your Country



alliance. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in the two countries most directly touched by wars, Armenia and Ukraine, pluralities preferred alliance over neutrality. However, in both cases well over 30 percent of respondents favored neutrality.

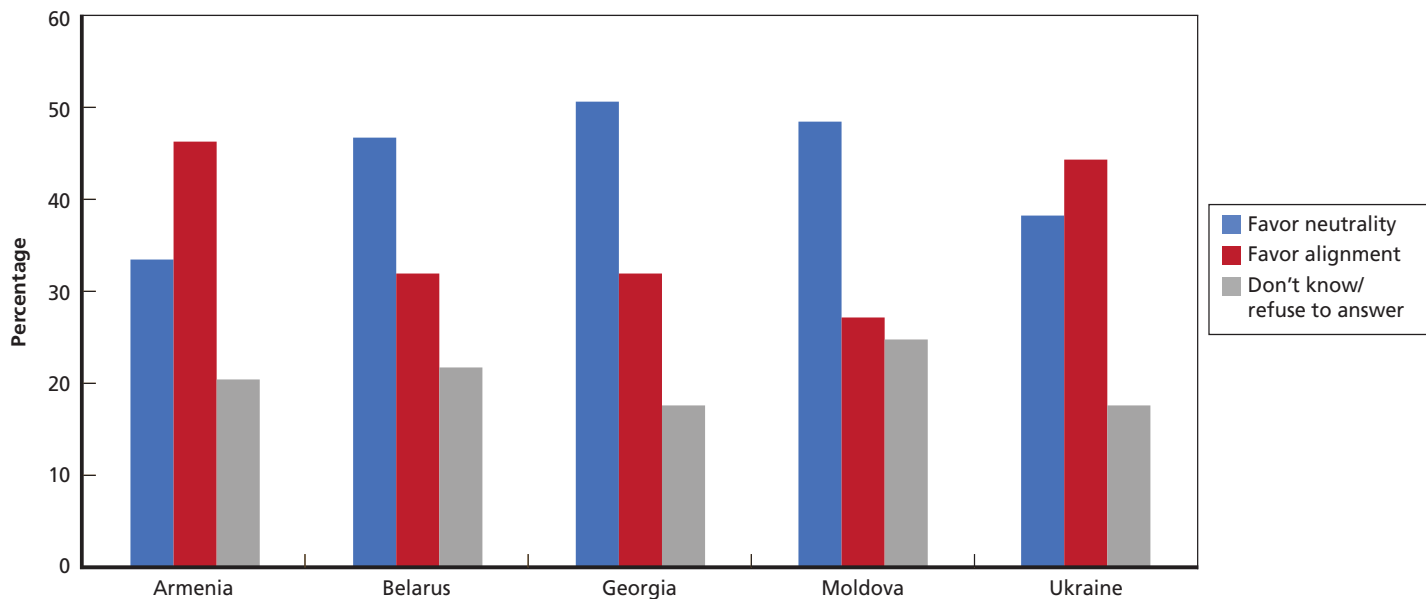
The next two questions were posed differently than typical polls of the region. Usually, respondents are given a binary choice when it comes to their preferences regarding membership in regional organizations: Do they prefer to join either Eurasian institutions or Euro-Atlantic institutions? For example, the latest International Republican Institute poll in Ukraine asked, “If Ukraine could only enter only one international economic union, which of the following should it be?” and offered only the EAEU and EU as possible responses. Regarding NATO, the question was:

“If a referendum was held today on Ukraine joining NATO, how would you vote?”⁸⁶ In both cases, the either-or framing obscures potential support for a third way and artificially polarizes the issue.

Our survey provided respondents a third option—equally close relations with both sides—and additionally allowed them to volunteer a preference for staying out of all unions/organizations.⁸⁷ The number of respondents who chose to volunteer such an answer was very high compared to the usual rates of volunteered responses in similar polls, a potential indicator of an even stronger underlying preference since the interviewer did not provide it as an option.

In terms of economic integration, although significantly more respondents in Belarus and Armenia favored

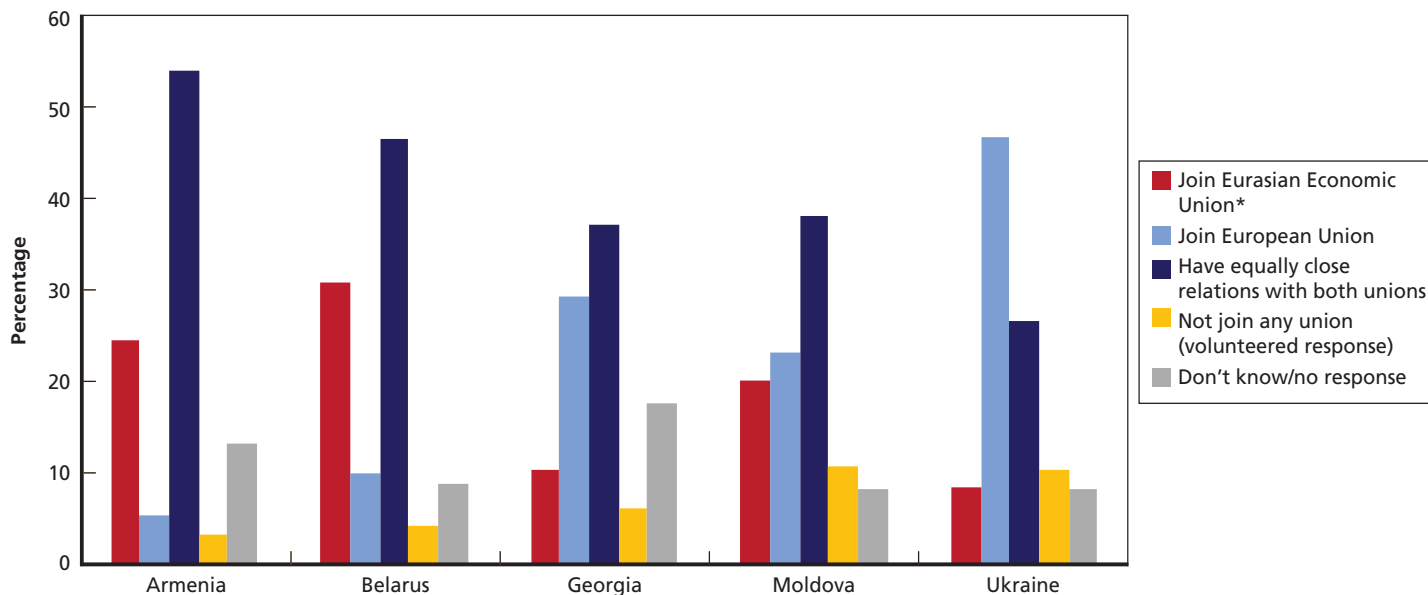
FIGURE 3
Neutrality Versus Alignment



remaining in the EAEU to joining the EU, equally close relations with both unions was by far the most popular option (43 percent and 54 percent, respectively; see Figure 4). The dynamic is similar in Georgia and Moldova, where equally close relations wins significant pluralities (37 percent and 38 percent, respectively) as opposed to support for joining the EU (29 percent and 23 percent, respectively) or the EAEU (10 percent and 20 percent, respectively). While joining the EU is the most popular option for Ukrainians (47 percent), 27 percent prefer equally close relations, and another 10 percent volunteered the response of “not join any union.”

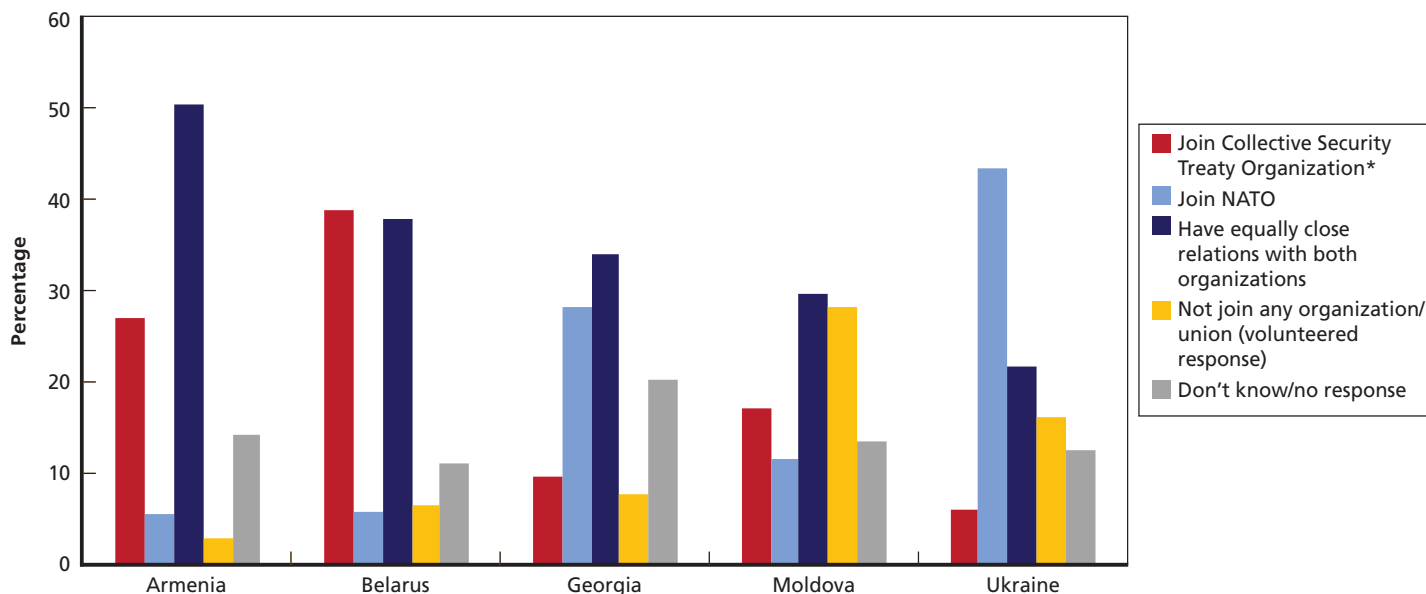
The latent support for a third way is even more pronounced when it comes to security alliances (see Figure 5). Almost double the number of Armenian respondents preferred equally close relations with NATO and the CSTO to remaining in the CSTO (50 to 27). Belarusians are more content with CSTO membership, with 39 percent preferring to remain compared to 38 percent in favor of equally close relations, but if the 7 percent who volunteered “not join any organization” as a response are included, there is a plurality in favor of a third way. The Georgian results are particularly surprising given the high support for NATO membership in polls where third options are not offered: 34 percent prefer equally close relations, 8 percent

FIGURE 4
Economic and Political Union Membership Preferences



* For Armenia and Belarus, the question was phrased “remain in the Eurasian Economic Union,” as they are already member states.

FIGURE 5
Security Alliance Preferences



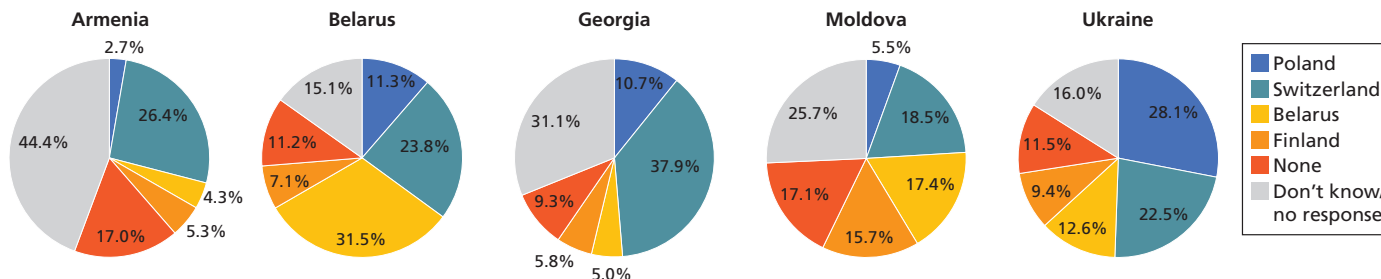
* For Armenia and Belarus, the question was phrased “remain in the Collective Security Treaty Organization,” as they are already member states.

volunteered a preference for no alignment, whereas only 28 percent chose NATO membership. In Moldova, over one in four respondents *volunteered* the “not join any organization” answer, only slightly less than the 30 percent who prefer equally close relations, suggesting a strong majority in favor of some sort of third option. In Ukraine, support for joining NATO is the strongest, at 44 percent. But a combined 38 percent prefer equally close relations or nonmembership. Tellingly, support for joining NATO is significantly lower when Ukrainians are offered a third option; when the same survey firm contracted by RAND asked (in the same poll) the question in binary terms,

62 percent were in favor of membership in NATO, with 38 percent against.⁸⁸ In other words, there is an 18 percent drop in support for NATO membership if Ukrainians are given third options.

Finally, we tried to assess latent preferences regarding regional integration by asking about preferences for country models (see Figure 6). We asked respondents which of the following countries’ security and economic arrangements would be best for their own countries: Poland, Belarus, Finland, and Switzerland. Poland and Belarus were selected as foils, as they are members of both the EU/NATO and EAEU/CSTO, respectively. Finland and

FIGURE 6
Preferred Integration Model



Switzerland are grades of neutral; both are militarily non-aligned, but Finland is a member of the EU. Switzerland is the most popular model in Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova. Strikingly, Poland is unpopular throughout the region, except in Ukraine. Yet even there, those who chose Switzerland and Finland (23 and 9 percent, respectively) outnumber those who prefer Poland (28 percent). The Belarus model is most popular among Belarus’s own citizens, but 17 percent of Moldovans—over three times the number of those who chose Poland—and 13 percent of Ukrainians are also attracted to it, which is even more surprising given Minsk’s alliance with Moscow.

In short, our survey data demonstrates that the political environment in the region is more permissive for third-way options on regional integration than broadly assumed or than reflected in the policies of several regional governments. There is broad societal support for a compromise in at least four of the five in-betweens where we polled. If such an option were to be championed by politicians in the region, they would be unlikely to suffer—and might even gain—politically from it. Ukraine is indeed somewhat of

an exception to that trend. However, the data show that there is a large minority—between 30 and 40 percent—that strongly supports some sort of third way. It is possible that number would grow if the war in the east of the country and the associated tensions were to be reduced.

Would Endorsing a Third Way Undermine Key Western Principles?

The evidence from our polling data indicates the populations of the in-between states do seem open to a third way. But we should consider whether the West is as well. Since the regional order in this part of the world is not particularly important for Western publics,⁸⁹ the challenge here is instead an elite consensus view that endorsing a third way means reneging on a commitment to leaving open the door to any European state that meets the criteria for membership to join Euro-Atlantic institutions.⁹⁰

But in fact, seeking a new mechanism for engagement with nonmembers in the region does not mean explicitly abandoning the “open door” principle regarding the future

institutional enlargement of either NATO or the EU, or the relevant Helsinki Final Act principles. It is important to recall precisely what these principles entail since much mythology surrounds them. The Helsinki Final Act contains “the right to belong or not to belong to international organizations, to be or not to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties including the right to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance.”⁹¹ The reference here is to an abstract principle of a right to belong to organizations generally speaking; the provision certainly does not guarantee states the right to join any particular organization.

Other OSCE documents reference a state’s “right freely to choose its own security arrangements.”⁹² In other words, OSCE member states have the right to seek membership in any international organization. By the same principle, those organizations, and *their* member states, also have the right to make their own decisions regarding the membership aspirations of nonmembers.

In short, no OSCE principle obliges NATO and the EU to offer membership to any state—even one that meets the technical, economic, and other stated criteria for accession. The decision to make a formal offer of membership in both organizations has always been explicitly acknowledged as *political* act, not a technocratic one: The current members must judge it in their interests to extend the offer of membership.

While the EU has never declared a formal “open door” policy, the Treaty on the European Union states that “any European State” that respects the EU’s values “may *apply* to become a member of the Union” (emphasis added).⁹³ The ultimate decision on membership, after the relevant criteria are met, is a decision for the European Council (heads of state and government) and the European

Parliament—those EU bodies that are intended to provide *political* backing and legitimacy to the technocratic endeavors of the Commission.

Unlike the EU, NATO has a declared “open door” policy. The 1997 Madrid Summit declaration states that the Alliance will “maintain an open door to the admission of additional Alliance members in the future.”⁹⁴ However, a number of other documents clarify that there were always caveats attached to this openness. The 1995 NATO Study on Enlargement, the alliance’s official policy statement on the process, while not “foreclose[ing] the possibility of eventual Alliance membership for any European state in accordance with Article 10 of the Washington Treaty,” noted:

There is no fixed or rigid list of criteria for inviting new member states to join the Alliance. Enlargement will be decided on a case-by-case basis and some nations may attain membership before others . . . Ultimately, Allies will decide by consensus whether to invite each new member to join *according to their judgment of whether doing so will contribute to security and stability in the North Atlantic area at the time such a decision is to be made* [emphasis added].⁹⁵

Echoing this sentiment, then—U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright said in 1997:

We should all avoid making specific commitments to specific countries; there is no need to raise expectations by playing favorites, or to assume that our parliaments will always agree. As in the past, we must also insist that the remaining candidates for membership meet the highest objective standards before they are invited to join . . . and show us that their inclusion will advance NATO’s strategic interests.⁹⁶

The U.S. Congress, too, was cautious and deliberate about enlargement, framing future membership decisions in terms of serving the interests of the alliance. The 1998 Senate Resolution of Ratification of the treaty allowing for the first round of enlargement stated:

other than Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, the United States has not consented to invite any other country to join NATO in the future; and the United States will not support the admission of, or the invitation for admission of, any new NATO member unless . . . the prospective NATO member can fulfill the obligations and responsibilities of membership, and its inclusion would serve the overall political and strategic interests of NATO and the United States.⁹⁷

The emphasis here is on rejecting automaticity—no assumption of automatic membership for future aspirants—and on ensuring that future members' joining would serve the interests of the alliance.

At some point in the 2000s, prominent voices in several Western capitals, particularly Washington, began construing NATO enlargement as a promise to aspirants and only secondarily as a means of boosting the security of the alliance. This was particularly true in the run-up to the 2008 Bucharest summit, when the U.S. forced the issue of offering a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine and Georgia when there was neither a consensus within NATO to do so nor a compelling case for how such a move might improve the alliance's security.

In the event, NATO did not offer Tbilisi or Kyiv a MAP, but did issue a declaration stating that the two “will become” members of the Alliance at some unspecified date in the future.⁹⁸ As recently as 2015, NATO foreign

ministers have “reaffirm[ed] all elements of that decision.”⁹⁹ That statement suggested an inevitability and automaticity to the enlargement process that was never intended when it was originally conceived. The George W. Bush administration went further after Bucharest and “started a diplomatic offensive,” pushing allies “to offer Georgia and Ukraine membership to the alliance without first fulfilling requirements under the [MAP].”¹⁰⁰ This truly turned the process on its head with the interests of aspirants being put ahead of both the procedural requirements and the security of the alliance.

In the years since, the open-door-as-obligation is often invoked in discussions of the regional order. For example, then-U.S. Vice President Joe Biden told then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko in 2009 that “if you choose to be part of the Euro-Atlantic integration, which I believe you have, then we strongly support that.”¹⁰¹ In other words, if Ukraine says it wants to become a member of the EU and NATO, the United States supports that aspiration. In practice, this “support” is largely rhetorical, but U.S. policymakers seem to believe they are obliged to express it. Analysts pen phrases like “[Eastern Partnership countries] have the right to join the EU when they meet the requirements for doing so,” when in fact no such right exists.¹⁰² Even NATO's own fact sheet on enlargement and the open door states, “Each sovereign country has the right to choose for itself whether it joins any treaty or alliance.”¹⁰³ Clearly, the authors did not intend to suggest that aspirants control the decision about alliance membership, but the error is telling.

The political dynamic surrounding this reframing of enlargement has many causes. Enlargement acquired an aura of success and an aura of inevitability, particularly

when it seemed to be such a triumph in the ECE region. Contrary to the predictions of many early critics of enlargement, who argued that Russia would respond negatively to it, it also appeared to many to be a cost-free process in terms of relations with Moscow. When the costs became clear in the 2000s, with Russia's invasion of Georgia and the broader deterioration in Russia-West relations, Moscow's resistance to enlargement seemed to become a reason in itself to keep the process going under the banner of denying Russia a veto on NATO decision-making. In practice, this meant that NATO seemed to have an obligation to pursue any decision that Moscow opposed.

With the EU, the origins of the open-ended approach to enlargement share some similarities, but there are also additional factors at work. The premise of EU enlargement within the halls of the EU's bureaucracy is that it is a fundamentally technocratic process, involving legal approximation, norm-alignment, and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* (the EU's compendium of laws and regulations). With the creation of the EU AAs, the logic of enlargement was applied to the six EaP countries to which the union has no intention of offering membership: The AAs provided for the same process of gradual conformity with EU laws and regulations as in the accession process, but without the promise of joining the EU or receiving the structural adjustment funds that the ECE states enjoyed. Essentially, the AAs represented enlargement without membership.

This policy appeared in large part because the EU lacked an alternative framework for policy toward its neighbors; *acquis* approximation was the only game in town. So, when prominent members urged greater engagement with the EaP countries following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the

Commission essentially cut and pasted from the existing playbook.¹⁰⁴ Further, the professionals who worked on these matters at the Commission could not imagine that Russia would see the AAs as a threat to its interests. This led them to take Russia's statements to that effect as mere rhetoric, and to fail to engage in contingency planning for a potential sharp Russian response to the process.¹⁰⁵

The EU concept of engagement with its neighbors—creating a “ring of friends”—does present a similar dilemma as the open door does by suggesting an ever growing integration of the bordering states without a clear sense of an end point.¹⁰⁶ For example, the Polish president, in pushing for the EU to allow Ukraine to sign the AA in 2013, reportedly said to Merkel, “Never again do we want to have a common border with Russia,” implying that unless Ukraine is within the EU's economic-legal sphere, it by definition effectively becomes part of Russia.¹⁰⁷ The problem with this logic, of course, is that eventually certain countries do end up having a common border with Russia. This puts the in-between states in an impossible position.

The “open door” principle cannot be divorced from the objective of enlargement itself, which has been to increase stability and security in Europe and the Euro-Atlantic. In short, NATO and the EU would not be acting contrary to their stated principles if they were to declare that, while the in-between states are free to pursue membership, the organizations themselves do not seek to incorporate them, and will not be offering them membership for the present. As a practical matter, this is simply stating what all parties know to be true—that membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions is not on the table for the in-between states—but do not publicly acknowledge. Both organizations stipulated from the beginning of their post-Cold War enlargement that

they can determine the requirements for the process, and it would not be a betrayal of principle to reiterate officially that one such requirement is that a candidate's membership adds to stability and security, rather than detracts. In the meantime, both organizations can emphasize engagement short of membership that does increase stability. And such engagement need not lessen the Western commitment to the security of the states of the region. Indeed, it is possible that even greater defense cooperation with countries like Georgia and Ukraine might be feasible outside of a membership track. The example of NATO's partnership with Finland attests to that prospect.

Would Russia Be Open to a Third Way?

Many analysts argue that Russia would never accept anything less than “a sphere of influence” in its neighborhood. By this logic, engaging in a diplomatic process with Russia would amount to endorsing Moscow's maximalist ambitions for regional hegemony. As one commentator writes:

Anything that would come close to satisfying Russia would be equivalent to recognizing spheres of influence, and therefore telling Eastern Europeans that they have to live in a state of diminished sovereignty . . . To make it abundantly clear: Putin demands nothing less than giving up the spirit of the Paris Charter of 1990, even the spirit of Helsinki in 1975, and returning to a very specific interpretation of Yalta in 1945.¹⁰⁸

It is certainly true that before 2014, there were hopes in Moscow of bringing several of the in-between states into its institutional fold. For example, in March 2010, then-Prime Minister Putin in did not mince words on this score during

his first meeting with then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, issuing a public entreaty for Ukraine to “join the Customs Union [the precursor to the EAEU].”¹⁰⁹ In the case of Armenia, Moscow's pressure on Yerevan forced the latter to abandon its AA in September 2013 and join the EAEU.

However, there is evidence since 2014 that Russia has been willing to compromise on these matters. Moscow imposed sanctions against Moldova in 2013 to block Chisinau's signing the AA, but by 2016, it was willing to relieve those sanctions while Moldova continued to implement the AA.¹¹⁰ In the case of Georgia, Moscow has largely removed all restrictions on trade despite Tbilisi's implementation of the AA, and it has become Georgia's second-largest trading partner as of 2017.¹¹¹ And although Armenia was forced to scrap its AA in 2013, it signed a comprehensive partnership with the EU in 2017 and Moscow did not seem to object. In short, it would appear that Russia is in fact willing to accept something less than total dominance of the region.

Russia's policy toward Azerbaijan is another example of the limits of its imperialist drive in the region. While Baku remains outside of the CSTO and the EAEU, it also is not closely integrated with NATO or the EU. It has managed to keep its distance from both sides while avoiding isolation from either. That said, it had a formalized partnership with NATO from 2005 and joined the EaP in 2009. Azerbaijan was one of the key initiators of the GUAM—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova—grouping, a body that was essentially intended to limit Russia's influence in the region. It joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 2011. While Russia-Azerbaijan relations have always been fraught due to the former's alliance with Armenia,

While there are no guarantees, it seems unlikely that Russia would insist on some formalized “sphere of influence” if a negotiation were to take place.

Moscow seems content with Azerbaijan’s geopolitical and geoeconomic neutrality. There is no evidence that Russia is actively pushing for Baku’s membership in either the CSTO or the EAEU.

In short, while there are no guarantees, it seems unlikely that Russia would insist on some formalized “sphere of influence” if a negotiation were to take place. If Moscow does make unreasonable demands, the other parties can always walk away from the table. And if Russia decides to pocket any Western concessions and ignore its new commitments, the West can always pull out of any agreement.

Despite the perception that Moscow is on something of a geopolitical winning streak, Russia also has a strong incentive to come to the table. It is paying a tremendous economic price for its misadventures and is clearly looking

for a way out of the diplomatic impasse and economic doldrums, albeit on terms that it can accept. Putin always defends his country and his regime when he believes that either are threatened, but when he does not he has proved capable of finding agreement with the West time and again during his reign. The West’s relative economic strength gives Western governments the breathing space to attempt to find agreement without endangering its economic fundamentals. Russia does not have that cushion. As a matter of policy, the key point is that Western governments will not be any worse off than they are today for attempting to find a mutually acceptable agreement, even if that attempt ultimately fails.

Conclusion

This Perspective has described a path for reducing the dangers of the current situation in Russia-West relations and its direct consequences for post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia through negotiation of a new agreement on the regional order. This modification would not alter the membership or principles of existing regional institutions. Instead, parties would agree a new regional integration framework for nonmembers and commit to a set of norms governing states’ behavior toward them. There is nothing particularly novel in our approach: A number of Cold War-era agreements on key aspects of the regional order in Europe had a significant beneficial impact on stability. Dialogue and agreements on the regional order, even between distrustful adversaries, was a key element of maintaining stability throughout the Cold War; unfortunately, dialogue on the fundamentals of the regional order is largely nonexistent today.

It is much easier to describe a potential adapted regional order and how all sides—Russia, the West, and the in-between states—might benefit from it than to envision it actually coming to pass. Given the possibilities for mutually beneficial cooperation and the numerous other challenges that Russia and the West face (not least the looming challenge posed by China), there is no reason not to at least attempt to find accord.

Nonetheless, very few in Moscow or in Western capitals are seeking compromises. Most are locked into a cycle of mutual suspicion and recrimination that makes a new cold war nearly inevitable. Having mythologized the history of the original Cold War, many now seem unwilling to take risks to avoid a new one, in large part because both sides believe that they can prevail over the other. Western leaders have a quiet confidence that they can recreate their Cold War victory over Moscow in the long run;

their Russian counterparts believe that they have learned the lessons of the previous war and now have a winning formula for outlasting the West.¹¹²

We do not share this sense of complacency. The possibility of the new cold war blossoming into a hot one remains as realistic as it was during the original Cold War, and the consequences would be equally unimaginable. Both sides' theories of victory remain unconvincing. Meanwhile, this contestation will remain destructive for both Russia and the West and ruinous for the in-between states.

This Perspective demonstrates that there are alternative paths. The proposed details are subject to debate—but at this moment, it is precisely the *lack* of debate and discussion of this issue that is the main challenge to finding a mutually acceptable way forward.

Appendix A. Survey Results

TABLE A.1

Impact of Russia-West Tensions

Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Tensions between Russia and the Western European countries and the US are detrimental to your country”?

	Armenia	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Agree*	57.1%	54.0%	68.1%	52.2%	62.5%
Disagree*	16.5%	32.7%	10.9%	27.3%	16.7%
Don't know/ No response	26.4%	13.3%	21.0%	20.5%	20.9%

* The responses “strongly agree/disagree” and “somewhat agree/disagree” were aggregated here for presentational purposes.

TABLE A.2

Preferences for Neutrality Versus Alignment

Question 2: Some people believe that your country’s neutrality could help resolve conflicts and improve its security, while others think that alignment with a certain bloc would bring more benefits to your country. Which of these two statements would you agree with more?

	Armenia	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Favor neutrality (statement 1)*	33.4%	46.7%	50.6%	48.3%	38.1%
Favor alignment (statement 2)*	46.2%	31.8%	31.8%	27.1%	44.3%
Don't know/ no response	20.3%	21.6%	17.6%	24.6%	17.6%

* The responses “strongly agree” and “agree” with the respective statements were aggregated here for presentational purposes.

TABLE A.3

Preferences About Economic and Political Integration

Question 3: In your opinion, what would be the best choice for your country's future economic and political development?

	Armenia	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Join Eurasian Economic Union, led by Russia*	24.5%	30.8%	10.3%	20.1%	8.3%
Join European Union, led by the Western European countries	5.2%	9.9%	29.2%	23.2%	46.7%
Have equally close relations with both unions	53.9%	46.4%	37.0%	38.0%	26.6%
Not join any union**	3.2%	4.1%	6.1%	10.6%	10.2%
Don't know/no response	13.2%	8.8%	17.5%	8.2%	8.1%

* For Armenia and Belarus, the question was phrased "remain in the Eurasian Economic Union" as they are already member states.

** Volunteered response.

TABLE A.4.

Preferences Regarding Security Blocs

Question 4: In your opinion, what would be the best choice for your country to ensure its security?

	Armenia	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Join Collective Security Treaty Organization, led by Russia*	27.1%	38.9%	9.6%	17.1%	5.9%
Join NATO, led by the Western European countries and the United States	5.4%	5.8%	28.3%	11.6%	43.5%
Have equally close relations with both organizations	50.4%	37.9%	34.0%	29.7%	21.8%
Not join any organization/union**	2.9%	6.5%	7.7%	28.2%	16.2%
Don't know/no response	14.2%	11.0%	20.3%	13.4%	12.6%

* For Armenia and Belarus, the question was phrased "remain in the Collective Security Treaty Organization" as they are already member states.

** Volunteered response.

TABLE A.5

Attitudes Toward Various Models of Integration

Question 5: In terms of security and economic integration, which of the following countries should be the model for your country?

	Armenia	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Poland	2.7%	11.3%	10.7%	5.5%	28.1%
Switzerland	26.4%	23.8%	37.9%	18.5%	22.5%
Belarus	4.3%	31.5%	5.0%	17.4%	12.6%
Finland	5.3%	7.1%	5.8%	15.7%	9.4%
None*	17.0%	11.2%	9.3%	17.1%	11.5%
Don't know/ no response	44.4%	15.1%	31.1%	25.7%	16.0%

* Volunteered response.

Appendix B. Survey Methodology

Background

Working with Irina Zaslavskaya, a polling consultant with significant experience working in the region, we designed and contracted for a public opinion survey of five questions of the adult populations (18 and above) in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. We worked with independent polling firms in each of these countries, which conducted the fieldwork and the data processing. Our questions were added to existing omnibus surveys regularly conducted by these polling organizations. The samples were designed to be representative of the adult population of each country. The surveys were all conducted via face-to-face interviews and were pre-tested to ensure the fidelity of the results. The purpose of this survey research was to examine opinions on geopolitical, economic, and security issues and run comparative analysis across these five countries. When applicable, the data was weighted by age, region, and gender to bring the realized sample in line with target population parameters in order to be nationally representative of the adult population.

Armenia

- **Survey firm:** The survey in Armenia was conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center-Armenia (CRRCArmenia).
- **Sample area coverage:** The survey was conducted throughout Armenia.
- **Sample size:** The sample consisted of 1,647 persons of the adult population in Armenia.

- **Fieldwork dates:** The survey was conducted from October 1 to October 28, 2017.
- **Margin of error:** ± 1.8 percent within 95-percent confidence interval.

Belarus

- **Survey firm:** The survey in Belarus was conducted by Novak.
- **Sample area coverage:** The survey was conducted in 78 population centers throughout Belarus.
- **Sample size:** The sample consisted of 1,044 persons of the adult population in Belarus.
- **Fieldwork dates:** The survey was conducted from September 13 to September 26, 2017.
- **Margin of error:** ± 3 -percent within 95-percent confidence interval.

Georgia

- **Survey firm:** The survey in Georgia was conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center-Georgia (CRRCArmenia).
- **Sample area coverage:** The survey was conducted throughout Georgia, excluding areas not under government control (Abkhazia and South Ossetia).
- **Sample size:** The sample consisted of 2,379 persons of the adult population in Georgia.
- **Fieldwork dates:** The survey was conducted from September 23 to October 10, 2017.
- **Margin of error:** ± 1.53 percent at 95-percent confidence interval.

Moldova

- **Survey firm:** The survey in Moldova was conducted by the Centre for Sociological Investigations and Marketing (CBS-AXA) S.R.L.
- **Sample area coverage:** The survey was conducted throughout Moldova, excluding Transnistria.
- **Sample size:** The sample consisted of 1,109 persons of the adult population in Moldova.
- **Fieldwork dates:** The survey was conducted from September 9 to September 20, 2017.
- **Margin of error:** \pm 3 percent within 95-percent confidence interval.

Ukraine

- **Survey firm:** The survey in Ukraine was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS).
- **Sample area coverage:** The survey was conducted throughout Ukraine (with the exception of Crimea). In the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, the survey was only conducted in territories under the Ukrainian government's control.
- **Sample size:** The sample consisted of 2,027 persons of the adult population in Ukraine.
- **Fieldwork dates:** The survey was conducted from September 16 to September 29, 2017.
- **Margin of error:** The statistical sampling error (with probability of 0.95 and design-effect of 1.5) does not exceed 3.3 percent for indicators close to 50 percent; 2.8 percent for indicators close to 25 percent; 2.0 percent for indicators close to 10 percent; 1.4 percent for indicators close to 5 percent.

Notes

¹ @realDonaldTrump, Twitter post, August 3, 2017, 5:18 AM.

² Samuel Osborne, “Vladimir Putin says US-Russia Relations Are Worse Since Donald Trump Took Office,” *The Independent*, April 12, 2017.

³ Susan B. Glasser, “Trump, Putin and the New Cold War,” *Politico Magazine*, December 22, 2017.

⁴ U.S. National Security Council, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., 2017.

⁵ “How to Stop the Fighting, Sometimes,” *The Economist*, November 10, 2013.

⁶ For more on the consequences of the new tensions, see Samuel Charap and Jeremy Shapiro, “Consequences of a New Cold War,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 57, No. 2, April–May 2015.

⁷ See Gustav Gressel, “Fellow Travellers: Russia, Anti-Westernism, and Europe’s Political Parties,” European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2017.

⁸ “HR McMaster: Russian Meddling ‘Sophisticated Subversion,’” BBC News, December 19, 2017.

⁹ See, for example, the 1995 presidential decree on policy toward the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which remains in force through the present. The document stated that “On the territory of the CIS are concentrated Russia’s most vital interests in the domains of economics, defense, security, and defense of [its citizens’] rights. [Russia will be the] leading force in forming a new system of international . . . relations in the post-USSR space [and will] foster integrative processes in the CIS.” The decree states that Moscow will “obtain from the CIS states performance of their obligations to desist from alliances and blocs directed against any of these states.” “Strategicheskii kurs Rossii s gosudarstvami—uchastnikami Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv,” September 14, 1995.

¹⁰ Official Internet Resource of the President of Russia, “Interv’yu Dmitriya Medvedeva rossiiskim telekanalam,” August 31, 2008.

¹¹ Sergei Karaganov, a government adviser and prominent foreign policy expert, makes this case in Sergei Karaganov, “Russia Needs to Defend Its Interests with an Iron Fist,” *Financial Times*, March 5, 2014.

¹² See Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, “The US Election and the Ukraine Connection,” *Project Syndicate*, January 24, 2017b.

¹³ Glasser, 2017.

¹⁴ Rex Tillerson, “Remarks with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko at a Joint Press Availability,” speech delivered in Kyiv, Ukraine, July 9, 2017.

¹⁵ For a full list of participants and several essays written by them, see Samuel Charap, Alyssa Demus, and Jeremy Shapiro, eds., *Getting Out from “In-Between”: Perspectives on the Regional Order in Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CF-382-CC/SFDFA, 2018.

¹⁶ For perspectives on this history, see Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014; John Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5, September–October 2014; Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2015; Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul, “Who Lost Russia (This Time)? Vladimir Putin,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Summer 2015; and Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2015.

¹⁷ Michael J. Mazarr, Miranda Priebe, Andrew Radin, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *Understanding the Current International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1598-OSD, 2016.

¹⁸ See International Organization for Migration, “IOM Assistance to IDPs and Conflict-Affected Population in Ukraine,” May 19, 2016, and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Ukraine: UNHCR Operational Update, 14 May–10 June 2016,” 2016.

¹⁹ While both institutions have in the past admitted states with territorial disputes (for NATO, West Germany; for the EU, Cyprus), these conflicts make the perceived cost of membership offers too high for current members to bear.

²⁰ See Joel Hellman, “Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions,” *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1998.

²¹ For more on the impact on the in-betweens, see Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, London: Routledge, 2017a, pp. 151–176.

²² As then-President George W. Bush put it during his first trip to Europe in 2001, “We will not trade away the fate of free European peoples. No more Munichs, no more Yaltas” (“The President In Europe; Bush’s Vision: ‘We Will Not Trade Away the Fate of Free European Peoples,’” *New York Times*, June 16, 2001).

- ²³ See Conrad Black, “The Yalta Myth,” *National Interest*, May 2014.
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Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
A/CFE	Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAC	European Advisory Commission
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ECE	East Central Europe
EDC	European Defense Community
EU	European Union
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe

About the Authors

Samuel Charap is a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation. His work focuses on the political economy and foreign policies of Russia and the former Soviet states; European and Eurasian regional security; and U.S.-Russia deterrence, strategic stability, and arms control.

Jeremy Shapiro is research director at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Previously, he was a fellow in the Project on International Order and Strategy and the Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution, where he edited the Foreign Policy program's blog, *Order from Chaos*.

Alyssa Demus is a policy analyst at the RAND Corporation. Her work focuses on Central and Eastern European geopolitical issues, deterrence, influence and disinformation efforts, and other national security and defense issues.

About This Perspective

Russia's relations with the West are in deep turmoil. This turmoil has manifested itself in various ways, including alleged Russian interference in U.S. and European elections, tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions, and sanctions. These developments notwithstanding, the issue that originally sent the relationship off the rails and remains at the core of the broader dispute is the competition over Ukraine and Russia's other post-Soviet neighbors, the "in-between" states: Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. While the competitive dynamic between Russia and the West has come to a head in Ukraine, all of these states are objects of a contest among outside powers. This contest has become a negative-sum game, benefiting none of the parties: The West and Russia now find themselves locked into a dangerous and damaging competition as a result, while the states in the region remain to varying degrees unstable, unreformed, and rife with conflict.

With support from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and in partnership with the Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the RAND Corporation launched a study to explore alternatives to the current approaches to the regional order. A working group of experts and former policy practitioners from the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the in-between states met three times to explore possible common ground on the underlying principles of regional order. Their papers are presented in a separate study. This Perspective draws on the discussions of the working group but represents the views of the authors alone.

This work was conducted in the International Security and Defense Policy Center of RAND's National Security Research Division. For more information on the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center, see www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri/centers/isdp or contact the director (contact information is provided on the webpage).



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