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Russia's Global Interests and Actions

Growing Reach to Match Rejuvenated Capabilities

After the end of the Cold War, the United States enjoyed a unipolar moment.¹ As the sole superpower, Washington had the freedom to turn its attention away from Russia, strengthen and expand its global alliances, and promote and support democracy around the globe. Russia was unable to substantially contest U.S. foreign policy; for the first two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia focused primarily on domestic issues, struggling to combat the economic collapse, hyperinflation, privatization, and widespread corruption that resulted from the cataclysmic transition away from a Communist structure.

However, even at its lowest point, Russia never fully accepted the unipolar construct, and it has spent the last 25 years regaining the capability to influence actions beyond its own region.² Building on its Soviet-era relationships and growing capabilities, Russia has enhanced its efforts to increase its own global influence—efforts that have accelerated since 2014.³ After assertive Russian actions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, the rest of the world has been forced to rethink Russia's global role and the objectives Russia seeks.

Russia's global reach makes necessary a more-detailed look at its objectives and activity outside of Europe and Russia's near abroad.

Recently, attention has focused on Russia's interests in its "near abroad"—the former Soviet Union nations, excepting the Baltic states⁴—and the implications for strategic stability in that region. Immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy goals were confined largely to its periphery, mainly because of its limited capabilities. Moscow's primary objective was to protect Russian influence in countries in its periphery and fend off external influence and threats. Russia has always vigorously protested and reacted to the perceived encroachment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) on its exclusive sphere of influence.⁵ These interests and related Russian actions are well documented.⁶ Russia, like any country, naturally has increasing levels of interest based on the proximity of perceived threats to its own territory.

However, for the last decade, Russian interests have extended well beyond Russia's near abroad.⁷ Recent U.S. policy documents reinforce the perspective that Russian

interests and actions extend beyond its periphery. In December 2017, the U.S. government released its National Security Strategy (NSS), which identifies Russia as a revisionist power that "challenge[s] American power, influence and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity."⁸ The NSS stipulates that Russia's objective is "to weaken U.S. influence in the world and divide us from our allies and partners" and that Russia views organizations like NATO and the EU as threats.⁹ This theme continues in the January 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), in which Russia is identified as a strategic competitor that wants "to shape a world consistent with [its] authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions." Moreover, the NDS states that Russia seeks "to shatter [NATO] and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor."¹⁰ Both documents point to long-term strategic competition with Russia.

Russia's global reach makes necessary a more-detailed look at Russia's objectives and activity outside of its traditional focus (Europe and its near abroad). This Perspective goes beyond the existing research regarding Russia to the broader subject of Russia's *global* ambitions and actions. We aim to help answer the following question: Given that both the United States and Russia view Russia as a resurgent great power, how should we understand Russia's key interests and objectives and its foreign policy approaches to pursuing or protecting them beyond its immediate region?

To address this question, we reviewed available English-language analysis of Russia's global interests, ambitions, and strategies; select Russian-language policy documents; and a variety of speeches and publications by Russian military leaders. We also drew from recent RAND

publications and a RAND workshop with subject-matter experts.

A brief word on what we mean by a *resurgent great power* is in order. We define a *great power* as any nation that has the desire and ability, through a combination of diplomatic, information, economic, and military means, to influence the behavior of others not only on its periphery but also on a global scale. For more than 20 years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia possessed the *will* to exert influence beyond its immediate neighbors, but it lacked most of the *capabilities* of a great power. Many academics and analysts have referred to Russia as a great power even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, either because of its global nuclear capability or because of its permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).¹¹ However, although these factors allowed Russia to play a spoiler role, they did not immediately offer it the broader means to influence behavior worldwide. Russia's ability to wield military, economic, information, and diplomatic power has grown considerably since the early 2010s, and that is why we refer to Russia as a resurgent great power. *Resurgent* captures both the recent increase in Russian capabilities and the relatively limited nature, at the time of this report, of those capabilities compared with those of other great powers, such as the United States and China.¹²

Key insights from studying Russia's global interests and actions include the following. First, the Kremlin views the current international order as a system based on U.S. dominance and believes that the best way to change this is to accelerate an ongoing transition from unipolarity to multipolarity.¹³ In the multipolar world that Russia envisions, Russia is a great power player with a key voice in

global affairs.¹⁴ Russia now believes that transition to such a situation is not only feasible but already underway. The global financial crisis of 2008 marked the beginning of a shift away from the U.S.-led unipolar system,¹⁵ and the seeming political shift in U.S. priorities toward greater isolationism marks the continuation of the shift toward a multipolar system.¹⁶

Second, although Russia still prioritizes its near abroad, it has implemented a selective global approach to confirm its resurgent great power status. This approach is based on opportunistic actions and pragmatic, transactional relationships. Moscow selectively engages where it can leverage existing relations or exploit local discontent with the United States and other nations.¹⁷ This approach maximizes overall gains while minimizing costs. Russia might not necessarily have a long-term strategy for building a global network, but this opportunistic approach provides a foundation of relationships and influence that it can likely exploit in the future. Russia varies how it approaches its own level of influence in each region while maintaining a common perspective that its own view of influence and leadership is simply one power among many.

Third, Russia uses a variety of geopolitical tools—primarily diplomatic, economic, and military engagement—to seek out conditions favorable to its objectives based on previous relationships, its resources, and tactical opportunities. Through a pattern of formal and informal diplomatic engagements at various levels, an emphasis on no-strings-attached arms sales, and an “opaque web of economic and political patronage,”¹⁸ Russia offers other nations alternatives to the United States and the rest of the world; these nations provide Russia with access, influence, and resources. Russia's global activities already involve

using this long-standing approach based on a foundation of relationships and techniques honed over centuries of rule and influence over vast territories.¹⁹

Fourth, although Russia draws on its historical experience and relationships, its current global ambitions are different from those of the Soviet Union. Russia's current actions are less based on ideological motivations than on realpolitik—its desire to undermine its key adversary, the United States.²⁰ Russia now practices pragmatic realism rather than Communist idealism.

Fifth, Russia's capability to act globally is limited but still potent. Many tools that Russia uses are relatively low cost, but the overall effectiveness of these tools is enhanced as the United States turns its focus inward and the world adapts to the growing influence of other great powers.²¹

We conclude that the United States and the rest of the world should not overestimate Russia's capabilities but should not underestimate Russia's resurgent great power status and its objective of undermining the United States' role as a global leader. Russia's global relationships and resources create pretexts for opportunistic Russian involvement and actions that can contravene the interests of the United States and its allies and partners. Russia's efforts do not always produce results that go beyond symbolic relationships, but they do have the potential to further undermine the U.S.-led liberal order. Russia's global efforts have also been surprisingly effective.²² Recognizing Russia's global interests and its opportunistic approach to bilateral relationships can help the United States and the rest of the world develop their own global response strategies that recognize Russia's intentions and limited capabilities and focus on those areas and issues that are the highest priority. U.S. and international policymakers would gain key

insights from paying closer attention to Russian intentions and actions globally rather than focusing on the near abroad and select areas in isolation.

Policymakers should also recognize that interaction with Russia does not always have to be a zero-sum game. At times, Russian actions support broader U.S. interests—e.g., providing a hedge against China's rise. In such cases, the United States should consider whether quietly or openly allowing Russia's actions to proceed unchecked supports U.S. strategic interests. This approach is more nuanced than previous attempts to find broad areas of common interest with Russia, such as counterterrorism or counternarcotics.

How Do Russia's Global Interests Fit Within Its Strategic Interests?

Russia's Strategic Interests

Russia's strategic interests and ambitions drive its foreign policy both in its periphery and globally. Russia's own 2015 National Security Strategy, along with various other documents and sources, identifies Russia's four main interests as the following:²³

1. regime preservation and national defense from internal and external threats, including interference in domestic affairs
2. authority and influence in the “near abroad”
3. realization of great power status and an increase in “the competitiveness and international prestige of the Russian Federation”²⁴
4. increase in Russian gross domestic product to “one of the largest in the world.”²⁵

Roots and Motivations of Russia's Core Interests

Many nations have regime preservation as a primary interest, but Russia has a greater sense of insecurity based on its history. Russian leaders fear domestic unrest, recalling major past upheavals like the 1917 Communist revolution and the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union. More recently, Russian leaders fear for their own security, given perceived U.S. support for and success in “color revolutions” and the Arab Spring uprisings.²⁶

Russia's focus on its near abroad extends directly from its interest in regime preservation and is based on its historic pursuit of creating buffer states on its borders and protecting itself from external threats by dominating surrounding countries. This focus stems from Russia's long border, exposed geography, and centuries of internal and external threats.²⁷ In addition, Russia has pursued the idea of a few great powers—itsself included—deciding the fate of lesser states. Part of this construct is that great powers have zones of privileged influence; Russia considers its near abroad to be one of these zones. Following decades of active measures on the part of the Soviet Union to impose its will on others, many Russians believe that the West did the same during and after the Cold War.²⁸ Incorporating states in Russia's periphery into NATO or the EU, thereby expanding the boundaries of these groupings closer to Russia's borders, stokes fears of encirclement by hostile powers. This links back to Russia's domestic concerns; Russia has often claimed that the West, and specifically the United States, has used democracy promotion efforts to overthrow regimes it does not like.²⁹

Russia's self-conception as a great power predates, but is bolstered by, the Soviet era. Long before the Soviet Union, the Russian empire viewed itself as a world power, having played a key role in major wars and events for several centuries.³⁰ Russian thinking is also heavily influenced by the massive loss of Soviet citizens and soldiers on the Eastern Front during World War II—which Russia calls the Great Patriotic War.³¹ Russia's leadership of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, memories of Yalta, and continued emphasis on its permanent membership in the UNSC have also reinforced Russia's view of its importance and sense of entitlement to a role at the negotiating table for all major global issues. Although the Soviet Union no longer exists, Russia still seeks recognition of its great power status in the international system because it believes that such recognition brings greater privilege and security.³² Russia seeks to be treated as a peer among several great powers, not just as a regional power. It expects great power status to lend it the right and ability to serve as a prominent voice in world affairs. This mindset is clear in President Vladimir Putin's claims that the July 2018 Helsinki summit with then-President Donald Trump was a success—it was a tangible example of the United States treating Russia as a peer rather than a regional power.

Global Reach and Nature of Russia's Foreign Policy

Russia's desire for influence and its foreign policy activities already extend beyond Europe and the near abroad as traditionally defined. Russia's 2016 Foreign Policy Concept covers Russian geographic priorities and mentions objectives on all continents.³³ The U.S. NDS characterizes

Russia's inclination to change elements of the existing order in a manner conducive to Russian interests as stemming from Russia's perception that it is not viewed as a great power and believing that the rules and institutions were created by the United States to serve U.S. interests.³⁴ This is particularly relevant for Russia to maintain its own sphere of influence and stop any further EU and NATO enlargement.

Russia also seeks to prevent the loss of its existing influence. Though Russia's aspirations might not yet be fully realizable, its actions are affecting the overall strength of the global security architecture.³⁵ Russia is using far fewer resources than it enjoyed during the Cold War to engage in transactional, opportunistic behavior throughout the world with an intention to build its prestige and influence while minimizing U.S. influence and disrupting the Western liberal order. Putin desires to damage U.S. confidence and to undermine the Western alliances—diplomatic, financial, and military—that have shaped the postwar world.³⁶

Russia's desired foreign policy end state is to undermine the Western liberal order; elevate the global stature of Russia to that of a great power; and undercut the credibility and influence of the United States, NATO, and Europe.³⁷ Achieving this includes weakening U.S. influence and its bilateral relationships and transitioning toward a system of greater multipolarity. The ideological component of the Cold War competition might be gone, and Moscow might no longer be as deliberately strategically involved with states outside of Russia, but U.S. policymakers would benefit from paying closer attention to Russian intentions and actions globally and should develop a strategy for assessing the overall risk to U.S. interests and ways to respond when necessary.

What Are Russia's Global Interests? How Is It Pursuing Them?

By investigating Russia's relationships in other geographic regions, we can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Russia's global aims and strategies. Consequently, we examine three key regions outside Russia's near abroad: the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Indo-Pacific, and the Arctic. Russia has elevated interests in these regions, and there are clear indications that Russia is actively using multiple levers of influence in these areas. Russia is also cultivating relationships in Africa and Latin America; we examine these regions in less detail.

Middle East and North Africa

Russia's overarching objectives in the MENA are to leverage existing relationships and increase Russian influence to maintain stable governments, counter regime change, and minimize U.S. influence and intervention.³⁸ Russia aims to help shape the major security and economic landscape in the MENA while promoting stability in the region; Russia views the United States as having served as a source of destabilization in the area.³⁹ Russia focuses on ensuring that regional extremism does not make its way to Russia itself⁴⁰ and on preventing popular uprisings from inspiring similar unrest within or near Russia.⁴¹ Although Russia's involvement in the region had been increasing since 2005, the 2011 Arab Spring particularly stoked Moscow's fears that proliferating popular unrest could contravene its regional interests.⁴²

Russia also expresses its commitment and desire to promote conflict resolution and to contribute to collective

counterterrorism efforts in the MENA. Counterterrorism is regularly cited as a point of alignment with the United States, but, in practice, this alignment is hampered by differing definitions of terrorism and divergent methods of action.⁴³ Russia also makes clear that its support for settling conflicts involves respecting regional nations' "sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right to self-determination without outside interference."⁴⁴

Syria, a key regional ally, is the most obvious example of Russia's interest in the region. Broadly speaking, Russia fears loss of influence, and Syria is a place where Russian influence was diminished by U.S.-led intervention. When Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was threatened, Russia was concerned about losing a friendly leader and the potential loss of access to the Mediterranean. Tartus, in particular, has been cited as key to Russia's pursuit of great power status and influence in the Mediterranean region.⁴⁵ The port of Tartus, which the Soviet Navy began using in 1971 and Russia still uses today, is a key resource for Russia. Tartus is Russia's only base in the Mediterranean; because it is a deep water port, nuclear submarines can dock there.⁴⁶ Russia has also long sought to protect and expand its air base presence in Syria, one of the few places in the world where its basing allows regional power projection.⁴⁷ In addition, Russia also sees Syria as an important example in its quest to combat instability, color revolutions, and regime change.⁴⁸ Consequently, Russia's stated objective for Syria is a political settlement and a unified, independent Syria that preserves its territorial integrity.⁴⁹

Russia also seeks to take advantage of power vacuums in such countries as Libya and diminished U.S. influence in such countries as Egypt.⁵⁰ Strengthening engagement with Libya and countries in the Middle East serves multiple

Russian objectives. Improved access to the Mediterranean increases Russia's influence in the region, as Russia gains more political leverage against Europe and greater power projection potential. Closer relationships also increase the opportunities for Russian arms sales. In addition to these objectives, the closer ties also provide a means to undermine the influence in the region of the United States and Europe. Russia also sees Iran as an important counter to U.S. influence in the greater Middle East. Russia and Iran are strategic allies, and their relations, while at times turbulent, are growing closer under U.S. sanctions.

Russia considers itself to be a vital actor in the MENA, but it lacks the means and the status that the Soviet Union had.⁵¹ Russia's current approach to the Middle East is both opportunistic and resource dependent, allowing it to adjust the scale and intensity of its efforts on a case-by-case basis. Russia's actions in the region are based on a strategy of pragmatism that seeks to improve its own short-term economic, military, and political advantages while reducing the short-term advantages of its adversaries.⁵² Russia's key approach to do this is through maintaining bilateral relationships with all major players in the region, including state and nonstate actors (except the Islamic State).⁵³ These numerous relationships are not alliances based on shared strategic interests. Rather, they focus on transactional, situation-dependent engagements and arrangements across the elements of international relations.

Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Egypt provide obvious examples of how Russia seeks to achieve its objectives through diplomatic, political, and informal interaction. Putin has worked hard to enhance the relationship with Iran, meeting frequently with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on topics ranging from cooperation in Syria

to energy and trade.⁵⁴ Russia-Iran relations have thus improved in recent years, even though Iranians have historically mistrusted Russia.⁵⁵ Some analysts believe that, even though the Russia-Iran alliance appears strong, both countries have divergent strategic visions that could threaten the long-term health of the partnership.⁵⁶

As for Saudi Arabia, in 2017, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud became the first-ever Saudi monarch to visit Russia, following an oil production deal originally signed in 2016.⁵⁷ Recent meetings have included discussions about corporate deals and cross-border investments, as well as potential Russian arms sales to one of the key U.S. allies in the Middle East.⁵⁸

Between 2016 and early 2019, Libyan General (now Field Marshal) Khalifa Haftar visited Russia at least three times. In 2017, he received a full-military-honors welcome aboard Russia's only aircraft carrier, and he reportedly video conferenced with Russia's defense minister from the ship's stateroom.⁵⁹ In Libya, Russia clearly demonstrates its pragmatic approach by keeping its options open and maintaining ties to more than one group. For example, Haftar's adversary, Fayeze al-Sarraj, has come to Moscow several times as well, creating consternation in Europe about Russia's intentions in Libya.⁶⁰

Russia also has been strengthening its relationship with Egypt. Both countries envision a strong alliance that builds its own power in the region. Putin has visited Egypt twice, and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has traveled to Russia four times since 2014. Sisi's October 2018 visit ended with both leaders signing a partnership and strategic cooperation treaty that, in the words of Sisi, will "open a new chapter in the history of our co-operation."⁶¹ It is important to remember that these high-level interactions

are just the tip of the iceberg; lower-level official and unofficial interactions lead up to these more visible meetings and agreements. These actions also lay the groundwork for the potential to establish basing or access in Egypt and Libya.⁶²

Economically, Russia's pursuits often focus on arms sales and energy deals (oil and gas, as well as nuclear energy infrastructure).⁶³ Russia seeks to increase Middle Eastern investment in and dependence on Russian infrastructure (and other sectors) and to maintain stable, relatively high oil prices. For instance, Russia recently agreed to another oil production cut with Saudi Arabia.⁶⁴ Russian state-owned companies, such as Gazprom and Rosatom, maintain key consumer markets, oil and gas fields, and customers for nuclear energy projects throughout the MENA.⁶⁵ Russia also looks for ways to be involved in wheat markets in countries such as Morocco, Algeria, and Libya.⁶⁶ Its economic efforts in the Middle East are also part of its pursuit of a "sanction-proof" economy.⁶⁷

Russia's most obvious military activity in the MENA is its involvement in Syria in support of the Assad regime. Russia's actions in Syria have included military presence, air strikes, and a leading role in negotiations.⁶⁸ At the tactical level, Russia recognizes that Iran helps it to sustain its Syrian intervention.⁶⁹ Russia regularly coordinates its actions in Syria with Iran and has used Iranian airspace for long-range strikes from Russia on Syrian targets. In many ways, Russia's military involvement in Syria mirrors its broader engagement—a lean, flexible approach that maximizes the impact of minimal resource investment.⁷⁰

Russia is also working hard to reclaim its role as the preferred supplier of arms in the MENA. Russia contrasts itself with the U.S. approach to arms sales by being a

“no-strings-attached” arms supplier.⁷¹ For example, Russia has delivered S-300 missiles to Iran and deployed more-advanced S-400 missiles in Syria.⁷² This approach resulted in significant growth in Russian arms sales since 2011; in 2017, Russia became the second-largest arms producer in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfers Database—a position held by the United Kingdom since 2002.⁷³ Russia’s actions have improved its access to the region. In 2017, Russia and Syria established an agreement allowing Russia’s naval operations at Tartus to expand. Over the next 49 years, Russia would be allowed to have up to 11 warships, including nuclear-powered ships, at Tartus.⁷⁴ The same deal also allowed for Russia’s indefinite use of the Hmeimim air base in Syria.⁷⁵ Russia’s increased presence and activities at the base have affected other regional countries, such as Israel, which reports concern about the more permanent Russian presence there and the resulting effects on its own naval operations.⁷⁶

Russia’s preference for a selective global engagement approach is most apparent in the MENA. This is not only because of Russia’s obvious level of engagement but also because of its ability to influence regional affairs with a modest investment of resources. Russian engagement in the MENA also reflects Russia’s pragmatic approach. Russia has yet to have to make choices between its various relationships and makes an active effort not to become actively entangled in its partners’ issues. While many MENA countries are wary of Russia, Russia has had success building transactional relationships by assuring regimes that it will not meddle in their internal affairs. Russia perceives its ability to maintain these compartmentalized, bilateral relationships to be an advantage it has over the West. Russia presents itself as an alternative to

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the United States.⁷⁷ Many countries see the value in a foil to U.S. power in the region—essentially playing the two powers off each other.⁷⁸ Still, there are drawbacks to the selective engagement approach even when it is as effective as it has been in the MENA. Russia always considers the domestic value of external engagement; initially, this paid dividends for Russia. For example, many analysts attribute boosts in Putin’s approval ratings to public announcements of foreign engagements. More recently, however, Russia’s economic weakness and grumbling about foreign adventures has resulted in a decline in Putin’s approval rating, which has fallen from a five-year high to levels not seen since before the annexation of Crimea.⁷⁹

Indo-Pacific

Russia has always had interests and some relationships with Indo-Pacific countries.⁸⁰ Since 2014, Russia has had expanded influence in the Indo-Pacific region as its goal. Whether through strengthening relations with China or India or pursuing engagement with Japan, Vietnam, and North and South Korea, Russia seeks to increase its influence with many countries across multiple domains, despite few regional powers desiring a larger role for Russia. Russia's interests in the Indo-Pacific fall into three broad categories: expanding alliances and multipolar groups to offset U.S. leadership, increasing opportunities for bilateral and multilateral economic growth, and expanding Russian influence (including power projection).

One of Russia's main objectives in the Indo-Pacific is checking U.S. influence to permit more Russian freedom of maneuver. A key to achieving this is to promote a shift away from the U.S.-led system of alliances and to nurture a more multipolar system in which multiple great powers—including Russia—dominate and U.S. influence is diminished.⁸¹ Two of the three pillars of Russia's "turn to the East" over the last decade include Russia rejecting the "universal values" of the West—insisting instead on its distinctive civilization—and forging a multilateral security framework that stands in contrast to the U.S.-centered alliance system.⁸² Through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Russia seeks to reinforce a comprehensive long-term dialogue partnership and achieve a strategic partnership with this multinational grouping. Russia's own doctrine states that it seeks to increase cooperation with ASEAN within related multilateral structures, including the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting. In addition,

Russia attaches importance to further improving another multinational organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), by strengthening the role it plays in regional and global affairs and expanding its membership.⁸³ Through the SCO, Russia attempts to maintain greater influence in Central Asia.⁸⁴

Russia also seeks closer economic cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region. This desire for economic cooperation has grown over the past decade, particularly following the global financial crisis that reduced the demand for Russian oil and the Western sanctions placed on Moscow after Crimea. This interest, however, might arguably be mostly opportunistic and driven by transactional motivations. At a time when Western sanctions are hurting Russia's economy and its energy exports to traditional partners are declining, the Indo-Pacific economies represent a source of investment, a market for resources, and a pathway around Western sanctions.

Apart from bilateral economic ties, Russia is pursuing multilateral means of cooperation. For example, Moscow "promotes broad mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the . . . region, which includes the opportunities offered by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum."⁸⁵ Russia also states that it seeks "a common, open and nondiscriminatory economic partnership and joint development space" for members of ASEAN, the SCO, and the Eurasian Economic Union to ensure "that integration processes in Asia-Pacific and Eurasia are complementary."⁸⁶ Russia also views China as a potential economic hedge if relations with the West deteriorate further.

China is Russia's predominant relationship focus in the Indo-Pacific. The two countries' relations during the Cold War were fractious, as differences over their doctrinal

interpretations of Marxism-Leninism led to a split in 1956. A decade later, the two came to blows in the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict, which resulted in deaths on both sides and catalyzed the transition in their respective relationships with the United States.⁸⁷ These Cold War memories have not been forgotten. There is little evidence that either country particularly likes or trusts the other, despite official comments on their relations being at the “best level in history.”⁸⁸ Today, many Russian military analysts privately express distrust of China—particularly its efforts in Central Asia and the Arctic—despite the fact that the two nations share a goal of reducing U.S. influence and disrupting the region’s U.S. alliance relationships.⁸⁹

In spite of their mutual suspicions, Russia and China’s shared goal of reorienting the Western-dominated global order has led them to cooperate on many fronts, including energy infrastructure and institutional development.⁹⁰ Officially, Russia desires a “comprehensive equal, and trust-based partnership and strategic cooperation” with China.⁹¹ In its national security doctrine, Russia claims: “Russia views common principled approaches adopted by the two countries to addressing the key issues on the global agenda as one of the core elements of regional and global stability.”⁹² Russia recognizes China as the dominant economic player in the region and is devoting significant resources to opening this economic relationship. Russia wants to explore new, largely transactional, avenues of cooperation, such as investment, trade, and arms sales. Russia supports the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) transiting through Russia.⁹³ Because Russia values economic development and stability but lacks resources, Russia does not view these

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projects with the same level of trepidation as many Western countries do.

Russia also continues to focus closely on its relationship with India. During the Cold War, India and the Soviet Union maintained a close relationship. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it was India’s biggest trading partner and military technology provider; aging Soviet-supplied military equipment is still a significant part of India’s arsenal.⁹⁴ The India-Russia relationship has always been based on multiple pillars of common interest.

Today, Russia wants to protect and maintain a close partnership and prevent India from developing a close relationship with the United States, particularly on the military-industrial side.⁹⁵ While there has been some improvement in economic cooperation between Russia and India in the last few years, the relationship is primarily about military technological cooperation with some Russian nuclear development. Russia supplied about 60 percent of India’s imported military equipment by value over the past five years.⁹⁶ The Russian dependence on military technical cooperation to sustain the bilateral relationship might be problematic in the long run, based on India’s

economic growth projections and doubts about Russia's ability to satisfy Indian demands. A prime example of this trend is the history of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. The joint venture, begun in 1998, initially saw less than 10 percent of the missile components manufactured in India. Today, India boasts that more than 75 percent of the BrahMos missile is manufactured indigenously.⁹⁷ India has reportedly held talks on the sale of its indigenous BrahMos missile to Vietnam, a move that would serve the interest of both Russia and India in balancing China's activity in the region.⁹⁸ The United States has also gained a significant share of the Indian arms market, with military sales to India rising from nearly nothing 15 years ago to approximately \$15 billion today.⁹⁹ Still, the Russia–India relationship remains close, thanks to personal attention from Putin. In May 2018, Putin hosted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an informal summit in Sochi, where the two leaders upgraded the bilateral relationship to a “special privileged strategic partnership.”¹⁰⁰

During the past two decades, the U.S. military has paid more attention to its relationship with India, particularly as U.S. ties with Pakistan have frayed and U.S. wariness of China has increased.¹⁰¹ Most recently, through the efforts of both nations, the U.S.–India relationship strengthened following the election of Modi in 2014.¹⁰² Stronger U.S.–India ties have renewed Russia's interest in maintaining its own special relationship with India and to potentially offset India's relationship with other countries via mechanisms like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.¹⁰³ Russia also focuses significant attention on India to attempt to keep China in check.

Besides key players such as China and India, Russia values relationships with other countries in the region,

including Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Koreas, and even Japan. For example, Russia seeks to maintain friendly relations with both North and South Korea and to de-escalate tension on the peninsula. This is rooted in Russia's interest in playing a role on the peninsula, as well as its support for denuclearization there. Russia has little interest in seeing the two Koreas unify under the democratic South, as that could strengthen U.S. influence in the region.¹⁰⁴

Russia's approach to achieving its objectives in the region is much less consistent and more opportunistic than its approach in the MENA. This is partly because of Russia's limited capabilities but also because of the greatly varied circumstances and relationships in the region. We do not know, for example, if Russia prioritizes pursuing opportunities to counter United States influence or if it is making efforts to actively diversify its links in the region beyond China for broader strategic reasons. It is likely a combination of both.

To achieve its regional objectives of expanded partnerships and multilateral groupings, Russia has focused on consolidating its partnerships with other regional players. It has done this in multiple spheres; by pursuing roles in multilateral regional security architecture negotiations and economic/investment groupings, Russia has ensured that its presence is felt in security-related affairs.¹⁰⁵ This has driven Russia's efforts with the SCO and the development of closer relations with ASEAN. Russia has also sought to enhance its status and influence through promotion of the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) association.¹⁰⁶ In economic and investment groupings, Russia has supported China's AIIB and BRI.

Russia has a program of foreign military arms sales to regional countries and is expanding its arms exports with key states in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁰⁷ Russia's relationship with Vietnam is an example of Russia's stepped-up regional efforts. Russia is Vietnam's biggest weapons supplier, and Russian companies are involved in several Vietnamese energy projects. Hanoi has purchased six Kilo-class Russian submarines; in 2018, Russia announced that Vietnam had placed a weapons order valued at over \$1 billion.¹⁰⁸ Russia's military efforts help improve access and (to a lesser extent than in the Mediterranean) influence. For example, driven partly out of its interest to ensure Russian Navy access to the South China Sea, Russia has been working to maintain numerous "access agreements" for its blue-water navy for port calls and repairs in numerous ASEAN countries, such as in Vietnam. Beyond basic port access, Russia has also sought to strengthen its comprehensive strategic partnership with Vietnam and expand multidimensional cooperation with Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and other states in the region.¹⁰⁹

Russia's economic pursuits in the region are driven by a redirection in trade flows and economic relations away from Europe; geopolitical tensions with the West have hurt Russia's economic relations there. While still relatively small in scale, Russian economic activity in the Indo-Pacific is growing, as many regional countries are actively seeking improved economic ties with Russia in the form of trade and greater investment.¹¹⁰

In particular, China is now Russia's largest trading partner. Energy deals are Russia's main line of effort for increasing trade with China, even though the terms are not always advantageous for Russia. For example, in 2014, Russia signed a widely publicized 30-year gas deal with

China is now Russia's largest trading partner. Energy deals are Russia's main line of effort for increasing trade with China.

China valued at \$400 billion. Most analysts believe that the Chinese got a lower price than the Russians wanted and that the deal will mean a loss for Russia (at least for the first several years).¹¹¹ Even as Russia pursues closer ties, it also seeks to hedge against China. Many Russian analysts consider Beijing's economic and commercial activities in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic a potential threat to Moscow.¹¹²

Russia's interactions with other countries in the region are less robust but growing. Russia claims to want good relations with Japan; its engagement is likely undertaken with the hope of making Japan more amenable to distancing itself from the United States. Russia does not think that it can realistically pull Japan away from the United States as an ally by offering major inducements. Russia is not threatening Japan, but the relationship is perpetually hampered by a lingering territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands, which were captured by Russia from Japan at the end of World War II; the two countries have never signed

a treaty to officially end that war. Negotiations over these issues bring Russia much-needed economic development resources for the Russian Far East and have likely contributed to the more than two dozen summit meetings between Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.¹¹³ Yet, despite the high-level summitry, the two remain far from resolving their differences.

Russia has also sought opportunities to inject itself into issues on the Korean Peninsula, even though its ability to do so is limited. In the past, given its historical ties with North Korea, Russia was a major player in negotiations related to North Korea's nuclear program. Russia's relationship with both Koreas, however, is restrained by the continuing division on the Peninsula. In recent years, it has been less active as its influence over Pyongyang has diminished. As such, Russia seeks to cooperate with China as they share the goals of preventing North Korean regime and instability collapse and the unification of the Korean peninsula under U.S.-led Western influence.

Russia is clearly devoting time and attention to multilateral cooperation and flexibly using diplomatic, economic, and military engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. However, because many of the targeted multilateral organizations are not integrated with U.S.-led institutions, Russian efforts to challenge the current international order and U.S. influence within it are limited. Arms sales and military cooperation with select regional nations are of slightly more concern. Russia's mixed views of China as a like-minded nation and a potential competitor seem to provide the best mechanism for ways to potentially benefit from Russian interests and actions in the region.

The Arctic

Climate change is slowly transforming the Arctic from a frozen maritime zone into a region with viable transit lanes and competing continental shelf sovereignty claims. Strategic competition in the area is likely to increase. Legitimate sovereignty claims might give Russia a strategic advantage in controlling many of the viable sea lanes in the region, and the rapid pace of environmental change might make it difficult for *anyone* to fully understand the terrain—political and real—of the future operating environment. The following section examines Russia's interests and actions in the Arctic.

It is worth noting that the Arctic is a unique operating environment. The vast distances and extreme weather conditions mean that infrastructure projects take longer and cost more; operations are more challenging and often require specialized equipment. Conducting Arctic operations requires more time and resources than in other regions, so it is important to plan ahead for any changes in force structure or relationships.

Russia has a deep connection to the Arctic. Today, Russia has four main interests there. First and foremost, like the Soviet Union before it, Russia seeks unfettered access to the Arctic to maintain its nuclear deterrence capability. This remains a priority; maintaining a nuclear deterrent is the first element of Russia's defense strategy and a key element of Russia's ambition to be viewed as a great power. The Arctic hosts more than two-thirds of Russia's nuclear warheads and provides excellent access to the Atlantic.¹¹⁴ The Arctic also provides the basing for strategic bombers and affords the most direct flight path to the United States. As access to the Arctic grows, Russia

likely will continue to restore old bases, create new ones, and increase protection for its nuclear deterrent capability.

Second, the growth in access to the Arctic is driving Russia to seek greater protection for its northern flank. Given its history of invasions and the scars of World War II, Russia prioritizes border protection. To that end, the most recent version of the Russian Arctic Strategy lists military security and protection of the state borders as one of the key activities of the Russian Federation in the Arctic.¹¹⁵ In 2017, Putin described the importance of the Arctic front this way:

Let us not forget about the purely military aspect of the matter: it is an extremely important region from the point of view of ensuring our country's defense capability. I do not want to stoke any fears here, but experts are aware that U.S. nuclear submarines remain on duty in northern Norway; the time it takes a missile to reach Moscow is 15 minutes.¹¹⁶

Third, Russia seeks to secure the Northern Sea Route (NSR) to fully exploit the vast reserves of natural resources in the Arctic (see Figure 1). The NSR runs from the Barents Sea, near the Russian border with Norway, to the Bering Strait near Alaska. Because the NSR is in Russian territorial waters, ships transiting the NSR need the permission of Russian authorities and must pay transit fees. The NSR is cited as a potential rival to the Suez Canal because it could cut transit times between Asia and Europe. For example, a ship needs about 34 days to sail from South Korea to Germany through the Suez Canal; the same journey would take only 23 days via the NSR.¹¹⁷ Previously considered impossible because of almost year-round ice coverage, Arctic liner shipping through the NSR might become economically feasible around 2040 if the ice cover continues to

FIGURE 1
Overview of Arctic Northern Sea Routes



SOURCE: Figure from Business Insider, used by permission.

diminish at the present rate.¹¹⁸ Russia already uses the route to ship liquid natural gas to Europe and Asia. In September 2018, the first container ship navigated the NSR carrying cargo as part of a commercial proof of concept test, and China is expressing interest in a “Polar Silk Road.”¹¹⁹

Finally, Russia possesses vast oil and gas reserves in the Arctic and would like to exploit those supplies. According to the U.S. Geologic Survey, the entire Arctic region could contain as much as 90 billion barrels of oil and 47 trillion cubic meters of natural gas; the Russian zone might hold 48 billion barrels of that oil and 43 trillion cubic meters of that natural gas (14 percent of Russia's oil and 40 percent of its gas reserves).¹²⁰ Putin has stated publicly that Russia's

objective is to produce approximately 30 percent of all hydrocarbons in the Arctic by 2050.¹²¹

Russia has a clear record of military and economic activity in the Arctic. However, Russia, at least currently, works within the existing guidelines and international agencies that provide the limited governance of the Arctic.

The year 2008 marked a clear turning point for Russian military activities in the Arctic. In that year, Russia announced that its fleet was resuming a warship presence in the Arctic, and military ships have patrolled the Arctic waters ever since. Russian strategic bombers also flew over the Arctic in 2008 for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Russian bombers with inflight refueling capability now regularly patrol the Arctic.¹²² Russia ramped up its military efforts in the Arctic in 2014, when it announced several initiatives and an organizational change. Russia created a Northern Joint Strategic Command based in Murmansk to coordinate all military assets in the Arctic region (which were previously divided among three different commands). Russia also began rebuilding Cold War-era military bases and constructing new ones along the NSR. Russia created an Arctic Brigade out of the 200th Motor Rifle Brigade based close to the Finnish border, and a second brigade is planned. Both brigades are designated to receive navy and air components by 2020. Russia has also signaled its intent to establish Arctic border guard units in such locations as Arkhangelsk and Murmansk and to create a counterterrorism center in Murmansk.¹²³ In late 2018, Russia also announced that Russia's 2019 major military exercise (Tsentr-2019) would take place on a portion of the NSR.¹²⁴ While Russia has clearly established or renewed its capabilities in the Arctic, its military posture in the region remains limited and is arguably not

focused on the Arctic alone but is part of a comprehensive reform effort that covers the entire military. As with overall military reform, Russia is unlikely to be able to match its rhetoric with actual capability given the constraints of the Russian economy, the impact of Western sanctions, and the overall drop in oil prices. Russia's military developments in the Arctic should therefore be acknowledged but are not necessarily cause for alarm.

Russia's efforts to bolster the economic potential of the Arctic and the NSR are equally ambitious and challenged. At the end of August 2017, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said that Russia would finance the development of the Arctic continental shelf and the economy of the local areas with more than \$2.8 billion by 2025. Medvedev said that Russia's Arctic development program would focus on three areas: boosting economic growth, developing sea infrastructure, and developing the continental shelf with modern technology and equipment. Russian companies Rosneft and Gazprom Neft are the only two companies authorized to drill for oil in the Russian Arctic, and they have only a few wells in service. Gazprom Neft operates the only oil-producing platform in Russia's Arctic (the well was drilled in 2013). Rosneft began drilling the northernmost well on the Russian Arctic shelf in 2017 and is drilling to "study [the Arctic's] geology, search for more oil, and define future drilling strategies."¹²⁵ Russia's oil exploration is hampered by U.S. sanctions that, since 2014, have prohibited the export of goods, services, or technology in support of exploration or production of Russian deep water, Arctic offshore, or shale projects that have the potential to produce oil. Russia lacks not only the full financing but also much of the technology needed for deep water drilling. Following years of pronouncements

dating back to the Medvedev presidency that Russia would form a Ministry for the Arctic or at least a special state corporation to oversee the region, Russia recently established a NSR Directorate, charged with responsibility for regional infrastructure development as well as running the nuclear icebreaker fleet. Russia is investing in new equipment, including three new nuclear-powered and four diesel-powered icebreakers.¹²⁶ However, even with the proposed investment in the Arctic, Russia might not have the necessary infrastructure, including multiple ports and support facilities, in place to support trade on the NSR for at least another decade.¹²⁷ That has not stopped Russia from signaling that it might, as early as 2019, tighten control over the NSR by requiring foreign warships to notify Russia before being able to pass through the Arctic.¹²⁸

Even as Russia has built up its military presence and signaled a shift toward restricting access to the NSR, Russia has maintained a generally accommodating approach with other Arctic states. Russia benefits from a cooperative stance on Arctic issues for three main reasons: First, it stands to secure its continental shelf claims through existing international mechanisms, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Arctic Council; second, a few key Arctic issues, such as search and rescue and environmental cleanup actions, require a collective response because of the difficulties of operating in the harsh Arctic environment; and, third, economic development and investments benefit from a peaceful and cooperative environment.¹²⁹

Coastal states normally have the right to exploit their continental shelf only up to 200 nm, but the UNCLOS provides that such rights can be extended if the continental shelf naturally extends beyond the 200-nm limit.¹³⁰ Russia

first filed a claim for an extended continental shelf in 2001 and submitted a revised claim in 2015. Russia's resubmission, made at the request of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, now covers more than 463,000 square miles of sea shelf in the Arctic, including an area around the North Pole.¹³¹ The commission's recommendations only apply to the rights to exploit the seabed. Waters above the continental shelf located outside the 200-nm border of coastal states are considered the high seas, which are, according to the UNCLOS, "open to all States, whether coastal or landlocked."¹³² Even if the shelf areas hold no near-term economic or strategic benefit for decades to come, they are still important politically and ideologically to Russia. Until the claims are resolved, which could take many years, Russia likely will continue to follow the established process.

Russia also has a history of cooperation in other areas of Arctic collaboration and governance. There are multiple examples of cooperation among Arctic nations in the form of political and economic bodies, treaties and agreements, and exercises. The diversity of these fora and activities demonstrates that Russia benefits from collaborating with other Arctic nations on topics ranging from search and rescue to environmental response. Even the United States and Russia cooperate on several activities; this cooperation has resulted in a generally peaceful relationship on Arctic affairs. In 2021, Russia is scheduled to assume the chair position of the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum that addresses nondefense regional issues. As its term as chair approaches, Moscow is expected to market the NSR as a commercially sound and secure international transport route.¹³³ Russia values and abides by the existing mechanisms and bodies in part because it already enjoys

an influential role as an Arctic state. Russia also seeks to balance its need for Chinese investment in Arctic infrastructure against China's growing influence in the region; China aims to enhance trade and transportation between Europe and Asia through the Arctic via a Polar Silk Road.¹³⁴ For example, Russia was initially reluctant to allow China observer status on the Arctic council. Given Russia's suspicion of China and its increased activity and interest in the Arctic, Western collaboration with Russia could provide a means to influence Russian behavior and ideally guide emerging Arctic laws and norms in a way that most benefits the United States and its partners and allies.

Latin America

Russia prioritizes the MENA, the Indo-Pacific, and the Arctic, but it also has strong interests in Africa and Latin America. We include this section and a section on Africa to demonstrate that Russia has some level of interests worldwide and does act on those interests. However, these sections only provide a sampling of Russia's actions, reinforcing that Russia's interests are global rather than just regional.

As in other regions, Russian interests in Latin America include the desire to renew Cold War-era relationships, expand the market for Russian arms sales, and demonstrate that Russia is a political actor on the world stage. Russia has also sought exploration rights in Latin America oil and gas fields and seeks to develop an anti-U.S. mindset in the region.¹³⁵ More recently, Russia is seeking ways to avoid economic isolation and is taking advantage of the fact that Russian military activity in Latin America creates planning problems for U.S. defense of the homeland. Most

concerning is Russia's interest in working long term to undermine U.S. security. During 2015 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, General John Kelly, then-commander of the U.S. Southern Command, said, "[a]s part of its global strategy, Russia is using power projection in an attempt to erode U.S. leadership and challenge U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere."¹³⁶

Russia's reengagement with Latin America began in 2000, after ten years of dormancy following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early 2000s, Russia developed an agenda for scientific and technical cooperation, combating narcotrafficking, and political consultation between respective foreign ministries. For nearly a decade, these initiatives were more aspirational than operational. In 2008, Russia began a concerted effort to form alliances around commercial deals, military arms sales, investment in energy projects, and agricultural cooperation with four countries especially unfriendly toward the United States: Argentina, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.¹³⁷ Shifting attitudes toward the United States have increased opportunities for Russia to encourage anti-U.S. sentiment and advance Russia's own interests.

Arguably the two most troubling examples of Russian activity in Latin America are in Cuba and Venezuela. In 2014, Russia forgave 90 percent of Cuba's \$35 billion Soviet-era debt and continues to push military and broader trade with Cuba. Russia supplies trucks, rail cars, spare parts, and transport aircraft to Cuba and began shipping fuel to Cuba for the first time in decades in 2014. Because Cuba is unlikely to be able to repay any future debt, most experts believe that Russia is supporting Cuba to step up Russian military and espionage activities on the island. Russia regularly docks intelligence ships in Havana while conducting

operations in the Gulf of Mexico and along the east coast of the United States, and it is seeking port access from other Latin American countries for its naval vessels.¹³⁸ Russia has even discussed reopening a military electronic surveillance base in Cuba, although that seems far from certain.¹³⁹

Russia's relationship with Venezuela is more complicated, but it is also a good example of Russia's approach to its Latin American interests. Russian interests in the country range from Venezuelan oil projects and military contracts to the value of having an anti-U.S. ally in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁴⁰ Putin and former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez first met in 2001, and Venezuela became the most important overseas investment target for Russian oil companies. Venezuela was on track to become the largest export market for Russian arms after India.¹⁴¹ However, Venezuela's oil revenues account for about 95 percent of its export earnings; when the oil price dropped sharply in 2014, Venezuela lost access to foreign currency and began experiencing hyperinflation. Russia has restructured Venezuelan debt twice since 2014 to help stabilize the government and economy.¹⁴² Upon return from a visit to Russia in December 2018, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro claimed to have secured \$6 billion in investment deals.¹⁴³ Russia is likely using the debt restructuring and Venezuela's disdain for the United States to gain greater influence, basing, and mineral rights.

Militarily, Russia uses a variety of approaches to influence Venezuela. A relatively concerning recent example is the 6,200-mile flight of two Russian Tu-160 bombers and two support aircraft to Venezuela. This is the third time since 2008 that Russia has sent nuclear-capable bombers to Venezuela. On this last trip, the bombers later flew a training mission near the Caribbean, signaling Russia's ability

to threaten the United States from the south. Besides an opportunity to display a long-range nuclear capability, the exercise is a signal of support for the Venezuelan regime at a time when both Russia and Venezuela are experiencing increased tensions with the United States. More recently, Russia sent two aircraft and 100 military "advisers" to Venezuela in March 2019, resulting in multiple public complaints from the United States.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, debt forgiveness and military and financial support can potentially backfire, and such ties would make the fall of Maduro more costly to Russia. Moreover, the opposition to Maduro is supported by most South American countries, so Russia's backing for him could undermine Russia's image both regionally and globally.¹⁴⁵

Russian interests and actions in Latin America are relatively modest, but they are potentially more threatening to the U.S. homeland because of the threat from intelligence collection facilities in Cuba and bombers launched from bases in Venezuela. It would be wise to plan for this continued presence and develop a strategy to offset it, or at least account for it. As the former commander of U.S. Southern Command, Admiral Kurt Tidd, put it: "Left

Russian actions in Latin America are relatively modest, but they are potentially more threatening to the U.S. homeland.

unchecked, Russian access and placement could eventually transition from a regional spoiler to a critical threat to the U.S. homeland.¹⁴⁶

Africa

In Africa, Russia wants to renew and expand its influence and foster a new power bloc. Africa is uniquely valuable to Russia diplomatically because African states have the largest geographic voting bloc in various international institutions, including the UNSC. In the security realm, Russia also seeks more involvement in Africa. Russia's diplomatic and military objectives are often pursued through Russian investments, mainly in oil, gas, and nuclear energy.¹⁴⁷ Russian trade with African countries has grown significantly in recent years.¹⁴⁹

Russia has the legacy of old Soviet ties to various African countries from which to reestablish relationships and build ties with various political parties and movements across the continent.¹⁵⁰ As it does for other regions, Russia's 2016 Foreign Policy Concept details its approach to Africa. Like elsewhere, Russia starts to build relationships by improving political dialogue and promoting mutually beneficial trade and economic ties. It then aims to increase comprehensive cooperation that serves common interests. Once it has established bilateral ties, it looks for ways to help prevent or solve regional conflicts and crisis situations, as well as facilitate postconflict settlement. Russia also seeks ways to promote partnership ties with the African Union and subregional organizations.¹⁵¹

As in the Indo-Pacific and MENA regions, Russia positions itself as an alternative to the Western order through its offers of support to African countries.¹⁵² This is most

evident in Russia's trade and investment involvement on the continent. As in Latin America, Russia also uses debt relief as a tool for influence in Africa, offering debt relief in return for arms sales or natural-resource exploration rights for Russian companies. Algeria, Benin, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia, among others, have received Russian debt relief over the past decade. In 2017, Putin claimed that Russia was writing off more than \$20 billion of African debt "as part of an initiative to help out the world's poorest and most deeply indebted nations."¹⁵³ These moves, combined with publicity via such news outlets as *Sputnik*, demonstrate that Moscow can enhance its influence in Africa through debt relief despite its relatively marginal importance as a trade partner with the continent. Russia also has sought to invest in the region's oil and gas sectors and mining, although its efforts to do so pale in comparison to those of China.¹⁵⁴ Russia is also approaching some African countries regarding nuclear power plants and promotion of training of nuclear energy workers in Africa.¹⁵⁵

Russia's opportunistic, transactional approach to gaining influence on the continent is also demonstrated through its arms sales. Russia has been a key supplier of arms to Africa since the Soviet era, and Russian arms are favored in Africa because they are inexpensive compared with Western arms and usually simpler and easier to maintain.¹⁵⁶ Russia sells billions of dollars of arms to Africa every year; 35 percent of Africa's arms imports come from Russia (although this constitutes only about 12 percent of Russia's arms exports).¹⁵⁷ In December 2017, the United Nations (UN) exempted Russia from the arms embargo on the Central African Republic. This exemption occurred after Russia requested that the UN allow it to sell light arms and ammunition to the country's military.¹⁵⁸ Rather

than pursuing every African state, Russia targets vulnerable fragile states, like the Central African Republic, that have intense security demands and requirements and, in some cases, also have rocky relations with the West.¹⁵⁹

Russia's opportunism and positioning in the military sphere extends beyond simple arms sales. Russia conducts military exercises with several African states—often states that also have trade ties with Russia.¹⁶⁰ Russia has also opened equipment maintenance locations on the continent and has been exploring the possibility of sharing a military facility with the Chinese in Djibouti.¹⁶¹ While the numbers are relatively small, Russia also participates in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, with troops in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sudan, and South Sudan.¹⁶² In 2018, Russia also began sending private military contractors to the Central African Republic to train the security forces of that country's president—representative of the multilevel approach that Russia uses to influence other countries.¹⁶³ These actions also allow Russia to pursue, where appropriate, base access agreements.¹⁶⁴

Russia's involvement in Africa does not necessarily pose a direct danger to U.S. interests, but it does indicate a growing Russian influence in Africa that could promote arms proliferation in already-vulnerable nations and reduce the strength of Western-led institutions and norms. South Africa is a good example of Russian influence, as it is one of the continent's largest economies and favors a close relationship with Russia. The two countries' ties, especially through the BRICS framework, are envisioned as a counterweight in Africa to the U.S.-led order. Russia is effectively trying to pull South Africa, and the rest of the continent, away from Western norms, hoping that South

Africa can be part of a coalition of rising powers willing to challenge the Western-dominated international system.¹⁶⁵ It is not yet clear that Russia has made substantial headway, but it seems likely that Russia's stronger commitment to relationships in Africa will result in greater, albeit incremental, progress over time.¹⁶⁶

Because Russia lacks a traditional foothold in Africa beyond its historical Soviet ties, its ability to establish strong relationships in Africa is limited but should not be discounted. Russia's transactional approach to its relationships on the continent often suits strongman leaders. The United States should therefore consider the long-term implications of reduced influence in Africa.

Major Points of Competition and Convergence with the United States

This overview of Russia's global interests highlights that Russia is strengthening relations with regional players across multiple domains to weaken the United States and undermine U.S. influence around the globe. In every region we examined, one of Russia's motivations for increased presence is either explicitly or implicitly linked to offsetting or replacing U.S. influence. Russia appears to have a more comprehensive, albeit lean and targeted, global strategy than the United States.

It is important to recognize and acknowledge areas of potential *major* competition with the United States. Russia is universally committed to increasing its own influence and strength while simultaneously minimizing U.S. influence. For example, in the Indo-Pacific, Russia is interested

not only in finding a way to provide economic assistance through a Russian-led system rather than a U.S. or European-led system, but is also seeking to minimize U.S. influence and weaken the U.S.-led alliance system, particularly in places like South Korea and Japan.¹⁶⁷ In the MENA, Russia has demonstrated an interest and ability to substantially influence developments in the region. More precisely, Russia can raise the cost to the United States of pursuing policy options that conflict with Moscow's interests.¹⁶⁸ In the Arctic, Russia will continue to seek protection for its northern flank and control over the NSR in its territorial waters. In Latin America and Africa, Russia pursues an approach to transactional arrangements without the same restrictions and demands imposed by the West, thereby gaining influence and access.

Arms sales provide an interesting case study of how Russian efforts build long-term influence. In 2017, Russia surpassed the United Kingdom to claim the second place in global arms sales (behind the United States).¹⁶⁹ Although arms sales do not directly guarantee loyalty, numerous examples exist of countries maintaining relationships with their arms providers to ensure continued access to equipment and parts. In effect, purchasing Russian military hardware could lock countries into close defense relationships with Moscow for decades. This effect is especially complex in the Indo-Pacific region, where many U.S. allies depend on Russian arms sales to supply their military but also work in concert with the United States to offset China's growing influence. In this environment, a one-size-fits-all approach to arms sanctions might hamper U.S. efforts.

An important, but often overlooked, conclusion is that Russia's efforts are not universally to the detriment of U.S. interests. U.S. and Russian interests still have some limited

areas of convergence and potentially even cooperation.¹⁷⁰ Typically, however, most analysts focus on broad categories of potential cooperation rather than considering potential shared interests by region. For example, one report suggests that there is room for cooperation through the UN system and international economic institutions to avoid major war and improve economic cooperation. The examination of the various geographic regions in this study demonstrates that the approach is not so simple. U.S. leaders need to carefully consider each region and the potential shared interests while also acknowledging the overarching objective of Russia to weaken the United States. In the Indo-Pacific, for example, Washington and Moscow have a mutual interest in stability on the Korean Peninsula and limiting the influence of China. Likewise, in the MENA, Russia's interest in countering extremism and terrorism is somewhat aligned with the interests of the United States, although there is room for skepticism based on differing definitions of terrorism and approaches to addressing it. In the Arctic, Russia values its accepted role as a key decision-maker in existing bodies like the Arctic Council, and that could lead to a path for developing Arctic rules and norms that are mutually beneficial. In Latin America and Africa, both Russia and the United States are interested in providing trade and economic assistance, preventing regional conflicts and crisis situations, and facilitating postconflict settlement across the continent—but each does so for its own objectives rather than shared interests.

When examined in a global context, there are more areas of competition than convergence between the interests of Russia and the United States. In the MENA, Russia seeks to eclipse U.S. primacy and help shape the major security and economic landscape in the area, while limiting

U.S. interventions in the region. Russia's intervention in Syria was initially driven by a perceived necessity to prop up an ally. It has now become the catalyst for a broader expansion of military, economic, and diplomatic actions designed to increase Russian influence while decreasing U.S. preeminence. Russia also aims to maintain and increase regional investment in Russia and maintain relatively stable energy prices. The potential for cooperation on counterterrorism remains, but, based on Russian actions in Syria thus far, it seems an unlikely area for real cooperation.¹⁷¹ Syria is the most visible area of potential conflict with the United States in the region, but by no means is it the only area for potential competition. U.S. policymakers would benefit from an enhanced understanding of Russian interests and objectives in the MENA and should develop a strategy for the region that works in concert with the overall strategy for countering Russian global actions. Although Russia's ambitions and actions in the region are not comprehensive, their targeted approach works toward the overall Russian objective of decreasing U.S. influence.

Competition with Russia is especially troublesome when Russia cooperates with other countries, such as China or Iran, to the detriment of the United States. For example, in the Indo-Pacific, the two countries share a similar vision of a world that seeks to minimize U.S. influence. Given current U.S. foreign policy priorities, the objective of a reduced U.S. presence and greater Russian influence seems more plausible. Russia is also working to build its presence in Southeast Asia, which serves to counterbalance both the United States and China. In addition, Russia continues to strengthen its special relationship with India.

The Arctic has the best possibilities for cooperation toward shared objectives, as Russia values and abides by the

Russian efforts are not universally in conflict with U.S. interests; there are still limited areas of convergence.

existing regional bodies and rules. Because Russia also has concerns about growing Chinese influence in the Arctic, the United States should use existing mechanisms to help shape the Arctic rules and norms in a way most suitable to the United States. Because the United States is not a party to the UNCLOS, the United States should have an intermediary that is an UNCLOS signatory lead the effort. The United States should avoid its own elevated rhetoric and military actions in the Arctic that could be perceived as escalatory in a region that matters greatly to Russia. Such actions seem more likely to exacerbate Russian concerns and might even push Russia closer to China.

Similar friction points are visible, albeit to a lesser extent, in Latin America and Africa. Russia competes with the United States and China for authority and resources in both regions for similar reasons. Latin America provides close approach points to the United States and, arguably, a greater ability to directly affect the U.S. homeland. Africa has been and remains a lucrative venue for Russian arms sales, and, diplomatically, it is of strategic interest in terms

of the geopolitical support it offers to Russia via the large geographic voting bloc of African countries.

The Russian objectives that most directly counter U.S. interests are expansion of its own influence and reduction of U.S. influence; opposition to the deepening of U.S.–India ties; opposition to the extension of NATO infrastructure or force posture; opposition to the expansion of EU influence in economic, political, or military spheres; Russian support for Syria, North Korea, and Iran; and increasing Russian military access around the world.

How U.S. Policymakers Can Contribute

Table 1 provides a summary of Russia’s key policy objectives and regional actions. The table is not intended to be an explicit indication of exactly what actions Russia takes for a specific objective but is instead an indication of the variety of actions undertaken by Russia and how they can be seen to serve different objectives.

The observations noted in each region about how Russia pursues its interests, objectives, and actions in those regions uncovered five major insights. First, Moscow views the current international order as a system based on U.S. dominance and actively seeks to undermine that paradigm. Russia desires to be recognized as a great power and aims to accelerate a transition from a unipolar world to a multipolar world in which it holds a key voice in global affairs. This belief is explicit in various Russian policy documents and publications and consistent in Russian objectives and actions in each region. Second, while Russia still prioritizes its near abroad, it is now taking a calculated and selective global approach to rebuilding its great power

status. Although Moscow has greater capabilities now than at the end of the Cold War, it still has fewer resources than the United States, Europe, or China. It therefore pursues opportunistic actions and a limited approach to building its relationships and offering alternatives to the U.S.-led order. At present, it appears to be prioritizing the MENA while also engaging selectively in other regions based on power vacuums, conflict, or opportunities to exploit energy availability. Third, Russia flexibly uses a variety of geopolitical levers to seek out conditions favorable to its objectives based on historical relationships, resources, and tactical opportunities. The MENA, the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America provide examples of Russia renewing previous relationships. The approach varies by region based on the perceived opportunities rather than a set pattern of engagement. Fourth, Russia acts less on ideological motivations based on a specific political philosophy, such as the advancement of Communism pursued during the Cold War. Instead, it applies a pragmatic, *realpolitik* approach. This approach allows greater flexibility but also comes with built-in contradictions and trade-offs that might decrease the future chances for success. Finally, despite limitations, Russia’s capability to act globally is potent, even if there are limits to how much it can do. Russia’s economy remains relatively stagnant, but Russia continues to find ways to influence regional events, as well as the global discourse.

Given the progress Russia has made in various regions, the United States should treat Russia as a resurgent great power with global interests, not just a regional power with limited interests. Russia’s global relationships and ties create pretexts for opportunistic involvement and for actions that can contravene U.S. interests. Nations that fail

TABLE 1
Russia's Key Objectives and Select Regional Actions

Key Objectives	Regions and Select Actions				
	Middle East/North Africa	Indo-Pacific Region	Arctic	Latin America	Africa
Increase Russian global great power influence	Pursue compartmentalized, transactional relationships; offer no-strings-attached arms sales	Provide economic assistance through a Russian-led system instead of a U.S.- or European-led system; engage BRICS	Increase Russian strategic bomber and maritime patrol operations	Leverage Cuban and Venezuelan debt forgiveness; establish basing options close to the United States	Engage BRICS; increase bilateral economic and political ties; participate in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa
Minimize U.S. influence	Increase cooperation with Iran; continue engagement in Syria; establish closer ties with Israel, Egypt, Libya (Haftar)	Expand engagement with ASEAN; increase military engagement with India; hold summit meetings between Putin and Abe; increase engagement with Vietnam; seek to strengthen SCO	Leverage cooperative stance in the Arctic; balance greater Chinese involvement	Engage with anti-U.S. political leaders and opposition figures (Argentina, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela); seek to develop an anti-U.S. mindset in the region	Recognize and leverage African states as large voting bloc in various international institutions, including the UN
Maintain stable, friendly governments and counter regime change	Support Assad, Egyptian military	Support status quo on Korean Peninsula	Not applicable	Maintain support for Maduro regime	Target vulnerable fragile states, like the Central African Republic, that have intense security demands and requirements; maximize use of transactional approach to relationships that often suit strongman leaders
Increase military access/power projection	Secure access to Tartus; establish Egypt strategic cooperation treaty; create options for potential access or basing rights in Egypt and Libya	Establish access agreements for Navy with ASEAN countries; continue and increase arms sales to regional states, such as India and Vietnam	Increase military security and protection of the state border as one of the key activities; create Northern Joint Strategic Command	Increase military and intelligence engagement with Cuba; seek port access for Navy; fly bombers to Venezuela	Introduce private military contractors in the Central African Republic; seek more naval basing; sign military cooperation agreements with Guinea, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Madagascar, and the Central African Republic

Table 1—Continued

Key Objectives	Regions and Select Actions				
	Middle East/North Africa	Indo-Pacific Region	Arctic	Latin America	Africa
Expand Russian markets, investment, sanctions evasion	Maintain trade, consumer markets, oil and gas fields, and customers for nuclear energy projects throughout the MENA	Engage with APEC; expand engagement with China and India; expand arms sales	Develop NSR as a rival to the Suez Canal and establish Russian control; finance the development of the Arctic continental shelf and the economy of the local areas	Seek commercial deals; pursue Venezuela as key investment target for Russian oil companies and as a large export market for Russian arms	Increase arms exports; invest in African oil and gas sectors and mining; promote mutually beneficial trade and economic ties; use debt relief in return for arms sales or natural resource exploration rights for Russian companies
Increase energy and natural resources	Cooperate with Iran on nuclear energy; strike oil production deal with Saudi Arabia	Sign gas deal with China	Secure the region and fully exploit the vast energy reserves	Seek exploration rights in Latin American oil and gas fields	Further energy investments: oil, gas, nuclear; invest in mining; approach countries regarding nuclear power plants and promotion of training of nuclear energy workers in Africa

to recognize this risk or are slow to do so allow Russia to expand its gains. The United States should not underestimate Russia’s desire to regain its great power status and to undermine the role of the United States as a global leader. It would be beneficial for the United States to pay closer attention to Russian intentions and actions globally rather than focusing narrowly on its activities in Russia’s near abroad. However, the United States must not overestimate Russia’s capabilities in any one dimension. Rather, the United States can acknowledge Russia’s lean and opportunistic approach to global relationships.

Recognizing Russia’s global interests and its opportunistic approach to bilateral relationships can help the United States implement its current global strategy while developing a more holistic global response that recognizes

Russia’s intentions and limited, albeit often effective, capabilities. The key is to focus U.S. actions on those areas and issues that are the highest priority for U.S. interests. The United States should also recognize that competition with Russia does not always have to be a zero-sum game. The United States would benefit from looking for ways that Russian actions offset China and consciously consider whether to allow that behavior to go unchecked. As part of this strategy, the United States would do well to incorporate its allies and partners because they also have a stake in the same liberal order that Russia seeks to undermine. They also multiply the U.S. potential to counter or adapt Russian actions to U.S. objectives. By strengthening existing allied and partner relationships and acknowledging the

complex relationships some have with Russia, the United States will be better poised to protect the existing order.

Russia is not the Soviet Union. Although it has global interests, Russia cannot be everywhere—nor does it intend to be. At the same time, downplaying Russian activities when a firm response is warranted can encourage and embolden Moscow to act more aggressively. To understand Russia's global interests in today's world, we must separate concrete Russian interests and actions from mere aspirations and avoid simply treating Russia like a smaller version of the Soviet Union.

Areas for Further Research

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, most analysts and policymakers did not consider Russia a global player. Only recently has there been recognition that Russia's global influence, limited as it is, can affect U.S. interests. While scholars have recently begun to renew analysis of Russia's global interests, objectives, and actions, a tremendous gap in knowledge remains about what drives Russia's international engagements, their effectiveness, and the implications of these efforts. During our research, we identified several gaps in the current research. Detailed analysis on Russia's relationships with allies and partners beyond its near abroad is sparse. There is a potential deep research agenda that can be pursued to gain a better understanding of this. Although the list below is not complete, it offers a look at some of the more critical areas that would benefit U.S. policymakers confronting a more globally active Russia.

- Does Russia have a specific regional priority for global engagement, and, if so, what is it? This

research should create a better understanding of select bilateral relationships Russia has with countries beyond its near abroad. Researchers should focus on a particular country or countries to encourage more-detailed case studies of individual bilateral relationships.

- How, and with what tools, does Russia most effectively pursue ties with individual countries?
- How effective is Russia at using international and regional organizations to pursue its national objectives?
- How much, if at all, are Russian efforts eroding U.S. influence?
- Which Russian actions are most effective at disrupting U.S. interests?
- How successful has Russia been at weakening the U.S.-led alliance system in Europe and the Indo-Pacific?
- How significant to Russian interests are U.S. actions in various regions?
- Where are there possible areas of convergence and divergence for the United States and Russia in different geographical regions? We have offered initial insights, but a more careful and rigorous analysis is warranted.
- When should Russian actions trigger a U.S. response, and what should that response be?
- Is it possible for the United States to develop a strategy that mixes competition with cooperation by region, given the lack of global integration of U.S. planning?

Endnotes

¹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 1990.

² This period of economic recovery was necessary and acknowledged even by Russian military leaders. For example, in 2006, Russian Chief of the General Staff Yuri Nikolayevich Baluyevsky claimed that the primary task for Russia was to improve the economy and reduce dependence on Western countries. See Yuri Nikolayevich Baluyevsky, “On the Force Structure of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,” *Vestnik of the Academy of Military Sciences*, No. 1, 2006. This emphasis on recovery followed a pattern of reform and rebuilding first observed after Russia was defeated in the 1853–1856 Crimean War. At that time, Russia’s foreign minister, Alexander Gorchakov, famously noted: “Russia is not sulking, she is composing herself.” For a full discussion of the Gorchakov concept of recovery and its reemergence in recent years, see Fleming Splidsboel-Hansen, “Past and Future Meet: Aleksandr Gorchakov and Russian Foreign Policy,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 3, 2002, pp. 377–396.

³ An analysis of Russian military speeches going back to 2006 shows a clear trend of Russian emphasis on a multipolar world and the need for a force structure to protect Russian interests. See Yuri Nikolayevich Baluyevsky, “Regional and Global Threat Assessment; Nature of Future War; Future Force Structure of the Russian Armed Forces,” *Vestnik of the Academy of Military Sciences*, No. 1, 2008. “After 2014, the horizons of Russian foreign policy shifted considerably, as the scale and scope of its activities expanded both geographically and operationally” (Paul Stronski and Richard Sokolsky, *The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2017, p. 10. As of July 15, 2018: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_320_web_final.pdf).

⁴ This definition includes Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It also recognizes that, although this is a common definition of Russia’s near abroad, “the near abroad does not have an uncontested geographic range” (Andrew Radin and Clinton Bruce Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1826-OSD, 2017, p. 10. As of June 7, 2018: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1826.html).

⁵ Yuri Nikolayevich Baluyevsky, “Theoretical and Methodological Bases for the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” *Vestnik of the Academy of Military Sciences*, No. 1, 2007.

⁶ For an example of senior Russian military views on this issue, see Baluyevsky, 2008. For a Western analysis of Russian interests, see Olga Oliker, Christopher S. Chivvis, Keith Crane, Olesya Tkacheva, and Scott Boston, *Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context, A Reassessment*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-144-A, 2015. As of July 19, 2018: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE144.html>; Olga Oliker, Keith Crane, Lowell H. Schwartz, and Catherine Yusupov, *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-768-AF, 2009. As of July 19, 2018: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG768.html>

⁷ For example, see Kari Roberts, “Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse,” *International Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 2017. As of July 16, 2018: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020702017692609#articleCitationDownloadContainer>

⁸ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017, p. 2. As of July 22, 2019: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

⁹ Trump, 2017, p. 25.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., January 2018, p. 2. As of July 26, 2019: <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

¹¹ Tim Sweijs, Willem Theo Oosterveld, Emily Knowles, and Menno Schellekens, *Why Are Pivot States So Pivotal? The Role of Pivot States in Regional and Global Security*, The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2014, p. 9. As of January 19, 2019: https://hcss.nl/sites/default/files/files/reports/Why_are_Pivot_States_so_Pivotal__The_Role_of_Pivot_States_in_Regional_and_Global_Security_C.pdf

¹² For more acknowledgement that Russia is a resurgent great power, see the 2018 U.S. NDS and its discussion of the “re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition between nations,” especially China and Russia (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 1).

¹³ Russian military leadership speeches and publications from at least 2006 to 2017 refer to the need to return to a multipolar world order. In 2006, Chief of the Russian General Staff Yuri Nikolayevich Baluyevsky wrote that the former bipolar world was transitioning to a multipolar

world, with regional leaders for each pole (Baluyevsky, 2006). See also Radin and Reach, 2017, pp. 32–35; Michael Kofman, “Raiding and International Brigandry: Russia’s Strategy for Great Power Competition,” *War on the Rocks*, June 14, 2018. As of July 20, 2018: <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/raiding-and-international-brigandry-russias-strategy-for-great-power-competition>

¹⁴ In this context, great power is defined as (1) having a major seat in the international order; (2) exercising influence in the immediate region; (3) ability to maintain regime security; (4) parity with global rivals; and (5) not being ignorable in any context internationally where Russia wants to be heard.

¹⁵ Nuno P. Monteiro, “Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity Is Not Peaceful,” *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Winter 2011–2012, p. 11, citing Stephen S. Cohen and J. Bradford DeLong, *The End of Influence: What Happens When Other Countries Have the Money*, New York: Basic Books, 2010; Radin and Reach, 2017, pp. 50–51.

¹⁶ Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017, p. 4.

¹⁷ In this Perspective, we focus discussion on Russia’s intent to undermine the leading role for the United States. Where appropriate, we mention Russia’s interests or intent vis-à-vis NATO, Europe, other nations, or the rest of the world. Russia’s ambitions are not solely about undermining the United States, so it is important to offer distinctions when they apply (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017, p. 27).

¹⁸ Heather A. Conley, James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov, and Martin Vladimirov, *The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2016. As of May 6, 2018: https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/1601017_Conley_KremlinPlaybook_Web.pdf

¹⁹ Michael A. Reynolds, “Outfoxed by the Bear? America’s Losing Game Against Russia in the Near East,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, April 2018, p. 14. As of June 6, 2018: <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Reynolds2018.pdf>

²⁰ “Vladimir Putin’s relentless focus for much of the past two decades has been to reverse the decline of the Russian state and its international standing—and the result is a Russia that sees its best bet for preserving its major power status in chipping away at the American-led international order” (William J. Burns, “Assessing the Role of the United States in the World,” testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 27, 2019. As of April 13, 2019:

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/27/assessing-role-of-united-states-in-world-pub-78465>).

²¹ Nations traditionally react to perceived power vacuums by acting to fill the void (Rodger Baker, “The United States: Between Isolation And Empire,” *Forbes*, January 31, 2017. As of July 18, 2018: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stratfor/2017/01/31/the-united-states-between-isolation-and-empire/#56cf6bc11392>); “Russia aims to increase its clout, refurbish its image, and assert itself on key international issues where retreating Western power has created vacuums. Moscow aspires to challenge the Western political, economic, and security institutions—around which much of the current international system is based—that it claims pose threats to Russia’s own interests” (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017, p. vii).

²² Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017, p. 3.

²³ These core interests appear in various sources, including the Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015. As of July 18, 2018 [in Russian]: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/l8iXkR8XLAtxeilX7JK3XXy6Y0AsHD5v.pdf>. English quotes from that strategy are from Olga Oliker, “Unpacking Russia’s New National Security Strategy,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, January 7, 2016. As of July 18, 2018: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/unpacking-russias-new-national-security-strategy>. See also Radin and Reach, 2017, pp. ix, 3.

²⁴ Quoted in Oliker, 2016.

²⁵ Oliker, 2016. This Perspective does not explicitly address Russia’s desire to increase its gross domestic product. However, in later sections we note whether there is an economic component to Russia’s activities in each of the regions that we cover.

²⁶ Valeriy Gerasimov, “The Primary Trends in the Development of Forms and Methods of Employing Armed Forces and the Current Tasks of Military Science in Improving [Such Forms and Methods],” *Vestnik of the Academy of Military Sciences*, No. 1, 2013. See also Radin and Reach, 2017, p. 9.

²⁷ Radin and Reach, 2017, p. 8; Oliker et al., 2015, p. 2.

²⁸ Active measures (активные мероприятия) is the common term for political warfare conducted by the Soviets and Russians to influence the course of world events in their favor. Active measures include disinformation, propaganda, political repression, and even lower-level acts of violence.

²⁹ See typical comments in remarks by General Valeriy Gerasimov: Gerasimov, 2013, and General Valeriy Gerasimov, “Organization of the Defense of the Russian Federation Against Enemy Employment of ‘Traditional’ and ‘Hybrid’ Methods of War,” *Vestnik of the Academy of Military Sciences*, No. 2, 2016.

³⁰ Oliker et al., 2015, p. 2.

³¹ Vadim Erlikman, *Poteri Narodonaseleniia v XX Veke: Spravochnik*, Moscow, 2004, pp. 21–35. The author estimates the total military and civilian Russian deaths during World War II at nearly 14 million, approximately 13 percent of the 1940 population of Russia.

³² Kofman, 2018.

³³ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016),” December 2, 2016. As of June 15, 2018: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248

³⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 2.

³⁵ Consider the following statement from the July 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration: “Russia has breached the values, principles and commitments which underpin the NATO-Russia relationship . . . broken the trust at the core of our cooperation and challenged the fundamental principles of the global and Euro-Atlantic security architecture” (NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11–12 July 2018,” press release, July 11, 2018. As of July 18, 2018: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm).

³⁶ Evan Osnos, David Remnick, and Joshua Yaffa, “Trump, Putin, and the New Cold War,” *New Yorker*, 2017.

³⁷ “Russia’s increasing global activism poses a major challenge to the U.S.-led international order and to the key pillars that sustain it. Moscow’s key priorities are to weaken Euro-Atlantic security, political, and economic institutions and to undermine European unity and U.S. global influence” (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017, p. 26).

³⁸ Russia shares similar objectives in Turkey, but we do not evaluate Russia-Turkey relations in this Perspective, as Russia’s relations with NATO allies are outside our purview. For more information on the Russia-Turkey relationship, see Pavel K. Baev and Kemal Kirisci, *An Ambiguous Partnership: The Serpentine Trajectory of Turkish-Russian*

Relations in the Era of Erdogan and Putin, Brookings Institution, Center on the United States and Europe, Turkey Project Policy Paper Number 13, September 2017. As of April 14, 2019: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/pavel-and-kirisci-turkey-and-russia.pdf>

³⁹ RAND internal workshop on Russian global interests, May 29, 2018.

⁴⁰ Center for Strategic and International Studies, *A Roadmap for U.S.-Russia Relations*, Andrey Kortunov and Olga Oliker, eds., CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program and the Russian International Affairs Council, August 2017, pp. viii–ix. As of May 6, 2018: https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170815_KortunovOliker_USRussiaRelations_Web.pdf?E0bdGVHlxxYRAXhOw8zJ9tbRGwdWjEgV

⁴¹ Jon B. Alterman, “Russia, the United States, and the Middle East,” *CSIS Commentary*, July 21, 2017. As of June 14, 2018: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-united-states-and-middle-east>

⁴² Gerasimov, 2013. See also James Sladden, Becca Wasser, Ben Connable, and Sarah Grand-Clement, *Russian Strategy in the Middle East*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-236-RC, 2017, p. 2. As of July 30, 2019: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE236.html>

⁴³ Colin P. Clarke, “Russia Is Not a Viable Counterterrorism Partner for the United States,” *RussiaMatters*, February 8, 2018. As of December 20, 2018: <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/russia-not-viable-counterterrorism-partner-united-states>. For an alternative view that favors cooperation with Russia on counterterrorism, see George Beebe, “Cooperate to Deescalate: Working with Russia Against Terrorism Will Make America Safer,” *RussiaMatters*, February 8, 2018. As of July 26, 2019: <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/cooperate-deescalate-working-russia-against-terrorism-will-make-america-safer>

⁴⁴ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” December 2, 2016.

⁴⁵ Ron Synovitz, “Explainer: Why Is Access to Syria’s Port at Tartus So Important to Moscow?” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty RFERL*, June 19, 2012. As of April 14, 2019: <https://www.rferl.org/a/explainer-why-is-access-/24619441.html>

⁴⁶ Synovitz, 2012.

⁴⁷ Sladden et al., 2017, p. 5.

- ⁴⁸ Baev and Kirişci, 2017, p. 10.
- ⁴⁹ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” 2016.
- ⁵⁰ Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017, p. 20.
- ⁵¹ Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017, pp. viii–ix.
- ⁵² Sladden et al., 2017, p. 2.
- ⁵³ According to Russia’s 2016 foreign policy concept, “Russia intends to further expand bilateral relations with the States in the Middle East and North Africa” (RAND internal workshop on Russian global interests, May 29, 2018). See also Sladden et al., 2017, p. 3.
- ⁵⁴ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” 2016; “Iran: Supreme Leader Advisor Lauds Russian Strategic Ties,” *Foreign Military Studies Office OE Watch*, Vol. 8, No. 4, April 2018, p. 6.
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- ⁵⁶ Samuel Ramani, “How Strong is the Iran-Russia ‘Alliance?’” *The Diplomat*, February 9, 2018. As of December 20, 2018: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/how-strong-is-the-iran-russia-alliance>
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- ⁶⁴ Gillian Rich, “OPEC, Russia Agree to Cut Oil Production—But Here’s The Catch,” *Investor’s Business Daily*, December 7, 2018. As of December 7, 2018: <https://www.investors.com/news/opec-meeting-crude-oil-production-cut-oil-prices>
- ⁶⁵ Sladden et al., 2017, p. 7.
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⁷⁶ Michael Peck, “How Russia Is Turning Syria into a Major Naval Base for Nuclear Warships (and Israel Is Worried),” *The National Interest*, March 18, 2017. As of April 14, 2019: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/how-russia-turning-syria-major-naval-base-nuclear-warships-19813>

⁷⁷ Sladden et al., 2017, p. 6.

⁷⁸ RAND internal workshop on Russian global interests, May 29, 2018.

⁷⁹ “Indicators: Putin’s Approval Rating,” *Levada Center*, March 2019. As of April 1, 2019: <http://www.levada.ru/en/ratings>

⁸⁰ During the Cold War, while the Soviet Union had a challenging relationship with China, it maintained close relations with several states in the region, including India, Mongolia, North Korea, and Vietnam. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s presence in the region dissipated as it turned its attention to challenges both at home and in its near abroad. Over the past decade, Russian presence in the Indo-Pacific region has increased once again. Today, in addition to maintaining strong relations with India and Vietnam, Russia has sought to develop ties with Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, among others. Russia’s current relations with China are more complex and are reviewed in the text.

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Abbreviations

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
EU	European Union
MENA	Middle East North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSR	Northern Sea Route
NSS	National Security Strategy
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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