



Extending Russia

Competing from Advantageous Ground

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As the U.S. *National Defense Strategy* recognizes, the United States is currently locked in a great-power competition with Russia. This report seeks to define areas where the United States can compete to its own advantage. It examines Russian vulnerabilities and anxieties; analyzes potential policy options to exploit them; and assesses the associated benefits, costs, and risks, as well as the likelihood of successful implementation.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are Russia's greatest anxieties and vulnerabilities?
- In what ways can these anxieties and vulnerabilities be exploited and extend Russia?
- What are the costs and risks associated with each option, and what are the prospects of success?



KEY FINDINGS

Russia's weaknesses lie in the economic domains

- Russia's greatest vulnerability, in any competition with the United States, is its economy, which is comparatively small and highly dependent on energy exports.
- The Russian leadership's greatest anxiety stems from the stability and durability of the regime.

The most promising measures to stress Russia are in the realms of energy production and international pressure

- Continuing to expand U.S. energy production in all forms, including renewables, and encouraging other countries to do the same would maximize pressure on Russia's export receipts and thus on its national and defense budgets. Alone among the many measures looked at in this report, this one comes with the least cost or risk.

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- Sanctions can also limit Russia’s economic potential. To be effective, however, these need to be multilateral, involving (at a minimum) the European Union, which is Russia’s largest customer and greatest source of technology and capital, larger in all these respects than the United States.

Geopolitical measures to bait Russia into overextending itself are likely impractical, or they risk second-order consequences

- Many geopolitical measures would force the United States to operate in areas that are closer to Russia and where it is thus cheaper and easier for Russia than the United States to exert influence.

Ideological measures to undermine the regime’s stability carry significant risks of counter escalation

- Many military options—including force posture changes and development of new capabilities—could enhance U.S. deterrence and reassure U.S. allies, but only a few are likely to extend Russia, as Moscow is not seeking parity with the United States in most domains.

