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Analysis of Russian Irregular Threats

This report has two primary purposes. First, we take stock of numerous strategic global trends related to Russian global influence and behavior. To do so, we leverage geopolitical, socio-economic, and public opinion indicators, generally for the period from 2010 to 2017.¹ Second, we provide an overview and assessment of hostile activities Russia has undertaken in the face of the strategic trends we identify. We assess these activities across two primary realms: the cognitive and physical.² Measures within these two realms include information warfare, political subversion, and the use of violence or the threat of violence through proxies to undermine political order and influence vulnerable governments. We divide our assessment of Russian hostile measures across six different regions, with a focus on the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) areas of responsibility. We thus offer a geographical assessment of Russian activities across these two realms.

Strategic Trends

We begin by comparing indicators of Russian and U.S. global influence. We then briefly look at Western policies toward Russia in the form of military spending and European exports to Russia. We follow this up by tracing several indicators of Western public opinion toward Russia, as well as public opinion for Western institutions. Finally, we examine potential costs to Russia related to Western responses.

KEY FINDINGS

- The evidence in this report shows no indication that Russia has been able to translate its hostile measures into strategic gains. This apparent failure, however, should not induce a sense of complacency among U.S. or Western decisionmakers.
- Russia is prepared to assume more risk in areas of conflict and where it wields more influence vis-à-vis the West—former Soviet and various Eastern European states.
- Where the United States can build resilience and consolidate its advantages among its allies and partners, it should do so.
- The United States should exercise due caution if and when engaging Russia in zones of conflict.

¹ The precise time frame differs in some cases because of data availability.

² The *cognitive realm* encompasses activities whose initial, direct effects are aimed at the decisionmaking processes or perceptions within a target state. The *physical realm* encompasses activities whose initial, direct effects are aimed at the target state's material capabilities, such as key infrastructure and military forces. We provide more distinctions within each realm below.

Russian Global Influence

As an indication of Russia's global influence, we gathered historical data on voting patterns in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. We sought to determine which countries voted with Russia at the UN when U.S. and Russian positions differed. We collected all roll-call votes from the General Assembly for each nation from 2010 to 2017 (Voeten, Strezhnev, and Bailey, 2009). We specifically limited our examination to those votes where the respective U.S. and Russian positions on the issue were at odds. UN voting data reveal, at least in part, country preferences along a set of international issues. Understanding when and how those preferences align with Russia's stated positions permits a partial assessment of Russian influence. Figure 1 displays the yearly percentage of votes "with Russia" for two distinct sets of countries.³ The red line includes nations that might be considered relatively more vulnerable to Russian influence or to hostility to the United States, including countries currently experiencing conflict, U.S. adversaries, and select countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia.⁴ The blue line includes North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), non-NATO Balkan states, Europe (non-NATO), and former Eastern Bloc countries except Ukraine.⁵

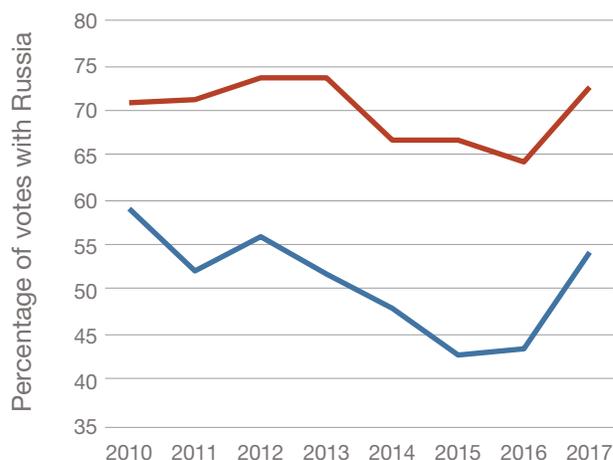
As might be expected, Western countries were much less likely to vote with Russia than were those experiencing conflict and those considered U.S. adversaries. Both groups show a sharp reduction in

³ Votes fall into one of three categories: *yes*, *no*, *abstain*. Voting "with Russia" implies a given country's vote was the same as Russia's (*yes*, *no*, *abstain*).

⁴ We deem these countries more vulnerable on account of internal instability or for historical animosities toward the United States. Conflict countries include Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Ukraine. African countries include Mali, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Kenya, Ethiopia, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Middle East and Central Asian countries include Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Jordan, and Israel. Adversarial nations include China, Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, and North Korea.

⁵ Countries reflected in the blue line in Figure 1 include Bosnia Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Georgia. Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union but is also a case of an active conflict zone, so it is grouped with the red-line countries in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
UN General Assembly Voting Patterns



SOURCES: Data from Voeten, Strezhnev, and Bailey, 2009; and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

NOTES: The blue line includes NATO, non-NATO Balkan states, European (non-NATO), and former Soviet Union countries except Ukraine; the red line includes Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine, Mali, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Kenya, Ethiopia, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Jordan, Israel, China, Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, and North Korea.

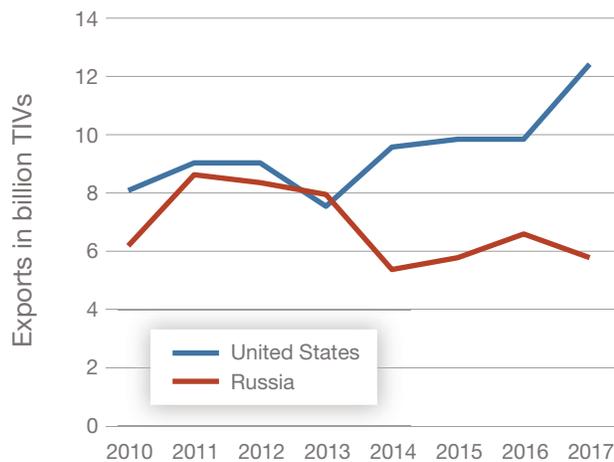
voting alignment with Russia beginning in 2014, the year of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Although voting patterns were more closely aligned with Russia in 2017, it is unclear whether that year represents an anomaly or whether Russia has finally regained the degree of support it had prior to the Crimea invasion.⁶ In any case, Russia appears to have suffered at least some diplomatic isolation at the United Nations for at least several years following its turn to a more aggressive foreign policy.

Arms sales are also frequently used as an indicator of international clout. As can be seen in Figure 2, this indicator also seems to suggest a flatlining in Russia's standing beginning in 2014. The figure displays U.S. and Russian global arms exports from 2010 to 2017.⁷ From 2010 to 2013, the United States

⁶ Votes fall into six general categories: Palestine-related; nuclear weapon and material-related; arms control/disarmament-related; colonialism-related; human rights-related; and economic development-related. For each vote, these categories are not mutually exclusive.

⁷ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), undated-a. SIPRI global arms sales data "measure the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons using

FIGURE 2
U.S. and Russian Arms Exports



SOURCES: SIPRI, undated-a, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.
NOTE: Trend-indicator values (TIVs) are the common unit employed by SIPRI to measure the volume of weapon transfers.

and Russia exported roughly the same level of arms. Starting in 2014—roughly coinciding with the invasion of Crimea—there is a stark and growing divergence, with U.S. arms exports increasing significantly and Russian arms exports decreasing slightly. As of 2017, Russia’s arms exports had still not recovered to pre-2014 rates (SIPRI, undated-a).

Western Policies Toward Russia

One key measure of Russia’s success in competition with the United States is the cohesion and vitality of U.S. alliances and partnerships. In the race for global influence, Russia has sought to undermine American leadership and cast doubt on U.S. alliances. To assess this issue, we examined two key measures of the strength of the transatlantic community: military spending among NATO member states and the intensity of economic sanctions maintained by Western states against Russia (measured as change in exports to Russia).⁸

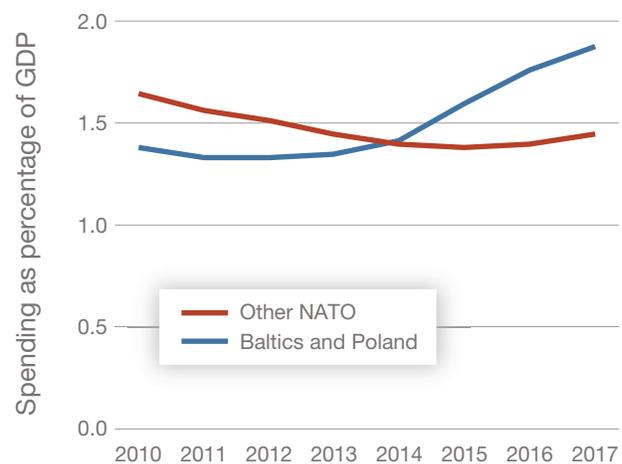
a common unit.” These are what they call the trend-indicator values (TIVs).

⁸ NATO budget data may be only a partial reflection of the health of the alliance. It is certainly possible that spending rises in tandem with tensions because of political or other factors, as has been observed recently.

We gathered NATO military spending data for each country as a percentage of its gross domestic product (GDP) (SIPRI, undated-b). Figure 3 presents these data from 2010 to 2017 for two groups of countries. The first group is composed of the three Baltic nations (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and Poland. The second group is composed of the remaining European NATO countries. In general, the data reflect a considerable increase in defense spending in the Baltics and other “frontline” states since 2014. The Baltics and Poland have been increasing their military expenditures, from roughly 1.4 percent of GDP in 2013 to roughly 1.9 percent of GDP in 2017. The remainder of NATO Europe shows a relatively constant level of military expenditures (averaging roughly 1.5 percent of GDP), with a reversal in trends and slight increase following the 2014 invasion of Ukraine. At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, country leaders agreed to a target for military spending of 2 percent of GDP for each NATO member state (of which at least 20 percent should be on major equipment). At the time, only three countries met the 2 percent threshold; and the others pledged to “move towards” it by 2024. Today, eight nations (more or less) pass the 2 percent mark, and 15 meet the 20 percent target for equipment (*The Economist*, 2019).

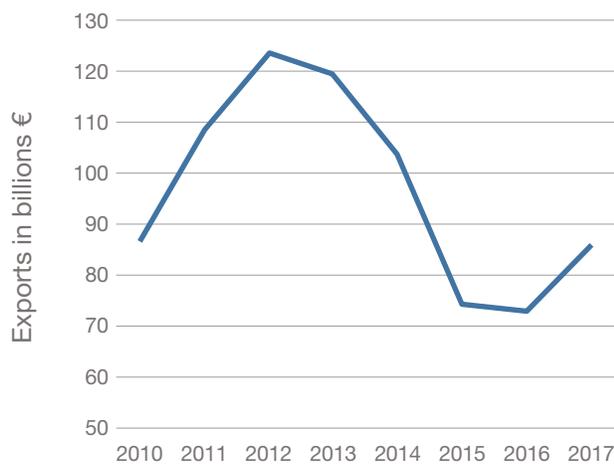
Europe (along with the United States) has responded to Russian activity in 2014 with economic sanctions. Figure 4 displays Eurostat data

FIGURE 3
Military Expenditures by NATO Members



SOURCES: SIPRI, undated-b, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

FIGURE 4
EU Exports to Russia



SOURCES: Eurostat, 2020, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

on European Union exports to Russia from 2010 to 2017. The data evince a sizable fall in EU exports to Russia after 2013. In fact, from 2013 to 2016, exports to Russia fell nearly 40 percent—a drop of nearly €50 billion (Eurostat, 2020). The sustained support for EU sanctions against Russia is remarkable in light of the clear domestic costs. The precise effects of the sanctions on Russia are difficult to estimate since they were imposed at nearly the same time that oil and gas prices sharply declined, but several studies have suggested they are sizable. One source reported that the combination of falling oil prices and sanctions on Russia has cut nearly 6 percent from Russia’s GDP.⁹

In sum, while NATO has not raced toward its collective pledge to attain military spending levels at or above 2 percent of GDP, overall spending has generally increased and greatly increased in the most vulnerable states. At the same time, Europe has demonstrated resolve in levying economic sanctions with considerable bite. Although it is an open question how long such cohesion will persist, it has already endured longer than many skeptics had predicted.¹⁰

⁹ Doff, 2018. We discuss the potential effects elsewhere in this section.

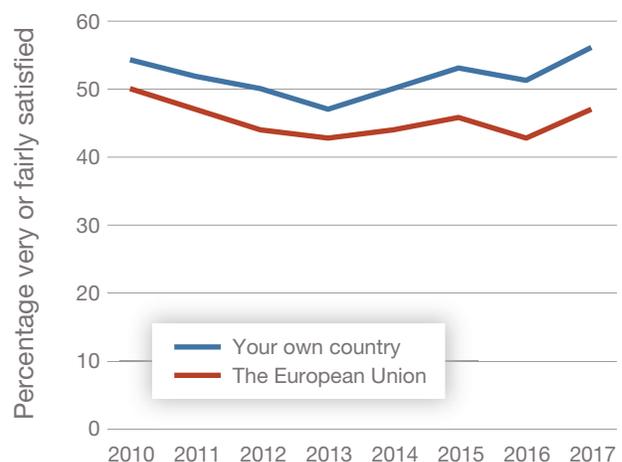
¹⁰ For instance, see the several critiques offered by foreign policy experts in Dempsey, 2016.

Western Public Opinion

To assess Russia’s aim at undermining the U.S.-led liberal democratic order, we look to various metrics related to democracy and support for current domestic and international institutions. Russia has made use of propaganda and disinformation to sway public opinion across Europe. As a result, we can use attitudes toward democracy as one indicator of Russia’s effectiveness on this measure. Figure 5 reports the results of Eurobarometer polling of European citizens’ satisfaction with democracy from 2010 to 2017, broken down by the averages for all countries and the average for EU countries. The percentage of individuals reporting being very or fairly satisfied with democracy, both domestically and in the EU context, slightly decreased from 2010 to 2013. However, the data reveal modestly increasing satisfaction with democracy since 2014, with a total increase between five and ten percentage points (Eurobarometer, undated).

Figure 6 shows net public opinion with a favorable impression of NATO in select countries.¹¹ The data show a steady decline in net favorability until

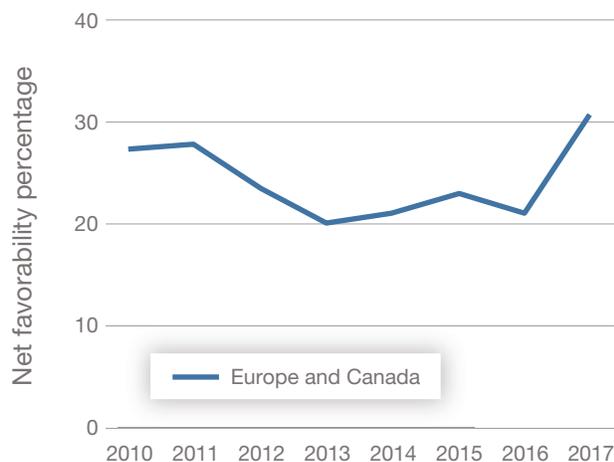
FIGURE 5
European Public Satisfaction with Democracy



SOURCES: Eurobarometer, undated, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

¹¹ Specifically, the favorability data includes Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom. (*Net favorability* refers to the difference between individuals with a favorable opinion and those with an unfavorable opinion, with

FIGURE 6
Western Public Favorability (Net) Toward NATO



SOURCES: Stokes, 2017, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

2013, followed by an increase from 2014 through 2017 (Stokes, 2017). Western publics have demonstrated slightly increasing favorability (just over ten percentage points) toward NATO since the Crimean invasion.¹²

We also analyzed data measuring select European nations' views on Russia, measured in net favorability. Net favorability is the percentage difference between those with a favorable and unfavorable view (of Russia). These data show that net favorability ratings, though never high, declined precipitously (by an average of nearly 40 percentage points) in most countries in the sample after 2014.¹³ Since then, Russian net favorability has recovered only marginally—and it remains well below 2013 levels, as Figure 7 shows.

It is possible that Russian influence operations undermined Western confidence in democracy and institutions such as the European Union and NATO, at least relative to what public opinion would have been in the absence of Russian efforts. But if Russia had any success at all, it appears to have been lim-

positive numbers indicating a net favorable impression in the population as a whole.)

¹² Trust in the European Union (not shown) demonstrates a similar pattern.

¹³ Letterman, 2018. Countries included are France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

FIGURE 7
Net Favorability of Russia



SOURCES: Letterman, 2018, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

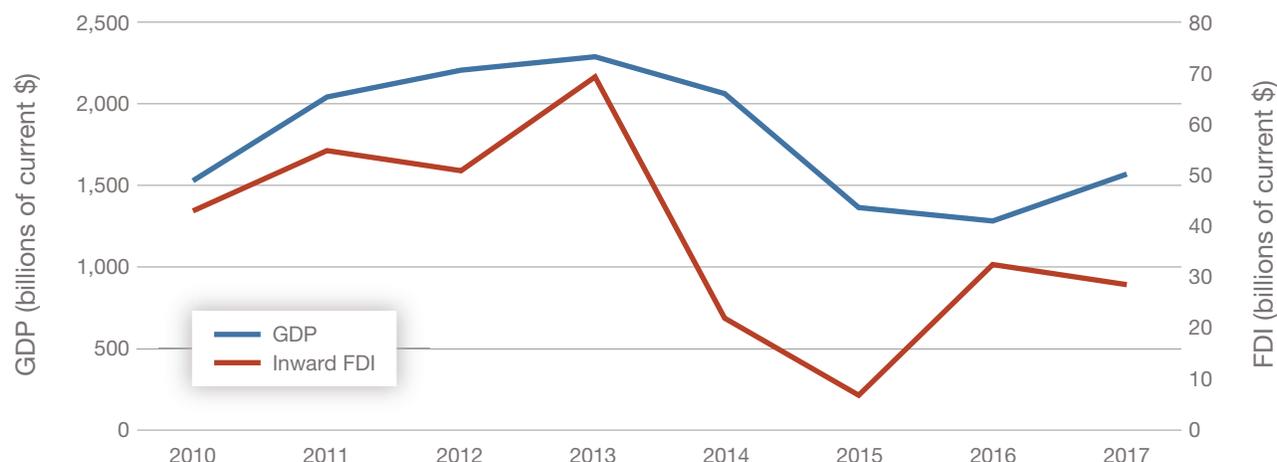
ited and eclipsed by other factors that led to general improvements in public opinion in all of these areas since 2014. Meanwhile, Russia has paid a substantial price in terms of its reputation in Europe, which may make it easier for European policymakers to sustain policies that target Russia.

Russian Costs and Ability to Sustain a Confrontational Foreign Policy

How likely is Russia to sustain its more aggressive pursuit of its foreign policy goals and its confrontation with the West? To partially address this question, we look to costs that Russia has had to pay up until this point. Specifically, we examine various metrics including GDP, foreign direct investment (FDI) flow to Russia, total state revenues, and domestic net approval ratings of Putin.

Figure 8 displays both Russian GDP (on the left vertical axis) and inward foreign direct investment (on the right vertical axis). The data show that after Russia's invasion of Crimea, there was a slight decrease in Russia's GDP, measured in current U.S. dollars, followed by a more precipitous drop through 2016 (World Bank, undated). Additionally, after 2013 there was a steep decline in FDI from external sources to Russia—decreasing from roughly \$69 billion to \$7 billion in 2015—nearly 90 percent (Central Bank of the Russian Federation, undated).

FIGURE 8
GDP and Inward FDI to Russia

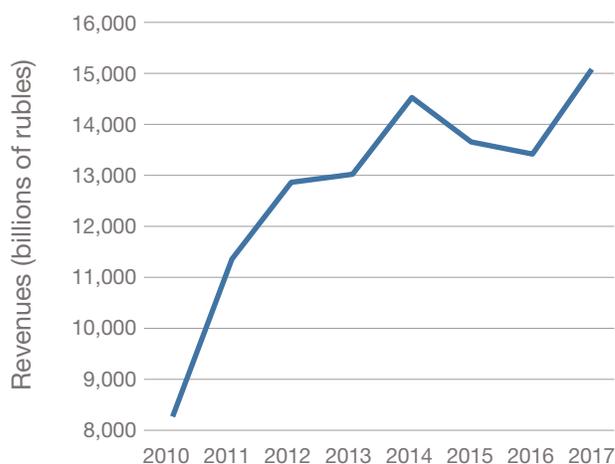


SOURCES: World Bank, undated; Central Bank of the Russian Federation, undated; and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

There is a slight recovery after 2015, but the level has remained around \$30 billion, far below pre-Crimea levels. Determining the causes of the declines in GDP and FDI is difficult; oil and gas prices fell at approximately the same time as sanctions were implemented, making it difficult to fully disentangle the effects from these two factors.¹⁴ Observers have found evidence, however, to suggest that sanctions have had a noticeable impact (Doff, 2018).

To what extent have these economic pressures impacted Russian state finances? Figure 9 shows Russian federal revenues, as reported by Russia’s Ministry of Finance, from 2010 to 2017. Russia’s total revenues nearly doubled from 2010 to 2014, permitting a large expansion in defense spending without corresponding cuts to domestic programs, but they have largely stagnated since that time (Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, undated). Additionally, Russia moved to counter some of the macro effects of the sanctions. It initially stemmed its currency depreciation by raising interest rates and employing foreign exchange reserves. Its central bank ultimately switched to a regime of inflation targeting and a free-floating exchange rate. More recently—in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic—the Russian central bank cut its benchmark interest

FIGURE 9
Russia’s Federal Revenues (Total)



SOURCES: Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, undated, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.

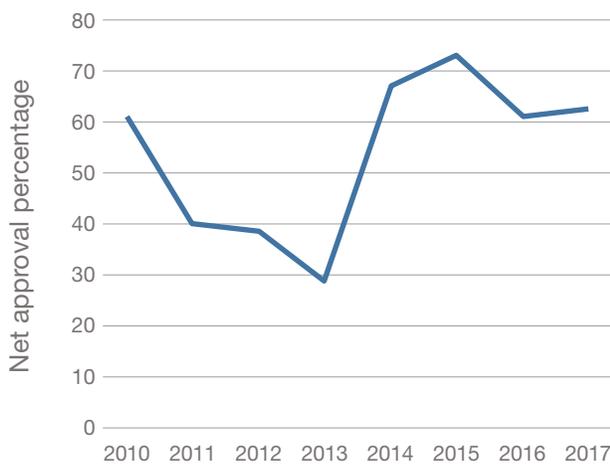
rate to a record low. In addition to more orthodox monetary policy, prudent fiscal policy—that included an increase to the value added tax—coupled with modest rises in oil prices have permitted Russia to record a strong current account surplus in 2019.¹⁵

The costs of Russia’s more aggressive foreign policy do not appear to have initially harmed Putin’s domestic standing. In fact, as shown in Figure 10, his

¹⁴ The annexation of Crimea and the secession in Ukraine’s Donbass region transpired shortly before oil prices tumbled from roughly \$120 per barrel to around \$50.

¹⁵ Perasso, 2019. Russia also raised the pension age by five years for both men and women in 2018.

FIGURE 10
Domestic Net Approval Rating of Vladimir Putin



SOURCES: Yuri Levada Analytical Center, undated, and RAND Arroyo Center analysis.
NOTE: Observations are from May of each year.

net approval ratings enjoyed a massive boost in the wake of the Crimean invasion.¹⁶ After that initial lift, however, his net approval slipped somewhat. More recently, there are indications of continued erosion of public support for Putin and his administration (Fokht, 2019). Years of economic hardship have left average Russians feeling poorer. Real incomes have fallen for five of the past six years and are about 10 percent below their 2013 levels (Foy and Seddon, 2019). In fact, Putin’s current domestic support has fallen since 2017.¹⁷ The popularity spike Putin enjoyed in the wake of the 2014 annexation of Crimea has somewhat dissipated. Month-long anti-Kremlin protests emerged in Russia’s far east in the summer of 2020 after the dismissal and replacement of a local governor by Putin.

¹⁶ Yuri Levada Analytical Center, undated. This pattern of short-term “rally around the flag” effects, followed by declines as the costs of foreign adventurism become apparent, is a common one, well documented in the international relations literature. See, for instance, Mueller, 1970; Jordan and Page, 1992; Lian and Oneal, 1993; and Baum, 2002.

¹⁷ Foy and Seddon, 2019. The margin of error for the poll is not given but may indicate the trend is slightly overstated.

Summary of Trends

The overall picture presented here suggests that the West has maintained considerable pressure on Russia. Moreover, public confidence in both national governments and international institutions such as the EU and NATO has actually improved somewhat (on average). Meanwhile, state elites in the West have so far kept up a relatively united front, sustaining sanctions longer than many skeptics had expected and finally arresting the decline in European military spending (although levels remain far lower than Washington has repeatedly insisted that NATO allies maintain). Russia has experienced some economic costs as a result of these sanctions, and it has experienced a sharp decline in Western public perceptions. At least in the short term, however, these costs have been entirely manageable, and indeed Putin and his administration have benefited (at least in the short term) from Russian public support for his more assertive policies. In the long term, however, this looks to be changing.¹⁸

Overview of Hostile Russian Activities

The geopolitical and economic trends we’ve described suggest that Western resolve against Russia has proven remarkably resilient, hindering Russian global influence. Moreover, Russia’s domestic situation is marked by economic difficulty and political uncertainty. Concurrent with such pressures, how has Russia responded in terms of the threat it presents to the West? In an effort to address this question, in this section we provide an overview of hostile Russian activities. Because Russia’s behavior varies considerably across geographic regions, we have divided our analysis into discussions of six regions, with a focus on the EUCOM, CENTCOM, and AFRICOM areas of responsibility. The specific countries examined here are Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Central African Republic, Czech Republic, Estonia,

¹⁸ For instance, promises of military success in Syria have largely been forgotten, as the Russian army has become more bogged down in the country’s civil war and the number of Russians killed continues to mount. See Foy and Seddon, 2019.

The spectrum of Russian hostile activities is wide, ranging from readily detectable actions, such as irregular warfare and cross-border incursions, to more opaque efforts, such as covert information campaigns.

Finland, France, Georgia, Hungary, Iraq, Kosovo, Libya, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovakia, Sudan, Sweden, Syria, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

Definitions, Scope, and Methodology

Russia has engaged in various types of hostile activities that are intended to undermine the target state's political stability, the state's relationship with the United States or the West, or the cohesion of Western institutions.¹⁹ "Hostile" activities, as understood here, are activities that include deception (including covert action), coercion, or intimidation and activities that are otherwise illegal under national or international laws but fall short of the use of conventional or nuclear forces for intimidation or coercion. The spectrum of these activities is wide, ranging from readily detectable actions, such as irregular warfare and

¹⁹ We note that not every channel or tool of influence that Russia employs in its relations with other countries constitutes an irregular threat. Thus, we sought to focus on those aspects of Russia's influence that go beyond normal activities that states ordinarily engage in in the course of their relations with other countries.

cross-border incursions, to more opaque efforts, such as covert information campaigns. Unsurprisingly, the extent and the character of such activities varies across the world, and, in this section, we adopt one approach to assessing and describing the intensity and variation of the threat presented by these activities both across and within the regions we examined.

To assess the threat presented by Russia's multifaceted activities, we distinguish between two main realms.²⁰ First is the *cognitive realm*, which encompasses activities whose initial, direct effects are aimed at the decisionmaking processes or perceptions within a target state. Russia uses activities in the cognitive realm to influence a target state's public opinion or decisionmakers, or simply to sow confusion and dissension within the target state.

Within the cognitive realm, we distinguish among three categories of efforts:

- *Overt information efforts*, which are activities conducted in or through the information environment where the identity of the actor's connection to the Russian state is overt. This includes activities of Russia's state-sponsored media, such as RT and Sputnik, as well as communications by Russian officials. What distinguishes hostile uses of these tools from ordinary public diplomacy is these actors' dissemination of disinformation and propaganda²¹ (alongside other content).
- *Covert information efforts*, which are activities conducted in or through the information environment, where the identity of the actor's connection with Russia is hidden. This includes activities of state-sponsored media or state actors acting covertly, and actors whose connection to the Russian state is obscured (as was the case with the now infamous and

²⁰ These realms are sometimes colloquially referred to as *domains*, which sometimes has other connotations. To avoid confusion, we use the term *realm*.

²¹ We define *disinformation* as "false, incomplete, or misleading information that is passed, fed, or confirmed to a target individual, group, or country" (Shultz and Roy, 1984, p. 41). We define *propaganda* as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012, p. 7).

exposed Internet Research Agency, or the “troll farm”).²²

- *Covert or illegitimate political support*, which includes tangible support or sponsorship for political actors, events, or forces that is not formally recognized or acknowledged by the Russian state, and (overt or covert) support for political actors whose legitimacy is not recognized by the international community.²³

The second is the *physical realm*, which encompasses activities whose initial, direct effects are aimed at the target state’s material capabilities, such as key infrastructure and military forces. Within this realm, we also distinguish among three categories of efforts:

- *Overt state actions*, which are conducted in the physical territory of a country—where the identity of the actor’s connection to Russia is overt. This includes, for example, military exercises or shows of military force by uniformed forces.
- *Covert state actions*, which are activities conducted in the physical territory of a country—where the identity of the actor’s connection to Russia is hidden. This includes, for example, operations by Russian intelligence and military operating covertly behind enemy lines.
- *Actions by nonstate actors*—actors who are not officially connected to the Russian state, or whose connections to the Russian state are concealed. These actors or their proxies have a physical presence in the target state and offer tangible support to actors or forces within the target country. This includes, for example, both covert and overt activities by private military contractors (PMCs).

²² On the Internet Research Agency and the election trolls, see Barrett, Horwitz, and Helderman, 2018.

²³ This category includes primarily buying political influence—providing financial or other resources to political actors, media, nongovernmental movements, etc.—by the state or entities acting in the interests of the state (e.g., oligarchs). This also includes overt support to internationally unrecognized separatist forces and breakaway regions, because such actions challenge arrangements regarding sovereignty that are widely perceived as legitimate. However, we exclude support for direct violent actions or armed groups, which we classify largely as maneuvers aimed at the physical realm.

Measuring the level of threat posed by these various Russian activities is inherently challenging. The full extent of Russian activities is unclear, and their effects—especially over time—are extremely complex. In an initial step to characterize Russian irregular threats, we assessed the *intensity* of the threat presented by Russia’s efforts within the cognitive realm as either high or low. Within the physical realm, we assess intensity high, medium, or low.²⁴ These assessments represent qualitative judgments about the level of threat, which is in large part a function of how much attention and effort Russia and its agents place on the region or particular countries within each realm. Importantly, assessments of Russia’s *level of effort* cannot be neatly separated from the extent of *target states’ vulnerabilities*. For example, long-standing historical ties between Russia and target states make the latter more vulnerable to Russia’s efforts. This may be because of cultural similarities, historical alliances, or other factors. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is generally more evidence of Russia’s efforts to influence these more vulnerable target states. This is particularly important in the cognitive realm, where the reach of Russia’s efforts depends significantly on the willingness of local actors to take up and spread content favored by Russia. We are therefore mindful in our threat intensity assessments not to conflate a surfeit of Russian activity with high threat, particularly in countries not particularly prone to Russian messaging and hostile overtures. Thus, our assessments of threat intensity incorporate both the level of Russian effort and, to some extent, the underlying target state vulnerabilities.

The intensity scale we use in this stage of the analysis is defined in somewhat different terms in each realm. In the cognitive realm, low-intensity activities employ relatively few tools or tactics of influence, tend to reach smaller audiences, and involve intermittent efforts. Activities that are higher in intensity tend to use multiple tools and tactics of influence, reach broader audiences, and involve

²⁴ Because of the challenges of precisely defining threat levels in the cognitive realm, we have elected to use a simplified, dichotomous coding of threat intensity: high or low. Activities in the physical realm permit a slightly more detailed assessment: high, medium, or low.

a greater continuity of effort through time. In the physical realm, low-intensity activities are steady-state activities that are usually pursued in peacetime and used to develop access and relationships in a country or with segments of a country’s population. Low-intensity activities are also typically low-volume and employ few actors and tools. For example, normal military exercises are a low-level overt state action. Clandestine state actions at this level of intensity include cultivation of physical sympathetic proxies, and nonstate actions include establishing a limited mercenary presence.

Medium-intensity activities in the physical realm entail targeted campaigns against a country’s leadership or subgroup of the population. At this intensity level, volume of activity is moderate, with ebbs and flows involving a specific set of actors or tools. For example, a state may conduct unusually “aggressive” military exercises or threaten weapon deployment for a show of force or coercive purposes. Clandestine state action examples include elevated or more targeted intelligence recruiting campaigns against political or military officials. Nonstate actions in this category include, for example, the provision of training, instructions, or even weapons to proxy groups.

High-intensity activities are those ordinarily pursued only in crisis or wartime. These activities typically involve multiple actors and tools that, if suc-

cessfully executed, often have irreversible kinetic and nonkinetic effects. This includes irregular warfare activities, such as assassination and sabotage; large-scale violent protests led by sympathetic proxies; and armed conflict. See Table 1 for a summary of the intensity scale across both realms.

This report focuses its analysis on the areas of responsibility of EUCOM, CENTCOM, and AFRICOM. We further distinguish activity within six regions:

- former Soviet states (excluding the Baltics)
- Balkans
- active conflict zones (e.g., Syria, Afghanistan)²⁵
- NATO states
- non-NATO European states
- rest of the world.

These regions were identified by reference to Russia’s interests and foreign policy goals in relation to each: For instance, Russia’s interest in influencing former Soviet states is far stronger than for the rest, and its foreign policy goals toward states that are already part of NATO are different from the goals vis-à-vis states that are not members of the alliance.

We do not attempt to present comprehensive or comparative review of all countries within EUCOM, CENTCOM, or AFRICOM. Instead, within each region, we selected specific countries to illustrate the

TABLE 1
Intensity Definitions: Physical and Cognitive Realms

	Physical Realm	Cognitive Realm
High	Activities pursued in crisis or wartime of highest intensity. Includes irreversible kinetic and non-kinetic effects. High volume with multiple actors and tools.	Use of multiple tools and tactics of influence and some continuity of effort through time.
Medium	Targeted or intense activities against a country’s leadership or subgroup. Moderate volume with ebbs and flows, with a specific set of actors or tools.	
Low	Steady-state or typical activities pursued in peacetime. Used to develop access and relationships in a country or with segments of a country’s population. Low-volume with few actors or tools.	Use of relatively few tools or tactics of influence, efforts are usually intermittent.

²⁵ Ukraine is treated as part of the former Soviet Union but is also a case of an active conflict zone.

spectrum of Russian activities. The availability of evidence of Russian hostile activities in the cognitive and physical realms also played a role in country selection.²⁶ To be clear, we do not claim to identify countries with the most or least intense threat activities in either realm. Because many of these activities have been brought to light since 2014, we overwhelmingly focus on post-2014 activity.

To conduct the assessment of the threat presented by Russia's hostile activities in the two realms, we reviewed a range of sources, including news reports, investigative efforts, and research by academics and think tanks. We identified the relevant hostile activities by Russian actors that are most supported by evidence, which we then used to assign an intensity level to each country selected in each of the two realms. The intensity assessed can and does differ across the two realms in the same country. Moreover, because intensity levels are not defined identically across the two realms, our assessments are not intended to be combined for a one-dimensional summary assessment of the threat intensity for individual countries. Instead, we emphasize that the threat presented by Russian hostile activities is multi-dimensional, and individual countries can experience high levels of such activities in one but not another realm. Finally, in part because the evidence base is not uniform across the two realms for each country, for some of the countries we offer an assessment of only one of the two realms.

Below, we describe the hostile activities in the selected countries in each region.

Former Soviet States (excluding the Baltics)

Russia retains robust economic ties with the former Soviet Union states and is the dominant military and political power in the region. Cultural and social ties are also strong based on shared Soviet history, which facilitates Russian operations in this region. Russia's primary security interests for this region is to main-

²⁶ For some countries, we assess only a single realm. This is largely due to the availability of country-specific information related to each realm.

tain its position as the dominant regional power, particularly with respect to military and political affairs.

In the cognitive realm, this is the region where Russian activities present the most intense threat. In large part, this is because the Russian language is spoken and understood widely, which affords a broad reach for Russian-language media and other content. Russia conducts a significant part of its activities in the cognitive realm through overt information channels: In particular, Russia's direct transmission of content through domestic television channels and radio is ample and wide-reaching.²⁷ The country's covert information efforts are less well publicly reported outside a few cases, but evidence suggests that these are present and continuous and range from social media phishing and disinformation campaigns to covert support for information outlets.²⁸ On the political support side, owing to durable and persist-

²⁷ Russian domestic channels are widely available and popular with audiences. On Moldova, see, for example, Curararu, 2018 ("for two-thirds of the top television channels [10 out of 15], the most watched are mostly broadcasts and programmes in Russian"). See Jardine, 2015, on Kazakhstan ("with the largest Russian population in Central Asia, . . . most cable TV packages in the country include all the Russian channels") and Belarus ("Russia's major TV channels—the First Channel, RTR, NTV, Ren-TV—are part of Belarus' mandatory generally accessible TV package—9 channels whose dissemination is organized and sponsored by the Government"). Moreover, Sputnik operates in all the former Soviet languages and has offices everywhere except Turkmenistan (Jardine, 2015). RT is present as well, and Russian social media is widespread (see Curararu, 2018, on Moldova, and Jardine, 2015, on Kazakhstan). Russia's influence is somewhat limited by recent countermeasures adopted by some former Soviet Union countries: notably Ukraine (discussed later in this section) but also Georgia and Moldova. See Barbarosie and Coalson, 2018; Tughushi, Meskhi, and Ananeishvili, 2018. Thus, the official pro-Kremlin media is not as popular in Georgia, with only one TV network identified as pro-Russia.

²⁸ For example, in 2017, the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab uncovered "a large phishing and disinformation campaign against over 200 targets in 39 countries," including many former Soviet countries. Linked to the GRU, although circumstantially, the operation hacked and selectively leaked sometimes "tainted" (i.e., altered) emails of politicians, government officials, military personnel, and important figures in extractive and finance industries. See Hulcoop et al., 2017, reported by the Alliance for Securing Democracy's Authoritarian Interference Tracker website. In another example, Facebook recently took down 364 pages operating in the former Soviet Union (as well as Central and Eastern Europe) over the past few years, which were covertly set up by Sputnik, see Satariano, 2019, and Gleicher, 2019. For grounds for suspicions that various news outlets and websites are secretly funded or set up by Russia, see Senate Committee on

ing historical ties, Russia retains hidden or opaque connections to ex-Soviet political actors in this region.²⁹ Russia also supports figures in the unrecognized separatist or breakaway regions in Ukraine, as well as in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and Moldova (Transnistria).³⁰ Russia does not always use its multiple vectors of influence for purposes hostile to each of the states in the region, but it can easily deploy them to such purposes as the need arises. For example, Russia conducted a propaganda campaign using such channels in Belarus, one of Russia's closest allies since the Soviet collapse, angered by President Alexander Lukashenko's efforts to improve relations with the EU.³¹

Within the physical dimension, Russia's efforts across the former Soviet states are uneven. Russia has used military force in the region twice in ten years to prevent countries from leaving its orbit and becoming more pro-Western in orientation. Russia illegally occupied two separatist republics, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in August 2008, shortly after NATO and Georgia discussed NATO membership. Russia maintains one military base in each region, along with border guards, and has issued Russian passports to occupants of these separatist regions.

Foreign Relations, 2018, p. 74; IREX, 2017, p. 154; and Popescu and Zamfir, 2018, p. 171.

²⁹ On Russia's ties and influence on Georgia's wealthiest oligarch, see, for example, Banco, 2014, and Popescu and Zamfir, 2018, p. 189.

³⁰ For example, see Gerrits and Bader, 2016. This allows Russia to affect outcomes, such as elections: For example, see Minzarari, 2019.

³¹ See the Alliance for Securing Democracy's Authoritarian Interference Tracker website (2016), quoting MacKinnon (2017) in describing how Russia wages an aggressive propaganda campaign against Belarusian president Lukashenko:

In the fall of 2016 . . . Russian state-sponsored media, such as "government-run entities like the First Channel and Regnum news agency," engaged in an aggressive propaganda campaign against Belarus and its president Aleksandr Lukashenko. The campaign started after Lukashenko attempted to improve the country's relations with the EU, implement a visa-free regime for citizens of European countries, and rebutted Russia's attempts to establish a military base in Belarus. Some of the narratives included claims that Belarus was becoming a fascist state like Ukraine, that the Belarusian language was inferior to Russian, and that Lukashenko was ready to betray Russia.

The Balkans

Russia sees the Balkans, as a prominent Russia expert Mark Galeotti explains, "as a critical piece in a new, broader 'Great Game,'" in which Russia, Europe, and the United States "will seek to gain advantage and apply leverage in the region in the pursuit of wider goals that have little to do with Balkan politics" (Galeotti, 2018, p. 16). Broadly speaking, Russia has two sets of overarching goals in the region: discrediting and undercutting Western institutions and establishing Russia as a powerful actor in the region.³² Because of Russia's historical ties to the Balkans, cultural affinities (notably, the influence of the Orthodox Church), and the NATO bombings in the 1990s, Russia's agenda and its narratives find support among some Balkan audiences—in particular, the Serbs.³³ Russia's activities in the Balkans center on promoting their shared historical and cultural ties, promoting anti-NATO or anti-Western sentiment, collecting intelligence on NATO activities, and fomenting violent nationalism or anti-immigration tendencies.

In the cognitive realm, outside the former Soviet Union, it is in this region that Russia's activities are likely most intense, on par perhaps with only a few Central or Eastern European countries. Russia has little control over media outlets that would allow it to propagate its narratives directly in the region, as it does in some former Soviet countries.³⁴ Nonetheless, Russia has carved out a significant space in the information environment in the Western Balkans and Bulgaria through its *overt information efforts*. In particular, the media in most of the Western Balkans

³² See, for example, Zakem, Rosenau, and Johnson, 2017, p. 16. Galeotti describes the Russian interest in the Western Balkans as three-fold: "Acquire a role as a regional player and power," "stymie further NATO expansion," and "exploit potential EU expansion (and its potential failures)" (2018, pp. 9–10). Also see Bugajski and Assenova, 2016, p. 219.

³³ See, for example, Sajkas and Mijovic, 2016:

Due to historic ties, steady influence of the Christian-Orthodox Church, and the NATO bombing of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, citizens of the republics of Serbia and Montenegro are deeply divided over the relationships with the West and Russia, making it a welcoming ground for business, policies, and the messaging coming from Moscow.

³⁴ For example, RT has failed to launch a channel in Serbian, Croatian, or Bosnian (Bechev, 2017, p. 231).

is underresourced and insufficiently professionalized; its lack of resources to produce their own content led to many outlets “becoming increasingly reliant on stories from pro-Kremlin sources,” such as the Sputnik news agency.³⁵ Russia is thus able to rely on local media to disseminate its content broadly, without needing more extensive investments (Prague Security Studies Institute, 2019). Russia is suspected of *covert information activities* in the region as well in the cases of Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria. Alongside Russia’s many overt relationships with Balkan political actors, Russia’s activities likely cross the line into *covert and illegitimate political support*, such as its cultivation of nationalist and separatist forces in the region, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Salvo and De Leon, 2018, p. 3).

Within the physical realm, Russia likewise has multiple access points into the region. Russian physical activity in the Balkans is the most active in Bulgaria and Serbia, where it is considered medium-intensity, and Russia uses a mixture of the following tools:

- military pressure
- covert operations
- concealed support to pro-Russian proxy groups, including paramilitary training or recruiting local fighters to join Russian mercenary groups
- facilitating exchanges between Russian nationalist and Balkan nationalist groups
- running state-sponsored pro-Russian youth camps (Sukhankin, 2018c).

Active Conflict Zones

Russia is involved, to various degrees, in several conflict zones around the world, most notably in the Middle East. Military and intelligence forces provide overt and covert support to Russia’s allies in the region. Moscow also facilitates the use of PMCs in the Middle East, both to support ongoing military operations and to support commercial opportunities for Russian companies such as Wagner. For example,

³⁵ Sputnik also operates Romanian, Moldovan, and Greek-language websites, as well as a radio station in Serbia (Russell, 2017).

Wagner reportedly has signed lucrative contracts to defend energy infrastructure in Syria and in Libya (“The Last Battle of the Slavonic Corps,” 2013). Russia’s operations in the physical realm are often accompanied by related overt and covert activity in the cognitive realms, aimed at both shaping the narratives about a given conflict internationally and affecting perceptions and behaviors on the ground in the conflict zone.³⁶ In the conflict zones, we focus on activities in the physical realm, offering an overview of cognitive-realm activity only in the Syrian case, where it is best documented.

Because PMCs and their operations are not well known, we have compiled a list of these actors and their suspected areas of operations (Table 2).³⁷

NATO Europe

Russia’s efforts in the cognitive realm in NATO European countries are uneven, with the threat more intense in the Baltics and some Central and Eastern European countries than in most Western European countries. Although Russia attempts to direct a steady stream of propaganda into Western Europe, and its covert information activities peak around politically significant events such as elections and referenda, content promoted by Russian actors often does not gain much traction.³⁸ In part, this is due to higher media professionalism and a smaller “alternative media” universe in parts of Western Europe, compared with some Eastern and Central European countries.³⁹ On the political support front, there are

³⁶ Where Russia is supporting actors in the context of armed conflict, such support would ordinarily fall into the physical, rather than cognitive realm.

³⁷ Bingham and Muzyka, 2018; Dyner, 2018; Gostev, 2016; “The Last Battle of the Slavonic Corps,” 2013; “St. Petersburg Sends Contractors to Syria,” 2013; Leviev, 2018; Marten, 2019a, 2019b; Ostensen and Bukkvoll, 2018; Rimma, 2018; Sukhankin, 2018a, 2018b, 2019.

³⁸ Vilmer, 2019. Likewise, German expert Constanze Stenzenmüller (2017) argues that in spite of continuous information efforts directed at Germany, Russian actors have faced challenges: for instance, “RT and Sputnik . . . have had difficulty hiring German-language staff, and their output has consequently been noticeably low-grade.”

³⁹ On France and its media culture, see Vilmer, 2019. By contrast, as Jakub Janda and Ondrej Kundra write of the Czech

Table 2
Russian Private Military Contractors in Select Countries

Name	Missions (all are outside Russia)	Personnel Background	Area of Operation	Confidence Level
Antiterror-Orel (no longer active)	Sapper operations, security for Russian businesses in Iraq	Former GRU or former FSB Spetsnaz	Iraq	Moderate
Cossack groups (various)	Combat support, border protection, counterterrorist operations	Cossacks	Ukraine, Syria, Chechnya	Moderate
ENOT Corp.	Combat support	Former SOF	Eastern Ukraine, Syria	Moderate
Feraks Group		Former military officers	Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka	Low
Moran Group	Maritime security services (ships, ports), energy security, hostage rescue	Former SOF, Airborne	Indian Ocean, Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria, others	High
Patriot		Former military, SOF	Syria, Sudan, Central African Republic	Low
PMC MAR	Protect energy, site security for RS military or intelligence personnel		Ukraine, Libya, others	Moderate
Redut-Antiterror (TSENTR-R)	Combat support	Former SOF	Iraq, Somalia, Abkhazia	Moderate
RSB Group	Maritime security, intelligence support, combat support	Former FSB, SOF	Libya, Ukraine	High
Slavonic Corps (2013–2014)	Protect energy, ports, logistics, some combat support	Former SOBR, OMON, FSB	Syria	High
Turan Group		Central Asia	Syria	Low
Wagner	Protect energy infrastructure, natural resources, security for foreign governments, combat support	Mixed. Former military, intelligence, SOF, some with no prior experience	Syria, Central African Republic, Sudan, Ukraine, others	High

NOTES: SOF = special operations forces; FSB = Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation; SOBR = Special Rapid Response Unit; OMON= Russian special police.

numerous allegations of Russian covert support for European political forces, but apart from France’s National Rally, far less solid evidence of such.⁴⁰

In the *physical realm*, Russia does not have a standard template for its activity in NATO Europe. In some Eastern and Central European countries—for example, Poland and Romania—Russia resorts to sustained military intimidation and intelligence targeting because of these countries’ proximity

to Russia and because they host NATO military infrastructure (i.e., ballistic missile defense or other NATO forces). In most Western European NATO countries, Russian activities in the physical realm are not as robust. Western European NATO countries have more effective law enforcement and counter-intelligence capabilities that raise risks for Russia’s operations and generally weaker social and economic ties to Russia compared with Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. As a result, Russia often takes a more oblique approach to influence in Western Europe. For example, Russia funds and supports various soccer clubs or martial arts “fight clubs” in as many as 21 European nations as a cover to distribute

Republic, “Compared to the neighbouring states, the Czech disinformation scene is disproportionately large and well developed” (Janda and Kundra, 2016).

⁴⁰ For an overview of allegations, see Cohen and Radin, 2019, pp. 85–86.

anti-Western or pro-Russian propaganda to anti-Western ultranationalists (Carpenter, 2018). If Russia cannot co-opt ultranationalist biker gangs and similar groups to become pro-Russian, it resorts to agitating these groups and reinforcing anti-Western, anti-immigrant, and illiberal views. In Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, elements of the Russian state or pro-Russian proxies allegedly provide support and, in some cases, paramilitary training to local ultranationalist groups (Rettman, 2017). These groups include Slovak paramilitary groups such as the People's Party Our Slovakia, Slovak Revival Movement, and Slovak Conscripts. Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate, the GRU, has allegedly provided covert support to similar paramilitary groups, such as the Hungarian National Front, and recruited among Hungarian paramilitary groups to fight in eastern Ukraine.⁴¹ Although groups such as the pro-Russian motorcycle gang Night Wolves are outlawed in many NATO nations, there are branches of the Night Wolves in Slovakia, Latvia, Germany, North Macedonia, and Bosnia (Carpenter, 2018). Evidence also suggests that Russia was responsible for assassinations in the United Kingdom and Germany, although these assassinations have targeted Russian émigrés critical of the Russian regime rather than officials of Western European governments themselves.⁴²

Non-NATO Europe

Russia's hostile activities in non-NATO European countries are focused on resisting NATO's influence and undermining other Western institutions. The intensity and the character of Russian hostile activities varies across this group of countries. Russia's tactics of resisting NATO range from disinformation maligning NATO to covert orchestration of coups, as happened in Montenegro in anticipation of its accession to NATO. Russian physical activities in this region appear focused on its immediate neighbors, such as Sweden and Finland, which have both reported an increase in Russian intelligence activity

in recent years. That Russia resorts to overt mechanisms, such as military intimidation near Sweden and Finland, is likely due to ongoing Russian paranoia that one or the other could join NATO or could be willing to host third-party military infrastructure near Russian territory. We assess Russia's physical realm activity in the Nordic parts of non-NATO Europe to be low.

Rest of the World

Although Russia's hostile activities in Western democracies, former Communist countries, and conflict zones attract the most attention, Russian actors are also operating in the cognitive and physical realms in the rest of the world. We did not attempt a systematic worldwide analysis, but we highlight here parts of Africa as sites for some such activities. Russia is working to reinvigorate Soviet-era ties across Africa. In the cognitive realm, there are several reasons why Africa could be one of Russia's up and coming targets for information activities—particularly in countries that were former British or French colonies. Russian outlets already operate in French and English, key languages used on the African continent. Moreover, some of Russia's anti-Western narratives have a receptive audience in African nations, which view Russia through the lens of its anti-colonial Soviet past.⁴³ In the physical realm, Russia has been engaging in a variety of state and nonstate activities since 2014. The Russian government is reestablishing overt links to multiple African nations by offering unique services, such as military training for local forces, or arms deals, signing over a dozen new military-technical agreements with African nations since 2015 (Hedenskog, 2018). Several Russian companies are beginning commercial projects for natural resource extraction, and Russian PMCs are increasing their presence and roles in the region, including military training, political consulting, presidential security services, and guarding natural resource mines (particularly

⁴¹ GRU is the Russian abbreviation of Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravlenie (Mesežnikov and Bránik, 2017).

⁴² See, for instance, Morris and Dixon, 2019, and Harding, 2018.

⁴³ This includes Burkina Faso, Mali, Sudan, Suriname, and the Republic of the Congo, all of which signed agreements on military cooperation with Russia in 2019 (Vilmer et al., 2018, pp. 98–99).

in the Central African Republic but also in Sudan) (Marten, 2019a, 2019b). Russia's overall strategy for Africa appears to be mostly motivated by commercial interests, counterterrorism, growing a base of support for Russian positions on international affairs, and perhaps military access in the case of Eritrea and Egypt (Kulkova, 2018).

Summary of Activity

Russia has and continues to resort to hostile undertakings. Russia uses a diverse set of tools to conduct malign activities across the globe. We have highlighted the broad sweep of these activities across six regions in both the cognitive and physical realms, which sometimes overlap. Russia's behavior varies considerably and is a function of several variables. In the cognitive realm, the intensity of Russia's behavior is directly related to its geographic proximity to various countries, historical and cultural ties, and the susceptibility of target audiences within countries. Accordingly, threat levels appear highest in former Soviet states (including the Baltics), the Balkans, and Eastern Europe. But activities in this realm are generally cheap, low-risk, and offer higher deniability; they are therefore more widespread.

In the physical realm, Russia has limited its high-intensity activities to conflict zones (such as Syria) and breakaway regions in the former Soviet Union (Ukraine, Georgia). Its use of PMCs within conflict zones affords it a relatively cheap instrument to curry and expand influence. In Africa, where Moscow is trying to proactively regain influence, its actions in the physical realm often rely on the services of PMCs. Within Europe, Russian activity is certainly more circumspect, especially within EU and NATO countries, but in no way absent. In Europe, Russian operations typically face more robust counterintelligence or law enforcement pressure than in the Middle East or Africa. That said, Russia has grown increasingly comfortable since 2014 in using proxy forces on the continent to shape conflict outcomes in a plausibly deniable way. Across both the physical and cognitive realms, Russia leverages its influence throughout the former Soviet Union and exploits opportunities in countries beset with conflict—including Libya and

Syria, and, to a lesser extent, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan.

Figures 11 and 12 offer visual summations of the activity described above in both the physical and cognitive realms.

Looking Forward

Taken together, the threats and strategic trends presented in this report suggest several themes moving forward. First, the evidence in this report shows no indication that Russia has been able to translate its hostile measures into strategic gains. This apparent failure, however, should not induce a sense of complacency among U.S. or Western decisionmakers. Russian indirect measures are hostile acts against the United States and its allies and partners. Moreover, much of the threatening behavior is relatively low-cost and highly deniable. We should therefore expect it to continue, absent a profound change in current Russian foreign policy. The strategic indicators reviewed in this report should, however, help us to bound the level of threat posed by recent Russian activities and help to inform policymakers' judgments about the appropriate level of risk to accept in taking measures to counter Russia.

Second, Russia is prepared to assume more risk in areas of conflict and where it wields more influence vis-à-vis the West—that is, former Soviet states and in various Eastern European countries. That Russia is inclined to incur such risks does not imply that the United States and its allies should move to counter Russia tit-for-tat in every country Moscow seeks to influence. Some of Russia's overtures can provoke backlash or have unintended consequences. The degree to which the United States and the West can expose much of these malign operations can help contribute to that process.

Third, where the United States can build resilience and consolidate its advantages among its allies and partners, it should do so. Although corruption, economic discontent, and in some cases lingering potential for violent conflict make some European states vulnerable to Russian hostile activities, the United States and its allies enjoy many advantages in this region and should continue and in some cases

FIGURE 11
 Select Russian Activity in the Physical Realm

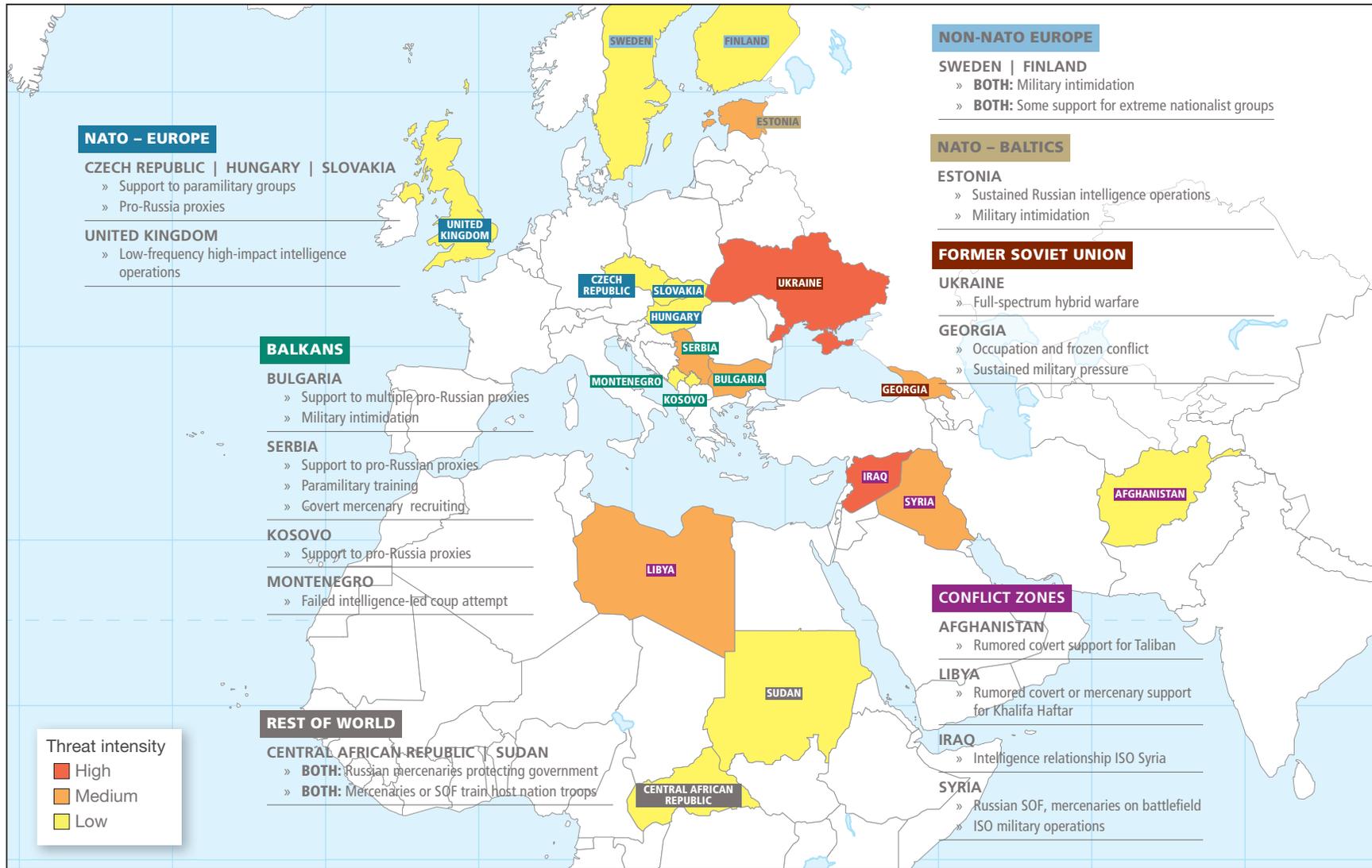
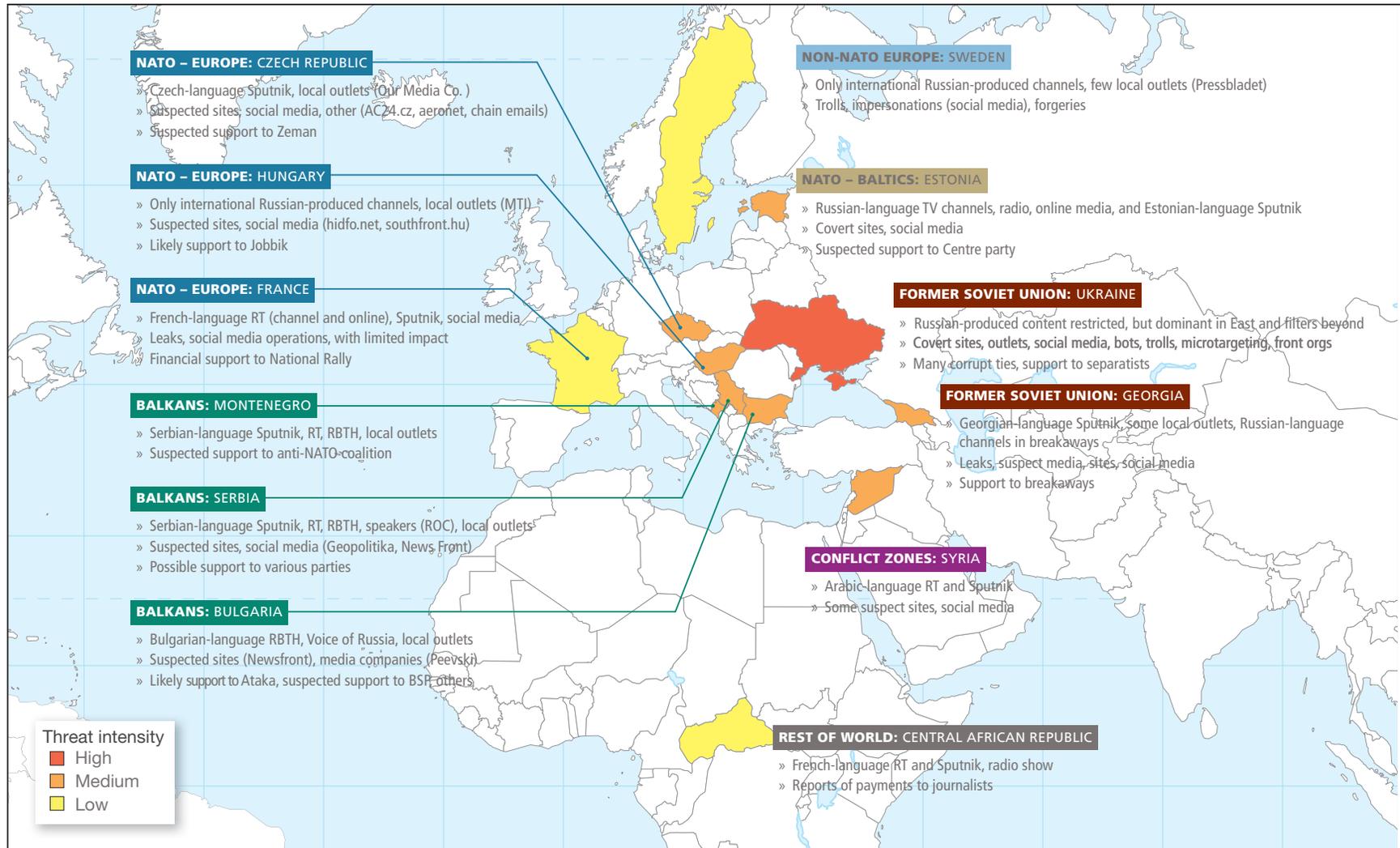


FIGURE 12
Select Russian Activity in the Cognitive Realm



invigorate its efforts to bolster partners. That said, how the economic fallout from the global coronavirus pandemic affects Western resolve to sustain pressure on Russia remains an open question.

Finally, areas of conflict present double-edged swords. Certainly, conflict may be leveraged to gain access or presence where it otherwise would be impossible, or terribly difficult. But domestic con-

flicts present their own hazards. They are highly charged and political by their very nature. They tend to have multiple, often competing, sides. Navigating these particularities requires tact and a high degree of local knowledge. The danger of getting “bogged down” in another country’s war cannot be overstated.

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Abbreviations

AFRICOM	U.S. African Command
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
EU	European Union
EUCOM	U.S. European Command
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GRU	Russia's Main Intelligence directorate
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PMC	private military contractor
UN	United Nations

About This Report

This report documents research and analysis conducted as part of a project entitled *Leveraging Operational and Strategic Maneuver to Counter Revisionist States*, sponsored by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. The purpose of the project was to establish a strategic framework for U.S. Army special operations forces (ARSOF) to support countering Russian activities in the competition space.

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