



Russia's Military Interventions

Patterns, Drivers, and Signposts

Samuel Charap, Edward Geist, Bryan Frederick, John J. Drennan, Nathan Chandler,
and Jennifer Kavanagh

www.rand.org/t/RRA444-3

Despite Russia's relatively small global economic footprint, it has engaged in more interventions than any other U.S. competitor since the end of the Cold War. In this report, the authors assess when, where, and why Russia conducts military interventions by analyzing the 25 interventions that Russia has undertaken since 1991, including detailed case studies of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War and Moscow's involvement in the ongoing Syrian civil war.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the primary drivers of Russia's military interventions?
- Under what circumstances, where, when, and how is Russia likely to undertake a military intervention?
- Are there trends or patterns in Russian military interventions?



KEY FINDINGS

- Changes on the ground in post-Soviet Eurasia that create an external threat or the perception of a rapid change in the regional balance or in Russia's status in ways that contradict Moscow's interests should be seen as potential triggers for military action. Moscow will not hesitate to act, including with force, in its immediate neighborhood.
- Russia seems to act in ways that are consistent with a desire to avoid losses when it comes to regional power balances. Moscow has intervened when it perceived regional balances to be shifting away from a status quo that was favorable to Russian interests. U.S. planners should view potential future significant (perceived) losses for Russia as potential signposts for military action.
- Although Russia intervenes in some cases in response to exogenous shocks, it often openly signals its interests and even its redlines. Prior to the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, Moscow made clear that it anticipated the need to act following the NATO Bucharest Summit. With Ukraine, Russia had made

continued on back

clear for years that it would react to perceived Western encroachment. Although Russian leaders have frequently uttered untruths about their country's actions and interests, there are genuine signals within the noise.

- Russia's one combat intervention beyond post-Soviet Eurasia—Syria—does not appear to be setting the stage for a series of similar interventions. The success of the Syria intervention may have made the leadership more likely to consider undertaking an expeditionary intervention, but there are still significant logistical challenges for the Russian military beyond post-Soviet Eurasia.

