



U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Russia

An Overview of Strategy and Considerations



American Security Project



White Paper

Matthew Wallin

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In this Report:

This white paper is intended to provide a brief overview of suggestions and considerations for U.S. policy toward Russia along a variety of fronts. Rather than looking at the entirety of the U.S.-Russia relationship as a singular policy, elements of the relationship are broken down by the major issue categories between the countries today.

While the current relationship between the U.S. and Russia is largely adversarial, there may be opportunities for positive progress on a number of challenges that face both countries. Where the U.S. chooses to put pressure on Russia, it must thoroughly analyze the costs and benefits of doing so.

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Introduction

In a matter of a few short years, the U.S. relationship with Russia has risen to the top of foreign policy concerns. From the invasion of Ukraine, to the interference during the 2016 election, Russia has taken an active role in sewing chaos. Russian action has reinvigorated the NATO alliance, while political disagreements in the U.S. have clouded the debate around the level of threat that Russia poses.

The current state of U.S.-Russia relations need not have reached this low. After the U.S. won the Cold War, concern about Russia largely dropped. America missed a vital opportunity to help Russia win the peace. The economic challenges and political instability of the country led to the rise of Vladimir Putin, who promised to lead Russians back to the days of commanding international power and respect.

In the past few years, Russia has proven adept in its ability to achieve limited objectives—to prevent the fall of the Assad regime, to prevent the complete loss of its strategic interests in Ukraine, to help destabilize the political discourse in the U.S., and to reestablish itself as a world power. Americans and policymakers should be extremely concerned about Russia’s actions in recent years. They should neither under- nor overestimate Russia’s ability to influence or disrupt American national security planning.

Relations between the United States and the Russian Federation are far too broad and intertwined to be subject to piecemeal policy making. Many issues between the countries, including Syria, Ukraine, and nuclear non-proliferation, cannot be solved in a vacuum.

There is room for the United States and Russia to improve relations and prevent the onset of a second Cold War. But this room is limited, and challenged by the continued entrenchment of Putin’s power in the country. This white paper is intended to provide a brief overview of suggestions and considerations for U.S. policy toward Russia along a variety of fronts.

NATO

Key Takeaways

- The president should routinely and publicly reaffirm the U.S. commitment to Article 5.
- Discussions of NATO member contributions to the alliance should consider “comparative advantage” capabilities in addition to defense spending as a percentage of GDP.
- NATO should bolster the abilities of vulnerable states to better survive attack until reinforcement arrives.
- NATO should avoid inviting new members for the foreseeable future.

NATO was founded in 1949 to protect the signatories from armed attack, particularly from the Soviet Union.¹ Through much of the 1990s and 2000s, questions were rife about NATO’s purpose, given that the Soviet Union no longer existed as a threat. After the Cold War, the number of NATO expeditions expanded significantly,² venturing beyond the defensive intent of the North Atlantic Treaty. Largely a result of Russian interference in Ukraine, some NATO members are very concerned about the possibility of potential Russian attack, particularly those countries which border Russia or have ethnic Russian populations.

While the NATO of the 1990s may have lost its anti-Soviet reason for being, Russian military action in Ukraine in 2015 reinvigorated discussion within the alliance. A debate about defense spending by non-U.S. NATO countries is at the core of this debate. European NATO defense spending saw an overall slight increase in 2016, which is still lower than 2009 levels as a percentage of GDP.³

The current 2% of GDP defense spending goal for member countries may not be the most relevant measure of contributions to the collective defense of the alliance.⁴ NATO should undertake a study to determine the comparative advantage of different types of contributions to the alliance, whether that is in terms of military capability or non-military contributions. Some countries may be able to contribute more significantly to the alliance by focusing on capabilities or expertise which fill gaps or provide a greater benefit to the alliance than defense spending figures alone. For instance, Estonia may provide greater utility to NATO as a contributor to cyber security than as a contributor of manpower given its total population and vulnerability to Russian attack.



President Trump and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg hold a joint press conference. White House photo.

Today the credibility of NATO still relies on the inviolability of Article 5, which defines the collective defense mechanism of the alliance. The guarantee that the entire alliance will come to the aid of any member that has been attacked is an openly-stated escalatory measure that spells out the consequences to any potential adversary. The United States' commitment to this premise sets the temperature for all discussions of European security. The President of the United States should frequently and publicly declare the U.S. commitment to Article 5, regardless of defense spending levels by NATO member countries.

However, responding collectively takes time, especially as some vulnerable members like the Baltic states are relatively isolated from other NATO members. It is an inefficient use of funds, troops, and other resources to base mass numbers of troops everywhere Russia may attempt to interfere militarily. The United States and its NATO allies should focus on bolstering the abilities of vulnerable NATO members to withstand a direct or Russian-sponsored attack until other NATO reinforcements can arrive. The smaller resources of countries like those in the Baltics dictate that a direct confrontation with the Russian military should be avoided until other NATO resources can be brought to bear.

To better address the military vulnerability of these countries, NATO countries should commit to:

- Increasing the self-sufficiency of the Baltic states to slow a potential Russian attack until reinforcements can be brought in.
- Training the Baltic states or other potential hotspots in methods of guerilla warfare, to slow and harass a militarily superior Russian force.
- Publicly and repeatedly reaffirming commitments to Article 5, particularly by the United States.
- Conducting an alliance-wide review of potential “grey zone” vulnerabilities and developing an action plan to address those vulnerabilities in member states.

The strength of the NATO alliance must also extend beyond military matters, as its member countries also face non-military threats. NATO should also work to improve governance in its member states, while being mindful of sovereignty. Working to address issues of corruption and improve the trustworthiness of governments will weaken Russian narratives aimed at fomenting unrest. Anti-corruption laws and measures in all NATO countries, including the United States, should be strictly adhered to in order to maintain credibility amongst allies and enemies alike.

A sometimes-overlooked consideration with regards to NATO's credibility is Russia's continued wariness of NATO's intentions, despite NATO statements that it is not a threat to Russia.⁵ Part of this wariness is justified by a failure to keep verbal promises by previous U.S. administrations to avoid expanding NATO membership further eastward towards Russia's borders.⁶ While these expansions don't indicate a direct military threat, Russia sees them as a both deceitful and threatening given the military nature of the NATO alliance. Further expansions to small or former Soviet states risk creating liabilities for the alliance, due to the inherent vulnerabilities of these states. Additionally, Russian suspicions of these expansions, and the "defensive" measures Russia might take in response could lead to the kind of armed conflict that NATO was envisioned to deter. NATO should therefore refrain from expanding any further for the foreseeable future.

United Nations Security Council

Key Takeaways

- The UN Security Council (UNSC) is a tool of U.S. strategic foreign policy.
- Russia must have a stake in the success of the UNSC.
- The U.S. should use the UNSC as a tool for forcing countries to publicly state their positions on the record.
- UNSC-sanctioned coercive action adds credibility to U.S. foreign policy.

The U.S. and Russia do not always see eye-to-eye when it comes to issues placed before the UN Security Council (UNSC). As a veto wielding power, the Russian Federation has exercised its veto 18 times since 1990.⁷ The U.S. has exercised its veto 16 times in the same period.⁸ More than half of Russia's vetoes have related to the Syrian Civil War.

Russian consent or abstention at the Security Council can make or break the ability of the U.S. to pursue its international security objectives. The U.S. should never cede its right to self-defense or its right to secure its interests, but it should also seek to better incorporate Russia into its security objectives. The goal should not be to placate Russia, but rather to give Russia a stake in the success of security missions.

Despite the inherent flaws in the United Nations, the UN is a tool and creation of American foreign policy;⁹ it should be used as such. It can be key in forcing states on the record for the world to see, as was done during the U.S. confrontation against the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile crisis in 1963. More recently, in April 2017, Ambassador Nikki Haley echoed this sentiment by forcing a requested closed meeting on Syria's chemical weapon usage to be open, stating: "Any country that chooses to defend the atrocities of the Syrian regime will have to do so in full public view, for all the world to hear."¹⁰

In order for the UNSC to retain its value, Russia must see value in it. Veto power gives Russia a stake in the UNSC as an institution and a desire to ensure its success as a tool of foreign policy. Keeping Russia engaged with the UN is a key means for exerting influence and pressure, even if it doesn't always work as American policymakers would like.

As a matter of policy, the United States should bring most international security matters it wishes to influence to the Security Council, whether or not it intends to abide by the council's decisions. Forcing Russia on the record about security issues may help sway public opinion in favor of U.S. security goals in case of a Russian veto. Additionally, obtaining a UN Security Council resolution in favor of military action, particularly in cases of humanitarian intervention, increases domestic support when a country partakes in that action.¹¹ Of course, gaining Russian buy-in on security issues is always desirable, and increases the chances of success.



Ambassador Nikki Haley delivers remarks at a UN Security Council Meeting on the Situation in Syria, April 7, 2017. State Department photo.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Key Takeaways

- The U.S. and Russia have cooperated for decades on nuclear non-proliferation.
- Several non-proliferation treaties are at risk of collapse.
- Russia's cooperation as a UN Security Council member is helpful and likely necessary for state denuclearization around the world.
- The U.S. should not waste more money on ethically and politically unusable nuclear systems beyond what is needed to effectively deter Russia.

The United States should engage Russia on issues of nuclear non-proliferation. Holding the two largest nuclear arsenals on Earth, both countries have a responsibility to continue to reduce the risks that nuclear weapons and radiological material pose to the population of our shared planet.

It is important to understand that even though both the U.S. and Russia have an interest in reducing nuclear risks, each country sees the other as the primary nuclear threat. Even the U.S. anti-ballistic missile program, while officially aimed at deterring rogue actors, is seen by Russia as a threat to nuclear stability. To Russia, any increase in nuclear or anti-nuclear technology achieved by the U.S. is deemed threatening.

Despite shared interests with the U.S. in reducing the dangers of nuclear weapons, Russia has recently taken a more provocative nuclear stance.



Ground launched cruise missiles, like the U.S. BGM-109G, were banned under the INF Treaty. USAF Photo.

In early 2017, Russia began flagrantly violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty¹² by deploying land-based cruise missiles. Though Russia has complained that other countries actively deploy intermediate range missiles and are not party to the treaty,¹³ this does not provide a permissible excuse for Russia to deploy its own missiles in violation. It does, however, create an opportunity for the United States to actively engage other countries for possible inclusion in an enlarged version of the treaty, thereby furthering U.S. nonproliferation goals. The U.S. should actively pursue measures that reduce nuclear risks worldwide, including measures that affect its allies.

If diplomatic efforts fail, the U.S. has a playbook for countering intermediate range missiles in Europe. In the 1980s, it placed equivalent missiles to counter the presence of Soviet SS-20s in Europe. Today, it should consider repositioning existing nuclear weapons or nuclear delivery assets and capabilities more aggressively in Europe to encourage Russia to come back into compliance with the INF.

However, the U.S. should avoid being coaxed into an arms race by Russian provocations and modernization. While it is preferable for arms control treaties and reductions to be made on a bilateral or multilateral basis, the U.S. should not let Russian action dictate its defense spending priorities. Instead, the U.S. should independently determine its own defense needs, including what expenditures are needed to maintain an effective nuclear deterrent which complies with arms treaty limitations. Considering that nuclear weapons are ethically and politically unusable, the U.S. should avoid excessive spending on these weapons in response to Russian provocations and consider allowing Russia to overspend on weapons that it, too, is unable to use.

Despite the complications presented by Russia's nuclear strategies, mutual reductions should still be a goal. As the New START Treaty is set to expire in 2021, the United States should negotiate with Russia for a follow-up agreement which aims for greater bilateral nuclear reductions. This process will need to be undertaken by the current administration in order to have a viable agreement for its second term or a new presidency. In lieu of a new agreement, the U.S. should pursue the 5-year extension permissible under the treaty,¹⁴ thus providing time to negotiate for a follow-on agreement at its conclusion. Russia has recently also raised the need to discuss New START and INF issues, especially as deadlines inherent in New START loom nearer.¹⁵

Russia can also be helpful in dealing with other potential or early nuclear powers. Russia's assistance was instrumental in securing the Iran deal (JCPOA), an agreement to which Iran has so far adhered, according to the IAEA inspectors charged with monitoring Iran's compliance.¹⁶ In this case, understanding Russia's motivations in imposing sanctions on Iran provides insight on how Russia can be encouraged to be more helpful in other situations. If the U.S. undertakes unilateral action against Iran, thereby undermining the JCPOA despite the certification of the IAEA, this will likely weaken Russia's interest in working cooperatively on non-proliferation agreements in the future.

There may be opportunities for Russia to contribute to a diplomatic resolution to the Korean nuclear situation as well, but these are likely to be fraught with drawbacks.¹⁷ Currently, North Korea has very little incentive to abandon its nuclear ambitions, and every reason to pursue them. If the international community is going to amplify the pressure sufficiently to change North Korea's calculus, Russia's cooperation on the UN Security Council will be required in order to increase the pressure.

Cyber Security

Key Takeaways

- Many cyber threats, including from state actors like Russia, can be eliminated through proper user training and education.
- Plausible deniability makes responding to cyber attacks more difficult.
- Diplomacy will be as important as technical solutions for deterring and preventing cyber attacks.
- Greater innovation is needed to defend from attacks by Russia, China, and others.

Cyber issues aren't solely about the U.S. and Russia. This is a worldwide problem, not exclusive to governments. It's an issue faced by local governments, corporations, and private citizens as well.

At issue is that cyber espionage and attacks can be incredibly damaging while not causing any real-world death or destruction. It is this issue that sets cyber weapons apart from conventional or nuclear weapons.

Rather than focusing on cyber issues specific to Russia, such as accusations surrounding the 2016 presidential election, the United States should focus on creating a universally accepted system of norms for cyber operations worldwide.¹⁸ The idea would be tantamount to a peacetime cyber arms behavior agreement regulating the use of cyber tools and creating a system of accountability.

The idea of a "cyber treaty" is viewed as unrealistic by some in the policy community,¹⁹ and this is understandable. Cyber tools are secretive, don't take up space in the same way that nuclear or conventional weapons infrastructure does, and are infinitely more difficult to verify. There is no monopoly on their use by state actors. This characteristic inherently makes their regulation nearly impossible. Furthermore, there is the question of attribution. The ability of non-state actors to commit cyber attacks raises a number of questions about holding a government responsible for non-state attacks originating from within its borders.

Putin illustrated this in June 2017, when he insisted that the Russian Government had no role in any hacking of the U.S. 2016 election, while simultaneously contending it was possible that private Russian citizens may have undertaken the effort on their own:

"If they are patriotically minded, they start making their contributions — which are right, from their point of view — to the fight against those who say bad things about Russia."²⁰

This type of plausible deniability complicates the issue of assigning blame or retaliating against the culprits of a cyber attack. It provides a means by which the Russian government can deny its involvement and continue acts of cyber espionage, potentially including cyber attacks with physical consequences. In the court of public opinion, it may be necessary to develop a system by which evidence of cyber-incidents can be declassified in a way that does not endanger operational security—but this may be prohibitively difficult.

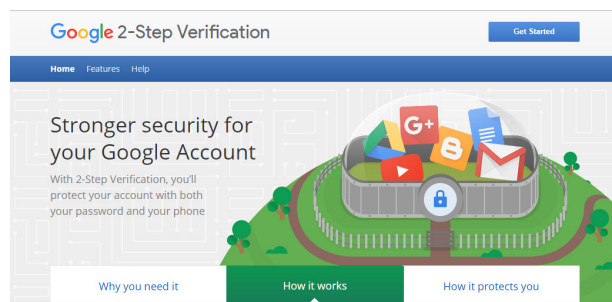
Yet difficulty in regulation does not mean the U.S. can ignore the danger that cyber weapons pose to the security of the United States. Even America's own cyber weapons have fallen into the wrong hands on occasion,²¹ threatening the security of its own citizens. Like with nuclear weapons, a serious international effort should be made to constrain the use of these tools, and a system should be developed to penalize certain types of actions by state actors. Addressing attacks by non-state actors may require a type of extradition or accountability that would be incumbent upon host-states to facilitate, and would need to go beyond the provisions of the more crime-oriented Budapest Convention on Cybercrime.²²

Aside from the dangers of state-produced cyber weapons, a great deal of vulnerability issues can be mitigated by updating software, enabling multifactor authentication, and educating users about identifying phishing attacks. A phishing attack, which tricks a user into voluntarily providing their login credentials, is exactly what compromised the emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta.²³

However, these measures don't solve all of America's cyber problems, and Russia is only one threat amongst many.

To better address the full gamut of cyber threats, attracting innovation in cyber security is vital. Hackers are continuously innovating, even developing methods to compromise computers that run gene sequencers by encoding malware into DNA.²⁴ The government and private industry must work together to encourage the motivation and innovation necessary to develop novel defenses. The U.S. government should work with private industry to incentivize cyber security innovation, promote the recruitment of top talent, and encourage the establishment of cyber security standards. Conversely, the private sector should be provided opportunities to better help the Federal Government update and secure its own systems in a timely and efficient fashion, to prevent episodes like the OPM hack.²⁵ Ongoing suspicions surrounding private industry software, like Russian owned Kaspersky Lab antivirus,²⁶ should prompt the Department of Homeland Security to issue a public list of "risky mainstream software" that is either considered outdated, suspect, or otherwise unsafe.

Undoubtedly, the cyber realm will continue to evolve and pose greater risks to military forces and civilian infrastructure alike. Russia, China, and non-state actors will continue to attempt to penetrate American networks for a variety of purposes, and the fight against these intrusions will be constant. The U.S. needs out-of-the-box thinking, not only when it comes to technical solutions, but in generating ideas to deter or discourage these actors from choosing a hostile course of action.



Signing in to your account will work a little differently

- 1 You'll enter your password
Whenever you sign in to Google, you'll enter your password as usual.
- 2 You'll be asked for something else
Then, a code will be sent to your phone via text, voice call, or our mobile app. Or, if you have a Security Key, you can insert it into your computer's USB port.

Multi-factor authentication, like the kind used by Google, is more secure than simply using a password.

Incidents at Sea and in the Air

Key Takeaways

- The behavior of Russian forces in the air has been provocative and dangerous.
- An updated naval/aviation behavior agreement may be needed to address the situation.
- The U.S. should work with Russia to create mechanisms for emergency de-escalation.

In recent years, the professional behavior of Russia's military has come into question. Russian military personnel have engaged in provocative and dangerous activities as a matter of routine. Airspace violations, dangerous intercepts, and buzzing of U.S. Navy vessels all pose a risk to the forces involved. Russian aircraft routinely fly through or near the air space of European countries with their transponders turned off.²⁷ In 2015, a Russian aircraft in violation of Turkish airspace was shot down,²⁸ illustrating the danger of poor communication and provocative actions.

In peace time, it's incredibly important that military forces maintain proper communications policies to ensure that encounters with other nations' militaries go smoothly. A failure to properly communicate can result in a misinterpretation of intent, and ultimately in the loss of life. At worst, it can result in a skirmish that leads to war.



A Russian Su-24 makes an unsafe close pass on USS Donald Cook in 2016. U.S. Navy photo.

The U.S. and Soviet Union signed the Incidents at Sea Agreement in 1972,²⁹ intended to reduce risky behavior at sea during the Cold War. This agreement was effective until recently, when Russian forces routinely began making dangerous approaches on American and other foreign air and naval assets. The flagrant violation of this agreement suggests that if attempts to enforce the original agreement fail, it may be time to update the agreement to ensure it is better suited to modern times.³⁰ The United States should thus make a concerted effort to reaffirm and enforce this agreement with Russia, or press for new negotiations.

If Russian behavior remains dangerous, the United States and NATO allies need to carefully lay out rules of engagement to deal with dangerous or aggressive behavior. These rules should be clearly communicated to Russia. Nobody wants a shooting incident to break out, but if Russia's behavior continues in this way, it may be inevitable—and Russia needs the information necessary to limit its provocations and prevent a miscalculation.

One recommendation to address this issue is the creation of a new deconfliction communications line, used to rapidly de-escalate situations in which U.S. or NATO forces come into close contact with Russian forces outside of Syria. Another recommendation could come in the form of designated exchange officers who serve as a point of contact for de-escalation, either through the combatant commands, the individual armed services, or another mechanism. The intent behind these individuals would be to rapidly respond to emergency situations reported from the front lines, and establish lines of communication when aggressive forces in the field are not responding to standard warnings.

ASP board member, Vice Admiral Lee Gunn, USN (Ret), suggests a variation on this idea:³¹

“A permanently staffed deconfliction cell on neutral territory, with officers from both the U.S. and Russia, could be helpful for these types of situations. Information passed to this cell by both sides would decrease the likelihood of these scenarios occurring, and provide a go-to contact for reducing risks when they do. Both sides have an interest in preventing a deadly situation from occurring, so the Russians should be receptive. In negotiating such an agreement with Russia, it’s useful to isolate the issue of air and sea incidents completely from the many other issues of contention between our countries, allowing both sides to focus solely on the critical issue at hand.”

Gunn notes that suggesting to Russia that we consider updating the Incidents at Sea Agreement for the 21st century, including better addressing incidents in the air, could be the genesis of a productive conversation on these issues. This conversation could potentially include a discussion of rules of engagement, not intended as a threat, but to further establish rules of the road for life-threatening situations.

Sooner or later, these risky encounters with Russian forces will result in a loss of life. A provocative confrontation at sea or in the air not only poses a severe danger to the personnel involved, but could rapidly escalate into a more consequential situation. These encounters are completely avoidable, and a system of norms needs to be stressed and reestablished to bring this pattern of behavior to an end, before hubris or foolishness results in mass casualties. The U.S. should make resolving these incidents a policy priority.

Ukraine

Key Takeaways

- Sanctions aren’t strong enough or universal enough to force a Russian withdrawal.
- There is no viable plan for reclaiming Crimea, but securing eastern Ukraine may be possible.
- Lethal aid should be tailored to Ukraine’s ability to use it effectively; advanced lethal aid should be restricted.
- Ukraine should not be invited to join NATO.

Since Russia illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, there has been no viable plan for reclaiming the territory and ousting Russia’s heavy military presence in the region. Ukraine has neither the military forces nor capacity necessary to force Russia to relinquish its claim.

Sanctions enacted against Russia³² in response to its actions in Ukraine have occurred at a time when Russia’s economy has faced numerous challenges, but it is unclear to what extent those sanctions are affecting the overall economic situation.³³ Despite any effect sanctions are having, it is clear that sanctions have not forced a Russian withdrawal from contested areas. It is therefore reasonable to say that sanctions as currently employed have not been effective at achieving their strategic intent. However, these sanctions may have the side benefit of deterring Russian action against other countries due to the potential increase in cost additional punitive action would cause. Additionally, removing sanctions prior to any positive action on Russia’s part would amount to a victory for Moscow.

As a matter of practicality, Ukraine will need to plan for a future that does not include Crimea as part of its territory, simply because it is incapable of reclaiming that area, and others cannot help. As Russia builds infrastructure into Crimea and potentially other areas, it becomes even less likely that Ukraine will ever be able to wrest control from its larger neighbor.

Two years after the Minsk II agreement was established to end the fighting, the situation in Eastern Ukraine has not been resolved, nor is it clear that Minsk II will be the final agreement to end the conflict. As the situation is not stable, the U.S. should work with the Ukrainian government to make contingency plans in case of a total collapse of the eastern region. This planning should involve analyzing whether Ukraine truly wants to reclaim control of its eastern border and thus absorb the associated military, financial, and political costs with doing so and subsequently rebuilding.³⁴ Reclaiming the East may be possible with a competent and well-equipped Ukrainian military, but there is an increased risk of further Russian intrusion by in this scenario. Regardless of the next move, Ukraine must be able to protect itself from future territorial annexation.

The options for fully dislodging Russia from Ukrainian territory are limited, and fraught with risk.

For instance, a drastic measure to limit the strategic use of Crimea to Russia would involve restricting access to and from the Black Sea through the Bosphorus Strait and Dardanelles, but this could directly result in armed conflict between NATO and Russia. This decision would be dependent on Turkey's willingness to confront Russia and would violate the premise of the 1936 Montreaux Convention,³⁵ as Russia's Black Sea state status provides it with legal right of passage.³⁶ There is little premise for Turkey or NATO to take this course of action, as neither were directly attacked by Russia.

Given Ukraine's vulnerability and inability to defend itself sufficiently, there has also been talk of joining NATO.³⁷ But there is no advantage in this for the alliance, and it may actually put Ukraine at greater risk. NATO expansion can reasonably be seen as a cause for concern for Russia and is a significant point of contention, providing Russia with further justification for the use of force. NATO should limit its risk and vulnerability by refraining from inviting Ukraine to be a member for the foreseeable future. If the purpose of the alliance is to deter an act of aggression, a Ukrainian membership bid may incite the opposite effect. Additionally, the length of negotiations and the ascension process to NATO would make Ukraine more vulnerable to Russian attack during this time, as Russia may take the opportunity to fully invade Ukraine before it can be protected by Article 5.

For now, the United States and its allies should continue to bolster Ukraine's capacity to defend itself. This includes:

- Increasing the frequency of training the Ukrainian military to build a competent, capable, modern military force.
- Increasing economic capacity, including trade and energy deals.
- Assisting in effective governance and reducing corruption.
- Providing lethal arms which are within the ability of Ukrainian troops to use effectively.

Noting that lethal aid is a logical option to improve Ukraine's ability to defend itself from Russia and retake its eastern territory, the U.S. and its NATO allies should restrict providing advanced lethal aid until Ukraine proves capable of employing these types of weapons effectively. Given Ukraine's current state of military competence, high tech weaponry has a high potential of falling into separatist, criminal, or rebel hands. Aid that is more in line with Ukraine's current technological state is thus more appropriate. While there is always a risk of losing equipment to the enemy in a combat zone, the Ukrainian military must be able to demonstrate capability and competence to minimize this risk. Furthermore, high tech weaponry tends to be expensive, and Ukraine should be equipped with weaponry that's more affordable to use and maintain.

Syria

Key Takeaways

- Syria is a divided country; the best-case realistic scenario for democratic forces is that it remains so.
- Russian military participation in the Syrian conflict makes defeat of the Syrian regime by rebel forces unlikely.
- Syria is the theater most likely to see an accidental clash between U.S. and Russian forces.
- Short of agreeing on an endgame for Syria, the U.S. should provide enough assistance to local forces to establish defensible division of the country.

Syria is the most complicated³⁸ conflict the world has seen since the First World War. The number of state and non-state actors involved plus the complicated web of support, alliances, and enemies makes sorting out the Syrian conflict incredibly difficult. Here, the U.S. and Russia have worked directly against each other in terms of dealing with the Assad regime, while sharing some interest in fighting terror organizations.

There are no “good” options for resolving the Syrian conflict. Any policy choice undertaken by the United States will inevitably result in negative consequences. Supporting rebel factions with arms has led those arms to falling into the hands of radical Islamic terror groups.³⁹ Attempting to depose Assad will ultimately lead to conflict against Russian forces, thus limiting the freedom of the U.S. to pursue a number of options.



U.S. and Russian delegations discuss Syria and Ukraine during their bilateral meeting at the Kremlin in March 2016. State Department photo.

The major risk of any military options undertaken in Syria is the prospect of U.S. and Russian forces clashing, especially in the air. In June 2017, after the U.S. shot down a Syrian jet attacking rebel forces, Russia withdrew its public support for the deconfliction line that was set up to reduce the risk of an incident between U.S. and Russian forces. It appears however, that this may have merely been rhetorical, as the line remained active throughout that month.⁴⁰

To better plan for dealing with Russia's involvement in Syria, the U.S. needs to decide on a viable end-goal for its own participation in the conflict. It must then rectify any conflicts between that end-goal and the involvement of Russian forces. No matter the goal, the involvement of Russian forces means there are few viable options for the U.S. to pursue to achieve that objective.

Secretary Tillerson has indicated that it is the goal of the United States to maintain a unified Syria,⁴¹ but this is unrealistic at present time without accepting severe costs to civilians and democratic forces in Syria. With Russian support for the Assad regime directly threatening civilians in the country, the only way to ensure the safety of civilians is to create a defensible border between them and pro-Assad forces. While complicated, the premise would involve securing a designated border, behind which a government and official military could be created. Assad would be left in power in regime-held territory, and the new "North Syria" government would not interfere beyond its borders. From within these two separate regions, each government and its allies could pursue the elimination of terrorist elements within their respective territories without interference from the other.

There are several obstacles to this pursuing this course of action: 1.) Potential objections from Turkey; especially given the recent Kurdish referendum in Iraq;⁴² 2.) Assembling a "native" force to secure the area and thus avoid coalition conflict with Russia; 3.) Securing access to the sea for economic trade purposes, especially due to the Russian air base at Latakia;⁴³ and 4.) Creating a strong enough consensus between rebel forces to establish a workable government.

Another option is to negotiate a replacement for Assad as part of a larger agreement for peace. At this time, neither Russia nor the Syrian government are facing sufficient battlefield pressure to make this appealing to them.

Therefore, the U.S. should continue to target ISIS, and support competent democratic military forces in Syria, including Kurdish forces. The U.S. should adopt a flexible strategy that acknowledges reality, and does not simply cede secured territory to Syrian and Russian forces. Once ISIS is contained and a contiguous perimeter is secured, this territory should serve as the basis of a more coordinated strategy to defend against the Assad regime and its Russian allies.

The Arctic

Key Takeaways

- U.S. interests in the Arctic are limited in comparison to Russia, as the U.S. has less Arctic coastline, lower Arctic population, less-developed infrastructure, and fewer economic assets in the region.
- The U.S. needs to maintain capabilities to protect Arctic military and economic interests.
- The U.S. does not need to increase its military assets in the Arctic to a level that would match Russian capability.

The United States and Russia are both Arctic nations with interests in the region. U.S. relations with Russia in the Arctic have evolved over time, from the running of Arctic supply convoys during WWII to the submarine chases of the Cold War. Today, both countries are members of the Arctic Council.

Though Russia has significantly more Arctic coastline than the U.S., the melting of Arctic ice and the opening of new sea lanes presents specific challenges the U.S. needs to confront in the region. However, the Arctic is a region in which the U.S. does not need to check every Russian move. Russia's coastline comprises more than half of all Arctic coastline,⁴⁴ making Russia a rightful player in the region.

As part of the Russian mainland, Russia's Arctic coastline gives it distinct advantages in military posturing in the region. The U.S. has very little infrastructure in Alaska capable of supporting heavy naval operations, highlighted by the lack of a deep-water port, and the supporting infrastructure to enable operation of such a port.⁴⁵ Despite the advantage Russia has in the Arctic, its military strength in the Arctic remains "well below" its previous Cold War levels.⁴⁶ A tit-for-tat challenge from the U.S. is unwarranted, because American interests are not immediately threatened.

Today, the Arctic presents opportunities for cooperation and competition, but the U.S. should hedge its resources carefully in the region. The U.S. does not need force projection capabilities to mount Arctic invasions or strike anywhere in the Arctic Circle. While the U.S. does need to be able to defend its Arctic interests, those interests are limited and should be narrowly defined when considering the importance of other regions to trade and security in America's strategic calculus.

The U.S. does need military capabilities to achieve the following:

- Defend Alaska and access to natural resources in its exclusive economic zone if necessary.
- Perform search and rescue operations.
- Maintain shipping lanes of interest to U.S. commerce that will open due to climate change.
- Come to the aid of Arctic NATO allies.
- Defend early warning and missile defense installations hosted on foreign territory, such as Thule Air Base in Greenland.



Russia's 40+ icebreaker fleet includes nuclear powered ships. The U.S. does not need to match this capability. Wikimedia Commons photo.

These missions mean that the U.S. needs a modern icebreaker fleet with sufficient numbers to accomplish these missions. This does not mean the U.S. needs to match, or even approach Russia's fleet of more than 40 icebreakers—America simply does not have the same extent of Arctic interests as Russia.⁴⁷ But the U.S. does need more than the two ice breakers it currently operates, especially considering the only heavy icebreaker the U.S. has is over 40 years old.⁴⁸

Arctic NATO countries aside from the U.S. include Canada, Denmark, Iceland, and Norway. Of these countries, Russia only shares a border with Norway. In case of a Russian attack that either enters Norway proper or threatens Norway's security through a Russian invasion of (non-NATO) Finland or Sweden, the U.S. will be expected to come to the defense of its NATO ally. This will mean maintaining the ability to move troops and equipment into an arctic country under potentially austere conditions. Because of Norway's isolated position compared to other NATO countries, this will likely mean moving forces and supplies by sea or air, as land routes from Sweden or Finland may not be initially feasible.

Aside from the military aspects of the Arctic, the also U.S. has an interest in performing scientific research in the Arctic, particularly in the field of climate change. The Arctic Council has been useful in facilitating this research, and opportunities to work with Russia on scientific issues in the region should be pursued. The information gained through joint research and data sharing will benefit both countries equally.

Ultimately, defining America's Arctic needs vis-à-vis Russia is a matter of risk and cost analysis. The Arctic has neither the population nor the natural resources to justify ranking it at the top of U.S. strategic priorities in the world. However, as Russia's investment in its Arctic capabilities has been increasing, the U.S. should make a better effort to understand Russia's intent by this action. Better understanding Russia's Arctic goals will help the U.S. better weigh its Arctic needs.

Strategic Cooperation with Russia

Key Takeaways

- Cooperation with Russia should not be undertaken at the expense of core U.S. interests or the interests of U.S. allies.
- Cooperation should be pursued in areas which offer tangible benefit to the U.S.
- Areas in which there is an imbalance of benefit can potentially be used by either side for leverage.

There are tangible benefits to U.S. cooperation with Russia in a variety of areas—benefits which go beyond simply improving relations. They include (but are not limited to) benefits gained through work in physics, space exploration, bio-medical research, and nuclear non-proliferation. Cooperation with Russia was also key in achieving the necessary pressure to force Iran to the negotiating table to stop its nuclear program.

But the cooperating with Russia faces a number of challenges made clear by the practicalities of pursuing cooperation with an adversarial country. Areas where the U.S. and Russia appear to have shared interests are complicated by differing philosophies, priorities, and strategic objectives that do not deconflict easily.

Even an area like space cooperation, a long-standing area of mutual benefit, has nuances in terms of conduct. Going beyond shared missions aboard the international space station, U.S. reliance on Russian-made engines for its heavy lift rockets⁴⁹ exposed important national security vulnerabilities in recent years. Between the retirement of the U.S. Space Shuttle fleet and the introduction of the Orion capsule in the coming years, the U.S. is completely reliant on Russia for its manned spaceflight program. While the U.S. benefits directly from Russian assistance for manned spaceflight operations, it puts itself at the Russian government's mercy for this assistance. Until the U.S. is able to ferry its own astronauts into space again, this remains a significant advantage for Russia, and an area in which the Russian government could potentially threaten or blackmail. That is not to say this cooperation shouldn't continue—it should—and NASA has recently announced plans to work with Russia on a cis-lunar space station in the near future.⁵⁰



NASA's current reliance on Russia for manned space launches is a vulnerability. NASA photo.

The U.S. has also historically used threats about ongoing cooperation as a tool of leverage against the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, in protest of Soviet propaganda alleging the U.S. creation of the AIDS virus as a bioweapon, the U.S. threatened to curtail cooperation with the Soviet Union in the health and biomedical fields. This resulted in a significant reduction in use of the story in the USSR.⁵¹ While leverage should not be a goal of cooperation, increased cooperation that benefits Russia can potentially be used to influence Russia's policy making process.



President Trump and Putin meeting at the G-20 summit in July 2017. Kremlin photo.

Current and future efforts to cooperate with Russia must first take into account the U.S. goals in doing so. If cooperation for the sake of cooperation hinders America's ability to achieve its goals, the singular goal of cooperation is unlikely to outweigh the value of doing so. It is certainly important to build ties in order to reduce suspicions and improve cooperation in areas of mutual benefit, but the U.S. should be wary of situations which could be used against it negatively. It is thus more beneficial for the U.S. to build cooperation that creates either a codependency or dependency *by* Russia, rather than a dependency *on* Russia.

Counterterrorism

Key Takeaways

- Russia's strategy with regards to terrorism is clouded by its mixed record of counterterrorism policies.
- To work together effectively, the U.S. and Russia must agree on a common set of targets or enemies.
- Geopolitical considerations decrease the likelihood that the U.S. and Russia can deconflict their counterterrorism policies.

The U.S. and Russia both have an interest in fighting terrorism. Terrorism has struck both countries in painful ways. However, in recent years, Russia's actions have indicated that it does not wish to fight terrorism in the same manner as the United States.

In order to cooperate on anti-terror activities, Russia and the United States will have to overcome a variety of difficulties, including:

1. Agreement on mutually acceptable targets.
2. Military-to-military coordination.
3. Sharing of intelligence without compromising intelligence assets.
4. Deconfliction of political objectives.
5. Assigning of blame when things inevitably go wrong.



Secretary Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in 2015. State Department photo.

is placing regional influence as a greater priority than fighting terror. These actions serve no purpose other than to further destabilize Afghanistan, with the end goal of undermining American influence in the country. This destabilization generates environments in which terrorist groups are better able to plan violent operations outside their home country, ultimately benefitting no one.

Identifying areas where the U.S. and Russia can work together to combat terrorism will take a detailed conversation with Russia to determine particular areas of agreement, and specifically, who to target. In 2003, the U.S. added three Chechen groups to its list of terrorist organizations at the request of the Russian Government.⁵⁵ In 2015, then Secretary John Kerry met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to discuss a mutual list of agreed upon terror groups.⁵⁶ This list, assembled by Jordan, was intended to unite members of the International Syria Support Group on targetable terror groups in the Syria conflict. The list was never adopted due to disagreements by the various parties.⁵⁷ The only agreement by all parties was on the designation of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra.⁵⁸

Due to the amount of disagreement on so many fronts, complicated by geopolitical objectives, a mutually acceptable terror list would likely be narrow and leave out too many groups to be useful.



Still frame from a Russian airstrike on supposed ISIS targets in 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense photo.

But the complications of cooperating on counterterrorism go beyond just deciding who's a terrorist. As an inevitable fact of war, any military action taken is likely to result in civilian casualties, and there will likely be a debate about whom should be assigned blame when this happens. With Russia's involvement, there is a very real risk that the U.S. will be blamed if American intelligence was used in an operation, even if U.S. military forces were not. Collateral damage risks have long been debated within policy circles, and they should be at the forefront of considerations in any joint counterterror operations with Russia.

Propaganda and Disinformation

Key Takeaways

- Russia is engaging in a massive global disinformation campaign intended to reduce trust in democratic institutions and influence political decisions by making citizenry doubtful of facts.
- American audiences need to be better educated on how to discern valid sources of news.
- The U.S. should insist on broadcasting reciprocity within Russia, and consider banning Russian broadcasting in the U.S. until Russia changes its foreign media ownership laws.
- Negative rhetoric disparaging U.S.-based media institutions as “fake news” weakens American trust of credible journalism and increases susceptibility to Russian-produced propaganda.

The United States faces two distinct challenges in this realm: protecting domestic audiences, and informing foreign audiences. Both of these challenges are characterized by a simple problem: a majority of people are unwilling or unable to discern real from fake information.⁵⁹

This problem creates an extremely exploitable weakness. If Russia has its way, objective truth will always be questioned. Russia has been flooding the already crowded information sphere with a massive amount of disinformation, which clouds the individual’s ability to discern the truth. This has been particularly prevalent on social media outlets like Facebook⁶⁰ and Twitter,⁶¹ especially as “social” networks tend to breed like-minded circles that may not challenge false information that conforms with the views of that circle.

Jed Willard, Director of the FDR Foundation at Harvard, and an expert on combatting disinformation, explains further:

Humans are inclined to pay attention to information that reinforces existing beliefs. We don’t like cognitive dissonance, and we habitually use information short cuts to draw conclusions.⁶²

Yet overcoming the effects of Russian propaganda is not dependent on simply “combatting” Russia in the information sphere. Rather, the U.S. should work to inoculate vulnerable audiences from Russian disinformation through a variety of means. This includes trust-building measures, media-literacy training, journalism training, and education in critical thinking. This is as important at home as it is abroad.

A traditional form of combatting propaganda abroad comes in the form of U.S. international broadcasting—an institutional practice which, to be effective, must be credible to target audiences. To be credible—to paraphrase Edward R. Murrow—it must be truthful. Though Russia has shown success in its spread of disinformation, U.S. international broadcasters should never bring their long-term credibility into question by spreading false information. U.S. international broadcasters should also acknowledge and appeal to core feelings held by the target audience. Furthermore, applying the “freedom” label to international broadcasting entities does not inherently make them beacons of free society. This freedom must be demonstrated not solely in the practice of our international broadcasters and their dedication to the ideals of journalism, but it must be seen in practice domestically. American international broadcast entities should also not shy away from covering the divided political discourse we are seeing today.

In addition to upholding America's international broadcasting standards, journalistic exchange programs⁶³ should be expanded to expose more foreign journalists to the American free press and to American journalistic ethics.

As for decreasing domestic susceptibility to Russian propaganda, the tools are less clear, particularly considering the values of the First Amendment as guiding principles of American society. Here, journalistic exchange programs can also play a role, by sending American journalists abroad to both learn and instill best practices of journalism in friendly democratic countries that are also facing Russian influence campaigns.

Certainly, better media literacy education is needed. One major challenge is that the American educational system is state and municipally based, making a nation-wide anti-misinformation education program more difficult to implement. Nina Jankowicz of the Wilson Center explores the roles that states, localities, and the private sector could play:

In K-12 curriculums, states should encourage a widespread refocusing on critical reading and analysis skills for the digital age. Introductory seminars at universities should include a crash course in sourcing and emotional manipulation in the media. Similar courses could be created as professional development for adults, beginning with state employees. Large corporations could be offered government incentives to participate, too.⁶⁴

But there are potential problems with this approach as well. Willard notes that, "Media literacy and critical thinking skills are helpful—especially when learned early—but they take individual mental effort to utilize, leaving most people susceptible to disinformation most of the time."⁶⁵ Addressing this issue, Willard contends disinformation strategies are vulnerable in certain conditions:

Where disinformation tends to fail is when it's used against people with strong underlying beliefs or knowledge that belie the disinformation. Also helpful is public awareness of disinformation campaigns; if I know someone is trying to sell me a used car I may take their promises with a grain of salt.⁶⁶

To better understand the media landscape and information sphere within target regions and amongst target audiences, the U.S. needs better baseline data. While media organizations certainly do audience research, the political bias of these organizations may skew the results of this research. It's necessary to have an understanding of what audiences believe to begin with, before one can determine if any efforts to influence those audiences are having an effect.

Currently, the U.S. does not have the same access to Russian audiences as Russia has to American audiences. To remedy this, Congress should seriously consider methods to effectively prevent Russian government-controlled broadcasting entities like RT and Sputnik from broadcasting in the U.S. In 2012, RFE/RL ceased broadcasting AM radio in Russia in order to comply with Russian law on foreign media ownership.⁶⁷ In 2014, Russia passed a law disallowing media entities with a more than 20% foreign stake in ownership.⁶⁸ A "ban" or other method aimed at preventing Russian broadcasting in the U.S. would not be intended to serve as censorship, nor would it represent a fear of Russia's influence. Rather, it would be used as a tool to encourage Russia to change its foreign media ownership laws, requiring fair and equal access to Russian airwaves by American or other foreign-owned media.

In September 2017, the Justice Department decreed that RT would be required to register as a foreign agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.⁶⁹ While this is an appropriate first step, it is unlikely to nudge Russia sufficiently in the correct direction with regards to its treatment of U.S. government international broadcasting in Russia.

Finally, is not helpful to Americans, or to America's influence abroad, to routinely deride and declare journalistically credible news organizations in the U.S. as “fake news.” Equating credible American outlets with Russian propaganda is a major disservice to the American people and only renders target populations as more susceptible to Russian influence. Declaring factually accurate reporting as “fake news” feeds directly into the propaganda narrative of Russian media outlets.

Democratic Disruption

Key Takeaways

- Russian attempts to influence democratic elections are routine.
- Russia is taking advantage of American social media outlets to foment protest and unrest.
- Election infrastructure should be electronically fortified, with analog records required.
- American faith in the voting system is vital for the continued success of its democratic government.

Russian attempts to interfere with the election processes of democratic states are not a new phenomenon, and the methods have varied. In recent years, Russia has directly financed disruptive parties in a variety of European countries.⁷⁰

Russia's interference in 2016 did not come without precedent, as the Soviet Union made several attempts to interfere in U.S. elections during the Cold War. In the 1960 U.S. presidential election, the Soviet Union made an attempt to push an Adlai Stevenson Democratic candidacy, complete with propaganda support.⁷¹ Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was also not a fan of then-Vice President Nixon after the famous kitchen debate of 1959,⁷² and used captured American pilots as leverage against his presidential candidacy.⁷³ In 1968, the Soviets attempted to offer funding to the Hubert Humphrey campaign, also against Nixon.⁷⁴ And in 1984, the USSR mounted a disinformation campaign against Ronald Reagan.⁷⁵



Russia successfully used Facebook to organize opposing rallies at the same time and location. Image courtesy Office of Sen. Richard Burr.

A primary goal of Russian interference is to “confuse, distract, and dismay audiences.”⁷⁶ This was effectively achieved in 2016. Russia has used a variety of methods to accomplish this, including organizing real-world political and xenophobic protests in the U.S. through Facebook.⁷⁷

But while 2016 was mostly an effort to influence the way people voted, or sew chaos, it did not succeed altering counted votes. Even though no votes were altered, a fear of Russia's ability to potentially alter votes in an election (partially motivated by use of the word "hack") feeds into Russia's goal of ruining confidence in democratic institutions. It is critical to protect against this fear becoming a reality, no matter the actors or parties involved. Americans must have confidence that their voting systems are secure and reliable.



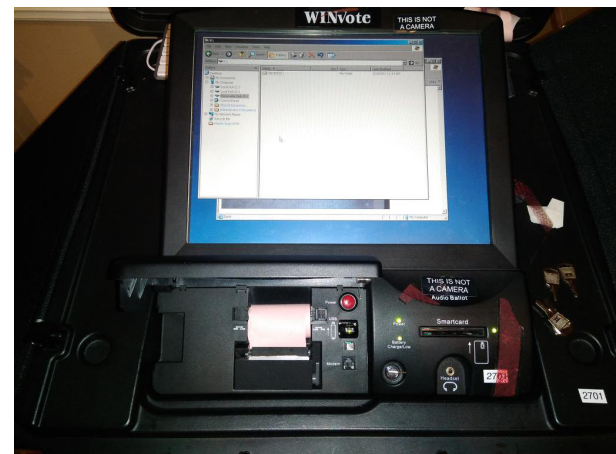
LA County inkblot voting booths in 2012. Photo courtesy Stephen Velasco / Flickr.

The introduction of electronic voting machines in the United States has raised a variety of concerns about the ability of a nefarious actor to hack and change votes.⁷⁸ Recent revelations that Russia appears to have engaged in a spear phishing operation against a U.S. voting software supplier further raises serious concerns about potential access to and manipulation of voting-related infrastructure.⁷⁹ Recently, the Department of Homeland Security has indicated that at least 21 states saw probes or attempted intrusions into voting-related systems in 2016.⁸⁰

Due to concerns raised during the most recent election cycle, it is worth exploring options to better secure election-related networks and technology, and restore American confidence in its election systems. Though there may be constitutional considerations about the role of the Federal Government with regards to state-run election systems, the threats of the 21st century demands the U.S. analyze ways to secure its democracy against threats the Founding Fathers could not have envisioned. This is vital not only for the actual election process, but for the faith of American citizens in the systems used to count their votes.

To better secure the voting process against future attempts at tampering by Russia or other actors, ASP recommends:

- Strengthening the Election Assistance Commission to focus on the security of the electoral process.
- Making Federal resources available to the states to provide assistance in voting system security if requested.
- States requiring their voting machines to accept input only by physical ballot, or in absence of a ballot, requiring them to produce a voter-readable verification receipt for every vote cast. These receipts or paper ballots should be retained by the election facilities.
- Developing State-level contingency plans to be submitted to the Federal Government in case of a confirmed manipulation of voting infrastructure.



Some voting machines still use outdated software, presenting a vulnerability. Photo credit @MichoSchumann / Twitter

Energy

Key Takeaways

- Energy manipulation allows Russia to exert influence and pressure on Europe.
- European countries should coordinate and manage their markets to exert influence and pressure on Russia.
- The U.S. should continue to provide and assist European countries with access to alternative energy sources.
- Permanently weaning Europe off Russian energy risks creating an unrecoverable collapse of the Russian economy.

The key issue with regards to Russia's energy policies is the ability for Russia to use energy exports as a tool of political leverage, particularly in Europe. As the global energy market evolves, Russia will undoubtedly have a hand to play, particularly while natural gas and oil occupy a major role in fueling the world's economies.

In principle, Russian energy integration with European economies is a good thing, as all countries involved benefit. Russia benefits from selling, countries benefit from collecting transport fees across their territories through pipelines, and the countries that buy from Russia benefit from having access to a resource of which they would otherwise have very little.



LNG infrastructure like this floating storage and regasification unit has allowed Lithuania to diversify its energy sources. Höegh LNG photo.

However, Russia's manipulation of prices can provide significant leverage against European countries. Russia is currently able to hold individual countries hostage, particularly Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, and Slovenia.⁸¹ To remedy this issue, the EU is aggressively pursuing the diversification of European energy sources, allowing these countries to better weather Russian pressure, or even to reduce their consumption of Russian energy as a tool of their own. This could include greater investment in renewables, the construction of more LNG terminals, and associated infrastructure in Europe to facilitate the delivery and access to gas. For instance: the building of new gas "interconnectors" across borders.

The energy sector represents Russia's greatest strength, and perhaps its greatest weakness. As Russia was dependent on the oil and gas sector for nearly 36% of its federal budget revenues in 2016,⁸² there is opportunity for European countries to use energy imports as a tool of leverage against Russia as a supplier. As European countries begin to wean themselves off of Russian gas, this may help in the medium-term. Lower dependence on Russia could help push the Kremlin to change its international policies in order to save its market share of the European energy economy.

But this strategy may have limits—as the fluctuation in oil prices over the past 5 years has had significant impact on the Russian economy and state budget, Russia has shown remarkable resilience to disruptions to its energy revenue.

Even if European countries are able to influence Russia through energy diversification, there are likely to be unintended consequences of pursuing this option. Notably, the passage of Russian gas through Eastern European countries helps to preserve their strategic significance,⁸³ and weakening their importance to Russia's economy may render them vulnerable to interference, attack, or other influence.

However, should European countries successfully reduce their consumption of Russian energy, it's unclear what the long-term plan for keeping Russia on the right path might be. For instance, if Russia changes its policies for the better in an effort to encourage European countries to continue buying Russian gas, it's not clear that those countries would opt to buy Russian gas given the availability of the more attractive alternatives they've built. In a worst-case scenario, combined with an unfavorable oil market, the subsequent consequences for Russia's economy would be severe and indefinite, thereby causing Russia to return to negative actions. Another Russian economic depression risks a repeat of the post-Cold War economic chaos which renewed Russia's adversarial relationship with the United States.

Overall, the U.S. should help European countries gain access to a balanced energy market that allows them to independently and collectively protect themselves against Russian influence, but not gain complete energy independence. To a certain extent, a properly balanced energy trade system between European countries and Russia should serve the purpose of creating economic *interdependence*. This balance should prevent Russia from taking actions that would risk its own financial stability. At the same time, it should encourage a furthering of mutually beneficial ties that neither Russia nor European countries can use as an overpowered tool of economic warfare against one another.

Conclusion

Many of the issues discussed in this paper are intertwined. Should the United States choose to exert pressure on Russia on any of these issues, Russia will likely push back along another front. Considering the interconnection of these policies, it's important for America's leaders to take into account the variety of issues the U.S.-Russia relationship covers. None of it is happening in a vacuum (except perhaps cooperation in space).

The U.S. also has limited resources with which to check Russia's strengths or provocations, and it should limit its decisions to interfere or put pressure on Russia to those issues which threaten American interests.

Considering this, it is in American interests to continue to find ways to work with Russia on issues of mutual benefit—but in these cases, the U.S. should be wary of becoming dependent upon Russia for certain things. In comparison, Russian dependency on America and her allies is a reasonable goal, and dependencies reduce Russia's ability to use its advantages as leverage against Europe. To put things in a practical perspective, European countries should not be dependent on Russian gas, but Russia should be dependent on European countries to sell its gas.

In areas where the U.S. fails or chooses not to act decisively, it should be assumed that Russia will attempt to assert its influence. In some regions, like the Arctic, this is acceptable, as the consequences are insignificant for U.S. interests. In other regions, like Syria, Russian interjection severely limits America's ability to achieve its stated objectives.

Overall, the U.S. needs to practice parallel strategy design when approaching issues relevant to Russia. As the U.S. develops policies to press Russia, it should also work equally diligently to provide off-ramps and face-saving opportunities to decrease tensions. To continuously push for the sake of pushing back will undoubtedly cause the situation to spiral out of control—and that may play directly into Putin's narrative.

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Gone are the days when a nation's security could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor and competitiveness of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with our partners and with all the tools at our disposal and address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this we must forge a bipartisan consensus here at home.

ASP brings together prominent American business leaders, former members of Congress, retired military flag officers, and prominent former government officials. ASP conducts research on a broad range of issues and engages and empowers the American public by taking its findings directly to them via events, traditional & new media, meetings, and publications.

We live in a time when the threats to our security are as complex and diverse as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate change, energy challenges, and our economic wellbeing. Partisan bickering and age old solutions simply won't solve our problems. America – and the world - needs an honest dialogue about security that is as robust as it is realistic.

ASP exists to promote that dialogue, to forge that consensus, and to spur constructive action so that America meets the challenges to its security while seizing the opportunities that abound.



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