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Research to Identify Drivers of Conflict and Convergence in Eurasia in the Next 5-25 Years

Virtual Think Tank Summary Report



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Prepared for Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment

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This report represents the personal views and opinions of the contributing experts. The report does not represent official USG policy or position.

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Executive Summary

Background

From July through November 2015, NSI employed its Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) methodology¹ to systematically interview 26 subject matter experts in support of a Strategic Multilayer Assessment² effort³ to research and identify drivers of conflict and cooperation in Eurasia in the next 5-25 years. Representatives from the United States European Command (EUCOM) provided 37 questions to guide the interview effort (see Appendix A). This report summarizes SME knowledge and insights on these questions—grouped into nine chapters.

The executive summary focuses on the issue of deterrence, which was a recurrent theme amongst the expert responses. From a social science perspective, we first need to ask, what behavior do we want to deter (i.e., Russian “aggression”?) and why (i.e., how does deterrence serve US strategic interests?)? The executive summary focuses on the element of conflict and cooperation with Russia: deterrence, strategic interests, and implications.

Strategic Interests

Russia

Russia’s rhetoric and actions suggests that it is dissatisfied with the international status quo. It wants a return to Russian greatness in the international community. Expert opinion indicates that, for Russia, a return to greatness would comprise the following elements:

- international prestige and recognition;
- acknowledged sphere of influence in near abroad; and
- economic, military, cultural, and political power and vitality.

¹ ViTTa is a virtual network of trusted subject matter experts, unconventional thinkers, brightest minds, foreign voices, and varied perspectives. ViTTa Subject Matter Experts enable NSI to craft timely and cost effective analyses of critical and complex problems.

² Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff (JS/J-3/DDGO) and executed by ASD(R&E)/EC&P/RRTO.

³ Under tasking from USEUCOM, the Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) will identify emerging Russian threats and opportunities in Eurasia (with particular emphasis on EUCOM AOR countries). The study will examine future political, security, societal and economic trends to determine where US interests are congruent or in conflict with Russian interests, and in particular, detect possible leverage points when dealing with Russia in a “global context.” Of particular interest are Russian perceptions of US activities in Eastern Europe and what impact (positive or negative) those activities are having on deterring Russian aggression in the region. Additionally, the analysis should consider where North Atlantic Treaty Organization interests are congruent or in conflict with Russian interests.

These desires are driving Russian domestic and foreign policy and are clearly entangled with Russia's aggressive foreign policy actions, including the annexation of Crimea, military intervention in Ukraine, and support for Bashar al Assad in Syria. From its perspective, Russia is hindered in achieving its strategic interests by international and domestic factors including Western attempts to "keep it down" (e.g., NATO enlargement, sanctions, etc.), low oil prices, slow economic growth, and demographic decline.

United States

The United States Government (USG) has multiple objectives in the EUCOM area of responsibility (AOR)—with regional stability being arguably the foremost among them. To achieve this end, the experts felt that USG decision-makers have reverted into a Cold War mindset that engenders a reflexive preference for containment of Russia. They pointed to efforts to expand NATO—an organization established after World War II specifically to contain the Soviet Union—and economic sanctions as evidence of a preference for containment over engagement. However, experts were evenly divided over whether containment or engagement strategies would be most effective in restoring stability in Eurasia. This summary does not weigh in on the optimal strategy, but highlights two competing pathways to stability addressed by the expert elicitation effort: containment and engagement.

The Centrality of the Russian Economy

Few issues exist in Russia that have greater potential to destabilize the country by creating internal dissatisfaction among both the elite and the general population than the economy. Experts felt USG leaders do not fully appreciate the importance of Russia's economy as the driver of Russian decision-making. The USG uses sanctions as a sort of tier two punishment—below the threshold of military force. However, in Russia, sanctions are viewed essentially as an act of war. There is a mismatch in perception between the USG and the Russian government and people about economic levers of power that is fundamental to this study.

Experts noted that economics dominates Russian media and government speeches, more so than Russia's actions in Ukraine, Crimea, and Syria—as is supported by thematic analysis conducted by Dr. Larry Kuznar.⁴ Even absent economic sanctions, Russia's economy is in serious jeopardy due to low oil prices, lack of economic modernization and diversification, and a shrinking workforce. It is important to remember that Putin's initial popularity and legitimacy rested on strong support for his policies that resulted in economic growth from 1999-2008.

The USG sees Putin as a nationalist and, therefore, aggressive, but Putin does not draw his support from a sense of populist nationalism; he draws his support from economic reform and improvement. It is easy to get caught up in the mistaken belief that ultranationalism is driving Russia aggression, but this term is often misused in the USG. Ultranationalism is not influential in Russian politics, but nationalism is.⁵ Experts felt this is concerning because by punishing Russia economically, the West is undermining both

⁴ L. Kuznar & M. Yager. (2016). Identification of Security Issues and their Importance to Russia, Its Near-abroad and NATO Allies: A Thematic Analysis of Leadership Speeches. *Produced for Strategic Multilayer Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense*. Please contact lkuznar@nsiteam.com for a copy of the report.

⁵ See the chapter on Media and Public Opinion for a discussion of nationalism vs. ultranationalism.

the economic and political stability of the nation. So the question then becomes, what does the West fear more: a failed Russian state or a stable, powerful Russia?

Containment and engagement actions taken by the United States (both USG as a whole and EUCOM more specifically) can influence Russian stability. Each of these paths create both risk and opportunity for US interests and has implications for EUCOM engagement activities in the EUCOM AOR as a whole.

Central Question

Pathways

Is it better for the USG to have a stable, strong, and prosperous Russia (satisfied) or an unstable, contained, and weak Russia (unsatisfied)?

The first thing we need to know is what *conditions are associated with each type of Russia*? That is, what do we know about what Russia needs to make it stable/satisfied, and what do we know about is making it unstable/unsatisfied?

Table 1 Conditions Associated with Russian Satisfaction

	Satisfied Russia <i>Conditions consistent with a satisfied, stable Russia</i>	Unsatisfied Russia <i>Conditions consistent with a dissatisfied, unstable Russia</i>
Economic	Strong oil prices Diversification of economy Removal of sanctions Skilled labor force Low unemployment	Low oil prices Energy-dependent economy Sanctions Weak domestic labor force High un- or under-employment
Security & Prestige	Reduction in NATO enlargement Acknowledgement of sphere of influence in near abroad Acknowledge and consulted as peer in international organizations/issues	NATO encroachment Containment in near abroad
Domestic	Population growth Reduction in terrorism risk Rising health indicators/spending	Demographic decline Increased terrorism threat Declining health indicators/spending

Because this analysis represents a thought exercise, and requires some simplification, we associate US engagement and cooperation with Russia leading towards a satisfied Russia versus continued US containment and conflict with Russia leading towards an unsatisfied Russia. We then explore the risks and opportunities associated with each pathway.

Implications

The second part of this thought exercise is to evaluate the *implications (at the extreme end of the spectrum) of these pathways for US interests*. The table below shows potential risks and opportunities if each pathway is taken to the extreme.

Table 2. Implications of Containment and Engagement at the Extreme

	Satisfied Russia <i>Implications for US interests</i>	Unsatisfied Russia <i>Implications for US interests</i>
Risks	Russian aggrandizement	State failure/ aggression
Opportunities	International cooperation	Contained Russia

Engagement/Satisfied Russia

Benefits

A stable, economically and politically strong Russia may better serve USG strategic interests as they relate to stability in the Middle East, the shake up of Western-leaning Eastern European nations, the balancing of East and West, and the development of the Arctic. Experts believe the West may be able to find common ground on these issues through a more cooperative relationship with Russia, but an uncooperative Russia could—and does—act as a spoiler for many of these critical issues.⁶ Furthermore, a more cooperative relationship with the West undermines Putin’s ability to deflect blame for domestic problems—although at least one expert stated that Putin would always be able to spin the relationship in his favor given his control of the media. Because of this, experts believe the only effective mechanism of communicating to Russian elite and the population a willingness to engage is through action—not words. By focusing on engagement vs. conflict with Russia, the West erodes Putin’s ability to message that the USG is the enemy of Russia. It opens the door for the population and elite to see the potential for economic prosperity through cooperation.

Risks

Additionally, while a satisfied Russia may serve US long-term, strategic interests, this pathway raises significant concerns for Western interests: losing face and fueling Russian ambitions. An overly confident Russia might mistake Western cooperation for weakness and use its new political, economic, and social stability to challenge the international system. This poses a difficult conundrum where long-term US strategic interests are best pursued in a way where any concessions made could be perceived or framed by adversaries and competitors as weakness. The significant Russia information operation complex will likely play up these developments as a win for Russia at the expense of the West.

⁶ For a discussion of the genesis of anti-Western sentiment in Russia due to lack of Western integration after the fall of the Soviet Union, see Chapter 7: Cold War Memory.

Containment/Unsatisfied

Benefits

The benefits of a contained Russia include the maintenance of the status quo for the international community in terms of continued US leadership, the reduction of a conventional military Russian threat to Europe, and support of US allies.

Risks

While a contained Russia may serve Western interest in maintaining the international status quo, this policy runs the risk of undermining the political and economic stability of Russia in the longer term. A perfect storm of a prolonged, weak economy; rising nationalism; significantly decreased quality of life for Russian citizens; and restricted economic opportunity for the political elite may result in a weak or failed state or the replacement of the current administration with one that is less stable or favorable to the West. State failure and political change in Russia is often abrupt, leaving little time for the West to respond or alter its strategy. Furthermore, the lack of any clear successor to Putin means we have scant information regarding the type of leader – and thus policies – that would ensue.

Additionally, Western efforts to contain Russia may increase its reliance on gray zone activities, increasing conflict via proxies, and increased reliance its nuclear threat if its conventional military and other means of influence and deterrence fail. Experts believe that containment of Russia may have unintended consequences fore US strategic interests and regional stability.

Levers of Influence

Third we need to explore the *effects of US levers of influence, particularly sanctions and NATO enlargement*.

Sanctions

The more force we apply to economic levers (such as sanctions), the more we cause Russia to turn away from the West towards Iran and China. Right now, Russia sees itself as more European than Asian, and would prefer to retain ties to the West. However, sanctions are pushing Russia to form alliances with countries outside the sanctions regime, countries we do not want to see getting more powerful.

Sanctions may also weaken Putin's legitimacy, driving him to increase the use of nationalism and aggressive foreign policy to shore up his political support. This may provoke a geopolitical crisis that the West would like to avoid. In the absence of sanctions, Putin is not likely to give up his nationalism rhetoric, but it might give him options other than aggressive actions, to enhance his legitimacy.

NATO Enlargement

NATO was expressly created to contain the Soviet Union. It is not hard to imagine why Russia perceives NATO expansion as a real threat—particularly expansion into the area Russia considers to be its near abroad.⁷

The danger of NATO expansion in this day and age is that power is increasingly about generating political will and less about sheer capacity. Experts pointed out that expansion has broadened NATO's membership, but in doing so has weakened the organization's collective political will. NATO has not demonstrated the political will to defend its newer states from aggression, weakening the effectiveness and credibility of the alliance—although some SMEs challenged this assertion pointing to the recent increase in NATO military exercises. Taken together, these factors point to a critical weakness at the heart of NATO: as the alliance grows bigger, member states' interests become more diversified, making it increasingly difficult to command unified action in the event of external aggression.

Conclusion

When Russia cannot express its power economically, it seeks to do so militarily (not so dissimilar to Iran). The implication of this for EUCOM is that there are risks and benefits to both the containment and engagement pathways for US strategic interests. This summary report covers many issues facing decision makers in the EUCOM AOR and dives deep into expert knowledge from multiple disciplines and perspectives to challenge assumptions and provide nuanced understanding of the issues.

⁷ Please see NATO chapter.

Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) Summary Report

Chapter 1: Regional Outlook

Q 01: What are reasonable and pragmatic assumptions about the Eurasia region regarding Russia in five-year increments out 15 years, to include its diplomatic, economic and security interests in the Arctic region?

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Q 25: What is Russia's long-term strategy (priorities, military infrastructure, activities, interests, and red lines) in the Arctic region?

Q 10: How does Russia see its great power status in the 21st century?

Q. 04: Who are Russia's allies and clients and where is it seeking to extend its influence within the EUCOM AOR?

Q. 11: Where does Russia see the line between peace and war?

Q 20: How might Russia leverage its energy and other economic resources to influence the political environment in Europe and how will this leverage change over the next 15 years? How effective is the EU's economic leverage (sanctions) on influencing Russian behavior and what is the political willingness of the EU (and its member states) to sustain or increase this leverage given Russian economic and political influence to counter it?

Reasonable and Pragmatic Assumptions About the Next 15 Years

When asked this question, one of the first things the experts mentioned is the difficulty in predicting what will happen in the region, given its recent volatility (Baev; Ivan; Oliker; Sherlock). No one predicted the Ukraine crisis (Oliker), and uncertainty regarding Russia's posture (Baev) and Putin's successor means that that not one supposition about the state of the federation 10 years from now can be described as "pragmatic" (Baev). That being said, the experts' responses to this question indicate that there is a general view that we will muddle through the general crisis, although there are few potential points of cooperation to balance the areas where Western and Russian interests and perceptions appear to conflict. Furthermore, Russian domestic factors are likely to limit the ability of Russia to reach its goals (this is discussed in greater detail in response to Question 10), which may incentivize the Russian leadership to adopt more belligerent foreign policy stances.

Russia's perception of itself as a regional and global power, and belief that it is not respected as such by the West, the US in particular, is identified by experts as a driver of Russian attitudes toward the West. It

is also expected to motivate Russia to attempt to forge relationships with other non-Western powers, particularly China, and influence its relations with states in its near abroad in future years.

Russia's Relations with the West

Overall, there is agreement that Russia is in an offensive mode, and that over the next five years or more the tension between NATO and the EU and Russia will likely increase. In particular, we are likely to see more competition, hostile language and military exercises (Oliker), and the continuation of frozen conflicts, including eastern Ukraine (Sherlock). Bobick suggests that Russia will also make more attempts to undermine the EU and NATO members through interventions. Ivan agrees that Russia will remain a challenge for the EU countries, and will attempt to strengthen control over its allies and stop other countries in its near abroad from getting closer to NATO and the EU.

Several experts expressed the opinion that Russia is actively working to undermine NATO. There is a perception among the Russian leadership that, although NATO is militarily much stronger than Russia, it is politically weak (Galeotti; Oliker) and reluctant to be in direct conflict with Russia (Tkeshelashvili). This assessment has led Russia to choose a strategy with regard to NATO that targets its political and unitary weaknesses so that Russia does not have to worry about its military superiority (Galeotti). The experts offered several suggestions as to how this might play out:

- first, and most generally, that Russian actions will focus on undermining NATO's credibility and legitimacy, and the cohesion between NATO member states, particularly old and new NATO;
- second, that Russia will try to erode confidence in Article V by taking actions that can be justified in terms of protecting Russian interests and populations and in line with international law, similar to what they did in Georgia and Crimea (Tkeshelashvili);
- third, that Russia will demonstrate to the countries at its periphery that it—Russia—can come in at will, without NATO intervening, sending a message to these countries that they will never be fully part of the West (Conley);
- lastly, that Russia will engage in small-scale violations of sovereignty, such as cross-border kidnappings and assassinations, that are not enough to justify NATO response, but which, if not responded to, undermine NATO credibility.

For Russia, this strategy is a win-win. If NATO does not respond to these provocations, it underscores Russia's narrative that NATO is not interested in protecting these states at Russia's periphery. If NATO responds, Russia can argue, as it has already done over Ukraine, that there is nothing to distinguish between its actions and the actions of NATO and the US in Kosovo and Afghanistan. For this reason Bobick warns that, while expansion of NATO may seem like a good idea, it does create vulnerabilities. It is harder to organize a larger group of member with more diverse interests and constraints. It also increases the probability of Russia triggering an Article V response.

Underlying much of this tension is the Russian leadership's perception that NATO is an artifact of the Cold War and the European order, which further underscores its belief that Russia does not receive the respect and attention it thinks it deserves from the international community. If Russia cannot get respect from the international community as partners, Trenin suggests it will seek respect through

disruptive actions. As much of the rationale for this lies in Russia's view of itself as a major power, it is discussed in greater detail in Question 10. The only opportunity for some sort of partial rapprochement with the West is seen to lie in the Russians choosing as a successor to Putin, someone with a more Western focus and willingness to move away from Russia's current foreign policy stance (Sherlock). The possibility of such change is discussed later in this section.

Regional Conditions

There is a common perception that Russian actions in its near abroad will destabilize its neighbors (Merry, Oliker), although for the next five years Russia itself is likely to remain stable (Merry). The instability around Russia's borders, combined with its strategic objective of Novorossiya (Karber; Mankoff), historical view of Russia as an empire with fluid boundaries, and stated policy of protecting ethnic Russians (Wood), all combine to create an environment of great uncertainty and potential for misperception and escalation.

The experts in general expect fairly high levels of uncertainty in the region over the next few years. Several countries surrounding Russia, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, are heading towards leadership transitions as long-time leaders age, which makes some level of political change inevitable (Merry; Stronski). Much as did the collapse of the Soviet Union, if Russia's current regime breaks down, this is likely to precipitate "painful and violent spasms" in Russia's periphery due to the poorly structured state institutions (Baev). Merry identifies Armenia and Azerbaijan as the most likely point of conflict in the Caucasus (Merry). Baev agrees, but identifies Central Asia as the region likely to see the most destructive chain of conflicts (Baev). Overall, there is expected to be significant political, economic, and social transformations in Eurasia (outside of Russia) over the next 15 years.

Russia's likely actions and responses

How Russia will respond to these challenges remains unclear and is highly contingent on the longer-term stability of the Russian regime. However Vieira noted a recent change in Russian activity in the near abroad from previous ad hoc measures, such as providing Belarus with cheaper gas in return for participating in the Eurasian Union. Since Crimea, Russia has consolidated its approach and has adopted a fully-fledged effort to have countries in the region abandon ties with the West and join the Eurasian Union (Vieira). These attempts to influence regional economies have political motivations, as economic instability creates popular discontent within these states (Lamoreaux), making them more vulnerable to Russian influence.

Russia is seen as unlikely to back down in its attempts to retain greater influence over regional economic activity. This creates problems for regional leaders who see closer ties to the EU as more likely to generate the economic growth and development they need (Tkeshelashvili). Vieira argues that, to Russia, the EU is not any less confrontational than NATO, as providing an alternative model or standard for countries in Russia's near abroad is perceived as a threat to Russia's sphere of influence (Vieira). Furthermore, it is unrealistic to expect that economic cooperation will take place independent from resolution of the Ukraine crisis (Vieira).

Although some experts have their doubts regarding Russia's capacity to act in the manner it wants in the region now (Tkeshelashvili), Russia has a long history of influence in these states. Regardless of what happens, it will be able to "rock the boat" (Lamoreaux). It is expected that Eurasia will continue to be a bit of a battlefield, not necessarily militarily—but for influence and control—over the next 15 years, and Russia will continue to be assertive. Russia will continue to try to limit self-determination of regional countries and their connection to the West, specifically the United States (Tkeshelashvili).

Russia's Wider Foreign Policy

Part of Russia's larger foreign policy initiative is focused on economic cooperation, in particular, increased reliance on the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) (Sherlock) and development of the Eurasian economic union as a counterweight to the EU (Trenin). Central Asian states, however, have been cautious about the idea of union and want to be sure it remains an economic, rather than a political, union (Wood). Despite these initiatives, it is expected that Russia's dependence on energy exports will continue to be a driving force of its foreign relations, as efforts to wean Russia off of dependence on energy have failed (Trenin; see also: Braun; Chow; Conley, O'Loughlin; Sherlock; Reisinger). Chinese economic activity in Eurasia is already having an effect in the region, not just in energy, but trade more generally as well (Tkeshelashvili). A more detailed discussion of Russian-Chinese relations can be found in a separate section of this report, but it is clear that, in Eurasia, Russia will not be the only major power player, and its actions in the region have the potential to effect and be effected by its developing relationship with China.

Attitude Toward Russia in its Near Abroad

Adding to the uncertainty is the tension many of the states in Russia's near abroad feel between aligning with Russia and aligning with the West. For many of these states' leaders, Russia provides a more attractive model of government and is many times seen as easier to deal with than the West, as it does not use the kind of democratic conditionality the West tends to use (Ivan). However, this is balanced by recognition that their chances of economic development may be better with the West. Russia is viewed with deep-seated distrust and suspicion by neighboring countries—a sentiment heightened by Russia's actions in Ukraine (Stronski), which might influence their foreign policy choices (Taras). While some of these leaders might have similar views regarding democracy as Russia's leaders, they do not want to lose freedom of movement (Ivan). Question 4 provides a more detailed discussion of the relationship between Russia and specific countries in its near abroad.

Domestic Issues

Political stability

There is disagreement among the SME's interviewed regarding the political stability of Russia over the next 15 years. Some see Russia as heading toward a domestic crisis involving regime breakdown, which could trigger a state failure (Baev). Others argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the height of fragmentation and that as we go further down the timeline cohesion will increase, rather than decrease (Taras).

Economic factors in political stability

Political stability is challenged by the fragility of Russia's economy. Widespread corruption undermines the economy but is the glue that holds the elites and Putin's inner circle together (Anon1). Many of Russia's economic elites are becoming unhappy with how the Kremlin's foreign policy actions are adversely affecting their economic interests. In particular, they are unhappy about the status of Russia's relations with West, their economic ties with Europe, fallout from Russian actions in Ukraine, and are not confident about Putin's strategy of pivoting to China or the BRICs (Stronski). Russia's economic decline means Putin has lost a lot of his previous ability to keep the elite happy. A "disproportionate share of the opportunities for embezzlement" now goes to a smaller portion of the elite, undermining his rhetoric of all being together (Galeotti; see also: Anon1). Furthermore, if the economic recession continues and there is less revenue to distribute to regional governments, social problems will increase for regional governors—"creatures of the Kremlin"—and their support of Putin may waver (Reisinger).

Demographic changes in Russia

Some experts expect demographic changes to be an overarching issue for Russia but not for 15 – 30 years. Their population is both aging and shrinking, and there is little the government can do to stabilize or grow the population. Such changes will decrease the availability of labor, production levels, and overall economy health (Galbreath). This in turn will have potential political implications. Attempts to increase labor supply by increasing immigration may increase nationalism and xenophobia (Galbreath). Baev suggests it would be unrealistic to expect a re-emergence of a powerful state, even in the best of circumstances, because the demographic problems accumulated since the start of this century and aggravated by [his predicted] state failure, would hamper the modernization (Baev). Galbreath expects the domestic impact of demographic changes to result in new stressors on existing geopolitical tensions.

Economic stability

While short-term economic stability (next 3 – 5 years) is considered possible, longer-term resiliency is in doubt (Chow, Kuchins). Much of this uncertainty is created by Russia's lack of economic development. There is consensus that the Russia has failed to modernize its economy or diversify away from its dependence on raw material exports (Braun; Chow; Conley; O'Loughlin; Sherlock). Of more concern is the skepticism regarding the Russian leadership's unwillingness or inability to do something about the problem (Chow; Conley; Wood; O'Loughlin; Reisinger). One area where there is some divergence of opinion is the role oil plays in Russia's lack of development. Some see declining oil prices as a barrier to significant economic reform (O'Loughlin). Chow, however, argues that higher prices initiated the problem as, historically, each time oil prices have risen, the Russian leadership has decided they do not need economic reform, and all proposed reforms for decentralization and modernization have stopped while corruption and dysfunctionality have increased (Chow).

The Arctic

The Arctic is one area in which many of the experts identified as offering opportunities for cooperation. While Russia's rhetoric around the Arctic can be aggressive, its behavior is in many cases cooperative (Oliker).

Diplomatic

The Arctic is traditionally an area where the United States and Russia have worked quite well together, both in scientific work and search and rescue (Stronski). In 2013, there was some work done on developing proposals for coordinated search and rescue responses, but this has ended, and it is unclear, given the current political climate, whether such coordination is still possible (Stronski). Despite this, Russia is still talking about cooperation with the United States, Canada, and Europe, which is considered important as there are multiple areas in addition to search and rescue for cooperation including mapping, climate, and ecology (Wood).

Economic

Oliker sees Russia's interest in the Arctic is primarily economic, rather than security, in particular the movement of tankers (Oliker). Wood also notes that, with climate change opening new sea-lanes, shipping is increasing, which increases the likelihood of collisions (Wood).

Security

Baev expects that the Arctic region could remain relatively stable over the next 15 years. Although Russia is currently increasing its military activities in the Arctic, he considers that it "is clearly unsustainable and lacking a solid strategic rationale" (Baev). Similarly, Bobick argues that Russia is unlikely to project into the Arctic in the next 5 – 10 years. Rather, they are looking to establish control, re-manning or upgrading existing bare bones Soviet installations (Bobick).

Russia's Great Power Status

A common theme running through many of the experts' discussions of Russia and its perception of its place in the international community centered on the importance Russia places on being treated with respect by other states. They see themselves very much on the defensive and are looking to secure their own sphere of influence (Taras). There is less consensus, however, on what the term great power means to Russia.

Russian Definition of Great Power Status

Several themes come up in the experts' discussion of how Russia, scholars, and elites have defined great power status. In most, some notion of restoring Russian civilization is implied or referenced. Closson identifies three strands of thought among Russian scholars regarding the definition of great power status for Russia: Westernists, who focus on integration and international institutions; Statists, who see the West as a threat to the state; and Civilizationalists, who see Moscow in cultural opposition to the West. Assessments of how Russia measures its great power status vary across experts, but five basic components can be identified: respect, economic power, military and nuclear capacity, relative power, and regional dominance.

Respect

One of the themes raised most consistently by the experts in response to this and other questions was Russia's desire for respect in the international community—to be treated as an equal partner. Merry suggests that Putin wants to make sure the international community takes Russia's views into account before taking any action and, if this does not happen, it will seek respect through disruptive actions

(Merry). Allison points to Russia's use of its seat on the UN Security Council as an example of this. For Russia, their position provides a means of constraining Western powers and reasserting Russia's great power status. This is one reason why it reacts so strongly when the Security Council is bypassed, as it was with the invasion of Iraq and NATO intervention in Kosovo (Allison).

At the same time, Russia sees international institutions such as the UN as "a symbol of Western dominance" and is attempting, with the Eurasian Union and other groups, to carve out a different course (Allison) if it does not gain the status it seeks within existing bodies. Russia is willing to go to great lengths to increase its international status. Truolyubov believes Russia is convinced it needs to become a country that is feared, more than they need to be concerned about domestic well being, reflecting the view that national glory should take precedence over all other considerations. O'Loughlin also sees status considerations as motivating Russia's foreign policy choices, including efforts to build closer ties with China.

Economic

Sherlock found that among the Russian public, power is defined in economic and social terms, rather than military. This is consistent with the elite's vision of Russia as an "energy superpower," which, due to Russia's valuable natural resources, they have long taken for granted (Baev). However, as Baev went on to explain "their basic assumption about the steadily escalating global competition for the scarce resources departs increasingly from the reality of international affairs" (Baev). Reisinger also noted the challenges Russia faces in trying to operate as a great power, even just in a soft power sense. Lower oil prices have created a sharp economic decline, and Russia has not invested in the modernization and diversification they need to develop a less export oriented economy (Reisinger).

Military / nuclear capability

Allison regarded Putin's inner elite—the security services and military—as having a "psychological commitment to being respected as a great power." He identified in them a tendency to view power in terms of capability and placing less weight on technological prowess or moral authority (Allison). For them, Russia's nuclear capabilities are seen as the bedrock of its power, providing Russia the latitude to "punch above its economic weight greatly," despite the fact that this capability is "effectively unusable" (Allison). Sherlock viewed Putin's return to a military definition of power since Crimea as a great disservice to Russia and indicates that there is great debate over this switch among both elites and the population (Sherlock). Reisinger suggested that there was less of choice than necessity in this switch, as Russia currently possesses no "other markers of great power status" and that they might be willing to be less militarily aggressive if they had an alternative means of expressing power (Reisinger).

Baev also saw nuclear weapons as integral to Russia's perception of great power status. In fact, consistent with Reisinger, he contended that the unexpected loss of a key asset (economic power of oil) has left Russia with only one instrument that serves to prove its claim to great power status—nuclear weapons. Since the start of the decade, Russia has invested considerable resources into the modernization of its nuclear arsenal and, even in the face of current budget declines, is continuing programs. He suggested that this creates a strong political incentive to find a way to harvest some

dividends from these massive investments. That the Russian leadership is looking for ways to turn their nuclear capabilities into a useful and usable instrument of politics (Baev).

Relative power

Part of the way that Russia looks to overcome the limitations to its claims of great power status is by emphasizing that is the relative, rather than absolute, measure of state power that matters. This feeds into their portrayal of the United States and Western Europe as declining powers and explains some of its narrative importance (Baev; Allison). Russia is taking the long view. They know the United States is fatigued with being the sole superpower and is proposing itself as an alternative (Bobick). Part of this strategy is to form an “anti-hegemonic alliance” by bringing together other countries that feel threatened by US power (O’Loughlin). Russia believes it is positioning itself on the side of the rising BRIC powers (Allison; Stent). The problem it faces is that it is not popular, and it is not clear the BRICs are interested in closer ties. Only a handful of countries have a less than negative popular perception of Russia, and all are either weak or far away from Russia (Reisinger).

Regional dominance

Among the experts who discussed Russia’s relations with states in its near abroad, there was consensus that maintaining a sphere of influence in neighboring states is critical to Russia’s perception of its own influence and status. Reisinger contended that for Russia, power around its borders is part of the definition of great power status, and this influence can compensate to some extent for US influence in the wider region (Reisinger). Beyond pragmatic reasons for wanting to retain influence in its near abroad, some experts suggested that Russia’s perception of great power is influenced by its history as an empire.

Russian Leadership’s Perception

Oliker questioned whether the Russian notion of great power is commensurate with our Western notion (Oliker). Similarly, Wood suggests there are significant differences between the Western European model of shared sovereignty and the Russian concept of great power. Wood argues that 19th century Russia was an empire and did not develop a concept of a nation with fixed boundaries; rather, rulers were considered “great” because they expanded the boundaries of Russia (Wood). Similarly, Stent suggested that Russia believes a mismatch exists between state/political borders and national/ethnic/cultural/historical borders and has a commitment to the idea of a Russian world (Stent). This idea of building a Russian world (Stent), bringing back Russian global status (Marten), and providing a reason for Russia’s existence (Bobick), is a common theme running through many of the SME’s comments.

Perception Versus Reality

Wood mentioned in her discussion of Russia’s perception of great power status that there are two words in Russian for state. The first, which translates roughly to “great power,” is used more frequently than that referring to government. She suggested that this might reflect a greater focus on building the might of the state, rather than development (Wood). Braun characterized the Putin regime’s approach to their global and domestic situation as political magical realism—the idea that Russia, through bluff and bluster, can accomplish what others have been unable to do. He argued that Russia needs to accept

that their dream of being a superpower is gone, their adventures in the Crimea and Ukraine did not pay off, and they need to focus domestically and build a solid economy (Braun).

These observations are consistent with the view of several experts that Russia's status does not match its real capabilities and resources, and that it is in denial about the effects of its lack of growth and development on its goal to return Russia to superpower status (Allison; Braun). Braun pointed out that Russia has great potential (natural resources and great brain power) and, with fundamental reforms, could become a Germany but lacks the strategic vision to achieve this nor has it done the hard work that needs to be done. Consistent with this, Allison concluded that deeper economic and financial integration and infrastructure development is just not considered a goal worth pursuing seriously now, despite this language being a central part of Putin's rhetoric in the early 2000s (Allison).

Marten also stated that Putin is a tactical, not a strategic, thinker who does not consider the long-term consequences of his actions, a factor that has led him to take actions that have harmed Russia's great power status (Marten).⁸ Contrasting this view, is Tkeshelashvili, who argues that although frequently Russia looks like it acts as a global power, it understands that it is not. It knows that it needs to become a strong regional power in order to have international influence, and sometimes their actions toward this goal are to the detriment of the population (Tkeshelashvili).

Public Opinion: Russia as a Great Power

There is general consensus that the idea of Russia as a great power does have relevance and importance to the Russian population. Putin's rhetoric of Russia as a great power is not only expected, but also respected and supported by the majority of Russians (O'Loughlin). Bobick also argues that this perception affects their expectations of the government: "When populations think that they are a great power, they expect their government to act that way" (Bobick). This is consistent with Wood and Reisinger's findings from surveys and focus groups that there is concern over whether Russians are respected as a nation and a people. This longing for power is reflected in spikes in Putin's popularity during action (such as Ukraine) and when the government shows decisiveness. O'Loughlin suggests that this desire for great power status might be driven in part by historical experience. Russians look back at the USSR and see not only a superpower, but a state that had a stable economy and stable ethnic relations (O'Loughlin).

O'Loughlin's view is consistent with Sherlock's finding that many of the respondents in opinion surveys view Russia's power in economic and social terms, rather than military terms (Sherlock). As Galeotti points out, these types of surveys need to be viewed in context: Russians "...are ordinary people—motivated by ordinary stuff such as university, bribes to get medicine, food prices, etc." He warns that we need to be aware that, as outsiders, we can fall victim to the same propaganda that the Russian regime targets at its people (Galeotti).

Sherlock's work demonstrates the importance of how we ask and interpret public opinion questions. When asked in a recent poll "Are you willing to bear a substantial decline in family well-being due to the

⁸ Work done by Dr. Peter Suedfeld for SMA on integrative complexity challenges this conclusion. For a copy of his report, please contact psuedfeld@psych.ubc.ca.

exchange of sanctions between Russia and the West?” 22.4% of respondents said “definitely no,” and 40.9% said “probably no.” When asked “If forced to choose, would you prefer that Russia direct its efforts at building up its military power or supporting the economic well-being of its citizens?” 69.9% responded well being of its citizens (Sherlock). He concluded that, while it is clear that Putin is still very popular, it is also clear that Russians are unwilling to bear significant costs to support aggressive Kremlin foreign policy. An adventurous foreign policy would be economically (and otherwise) detrimental to most everyday Russians, and Putin would find it difficult to mobilize public sentiment despite Kremlin control (Sherlock).

Russian Allies and Clients

Russia’s relations with other states appear to be influenced by its desire for global influence and respect, as well as its perception that it is at war with the West. Overall, both Allison and Stent discussed the fact that Russia rejects the need for close alliances, as weaker states do, preferring to “stand on its own two feet (Allison) and “go it alone as an independent center of power” (Stent). In what concerns relations with the EU, Russia prefers to deal with singular countries with smaller populations that it can influence more easily, than with the whole Union (Ivan). When looking to develop ties with larger states, such as China, Russia is seeking a partnership, rather than a patron client relationship (Stent)⁹ and a means of balancing Western power. Ivan also considered Russia to be concerned that the recent nuclear deal with Iran may lead Iran to become a locus of American power at Russia’s expense. Nowak suggested that Russia may see Germany as a good partner in balancing out US influence in Europe, and that there are segments of the German population that are sympathetic toward Russia.

Relations with Countries in the Near Abroad

Since 2013, Russia has adopted a fully-fledged effort to have countries in the region abandon ties with the West and join the Eurasian Union (Vieira). Russia considers both the extension of the EU and NATO into the countries at its periphery as a threat to its sphere of influence (Vieira). Despite Russia’s efforts, it has few allies in the region, with the exception of Armenia, and has to cajole or pressure most of the central Asian states into agreements (Hedlund). Merry characterizes Russia’s foreign policy in the region as Russia suzerainty—providing subsidies and economic benefits in return for a say in the domestic politics of these states (Merry). Even the alliances and cooperation commitments Russia has been able to secure, Allison and Hedlund argues, are not enough to assist Russia as they are too small to change the relative balance of power between Russia and the West, either economically or militarily (Allison; Hedlund).

Ukraine

There is disagreement among the experts regarding the potential for resolution of the crisis in Ukraine. Some feel resolution will be achieved (Oliker) while others expect the conflict to fester and continue to create problems (Bobick; Sherlock; Taras; Ivan). As O’Loughlin points out, Ukraine is very divided along ethnic lines, and there is a “strong reservoir of suspicion” between ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians. In the eastern part of the country, however, Putin remains very popular, and the proportion

⁹ For more on Russia’s relationship with China and India, see Questions 35-37 Russia-China Relations in this report.

of the population seeing the United States and the West as partners rather than competitors is decreasing. Ukrainian attitudes toward NATO and the West are equally as complex. There is a lot of suspicion of NATO among ethnic Ukrainians in the southeast who are majority opposed to NATO membership (O'Loughlin). However, almost two thirds of Ukrainians overall now support NATO membership—a dramatic increase from pre-Crimean figures (Sherlock).

For Putin, open Russian engagement in Ukraine is problematic as, despite their support for the rebels, most Russians do not want to see Russian forces fighting in Ukraine and, if Russia is dragged into an open war, Putin's popularity will suffer (O'Loughlin). Oliker suggests that Russia has not annexed eastern Ukraine because they want to destabilize the region, not run it (Oliker). Their interest is in proving to the Ukrainians that their coup government is unworkable and doomed to failure. Then, Russia can back a friendly government that will follow Russia's lead and become part of a buffer of satellite states separating Russia from Western Europe (Oliker).

Armenia

Armenia is currently a close ally of Russia, having abandoned the EU and joined the Eurasian Union under “massive pressure” from Moscow (Vieira; Braun). Although they are “clearly under Russia's thumb,” there are indications that they would like to reach out to the West (Stronski). There is also concern that Armenia and Azerbaijan may come into conflict during this time period (Merry).

Moldova and Transnistria

An important though decreasing part of the Moldovan population is pro-Western (Ivan) and wants to join the EU (Vieira). However, the state is strategically important to Russia (Vieira) and under pressure to join the Eurasian Union (Braun). Moldova's position is further complicated by the situation in Transnistria. Moldova has a rational, economic relationship with Transnistria (Galbreath). Transnistria's ruling class are Russiaphiles and want to be part of Russia (Toal), but despite two referendums on the issue over the past 10 years, their status has not been resolved (Bobick). There are also local Cossack movements and paramilitary forces in Transnistria and “lots of guns, armed people, and discontent” creating a volatile situation (Bobick).

Belarus

Belarus is concerned it might become the “next Ukraine” (Vieira), despite being a close ally of Russia. Recent internal political changes in Belarus indicate a growing ambivalence toward separatism, and there has been improved cooperation with the EU (Vieira).

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is another close Russian ally concerned about becoming the “next Ukraine” (Vieira). Their leadership has been building potential for resistance to Russian pressure or aggression through various means (Tkeshelashvili). They have been cooperating more closely with the EU in an attempt to decrease their dependence on Russia (Vieira), and the Chinese have been building up their soft power potential in the state (Galbreath). O'Loughlin believed Russia has little incentive to act in Kazakhstan as it is hard to predict what the outcome would be, and they have good relations with the current leadership, despite their connections to the EU and China (O'Loughlin).

Georgia

Over the next five-to-ten years, it is expected that Georgia will continue to face problems in its relations with Russia, including military threat (Bobick; Ivan; Taras). The Russians are engaging in a tactic of “creeping annexation,” moving the border in very small but successive increments. The last time this occurred was in September of this year when they moved the border a couple of kilometers (Bobick).

Baltics

Even though Baltic States are part of NATO, they are still worried about recent Russian foreign policy actions and feel they need to be protected. Specifically, they are worried about invasion or take over by Russia, under the auspices of protection of ethnic Russian populations. This fear is exacerbated over existing Russian influence with local populations through schools and universities (Lamoreaux).

Line Between Peace and War

There is overall agreement among the experts who discussed this question that Russia does not make a clear distinction between war and peace (Allison; Galeotti; Lamoreaux, Marten). Rather than see the two as binary, they regard them as existing on a spectrum (Galeotti) and use them as tools to maintain power and influence (Lamoreaux) and part of the natural contestation between nations (Galeotti). If Russian leaders believe can get away with using military action, then they will use it to extend their sphere of influence. If they do not, then they have a vast array of soft power options such as cutting off energy and gas flows or leveraging their huge media empire in Eastern Empire to achieve that influence indirectly (Lamoreaux).

In keeping with this overarching view, economic as well as military actions can become instruments of war, and Kuchins argued that from Moscow’s standpoint, economic sanctions constitute an act of war (Kuchins). In effect, they reinforce Russia’s belief that it is at war with the West (Galeotti), and that the United States is the main threat to Russia (Zawitkowski). Given this perception, Kuchins suggested we should be prepared for “every kind of symmetrical or asymmetrical actions from Russia,” including attempts by Russia to limit the power and influence of the United States in the international financial system (Kuchins).

Despite this clear willingness to both use force and influence, Russia, Allison argued, has made attempts to couch its military actions in terms consistent with international law. For example, its denial that Russian forces were active in Ukraine was motivated by a desire to distinguish Russian actions in its near abroad from Western-led interventions, such as the current actions in Syria, which it characterizes as violations of sovereignty (Allison). Similarly, Russia has adopted the term peacekeeping to describe its military interventions in Georgia and Chechnya, although their actions there were more akin to short, high intensity war than the UN definition of peacekeeping operations (Allison). The success of these actions in increasing Russian influence and avoiding international censure was mirrored in the recent Russian actions in Crimea, which moved Russia into the realms of hybrid war (Allison). For Yost, these actions, and the use of international law to justify them, reflect in the Russian leadership a revisionist approach to international law “distinct from that which has generally reigned since the formulation of the UN Charter.” He considered that Russia’s action have “damaged confidence in long standing principles of international order and crushed the Western vision of cooperative security in the Euro-

Atlantic region—a vision institutionalized in NATO’s Partnership for Peace and the NATO–Russia Council, among other bodies.”

Russian Economic and Energy Leverage

Energy

When considering the extent of Russian leverage on Europe, it is not analytically useful to think of Europe as a single entity. Russia has never had much leverage over Western Europe, most of its influence lies in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia due to the combination of geography, history, and the co-optation of local elites in opaque and corrupt institutions (Chow).¹⁰ Closson agreed, suggesting that what we see as grand strategy may in fact be more to do with corruption, and if so, EU transparency measure should help. She argued that, at least overtly, Russia does not try to leverage its energy resources for political ends and that, if anything, this potential has been weakened in recent years by increased competition from reverse pipelines (running West to east). Furthermore, she pointed out, Russia needs Western technology to extract much of its remaining resources (Closson). Lamoreaux and Hedlund are similarly skeptical about Russian leverage in Western Europe arguing that Russia is losing its desire to build a European oil trade and underestimated the ability of the EU to come up with contingency plans to do without Russian energy imports (Hedlund; Lamoreaux).

The situation in Central and Eastern Europe differs, however, and Russia has demonstrated a willingness to use energy as a form of political pressure, as was seen in Ukraine in 2009, and that other states are aware of this potential (Cohen). Robinson viewed energy dependencies as an important part of Russia’s strategic positioning in its near abroad. He suggested that several projects to supply natural gas to the Baltic States, and Moscow’s funding of anti-nuclear and anti-shale gas environmental and other groups, indicates its desire to keep the Baltic States dependent on Russian-supplied electricity. Similarly, Closson viewed the Balkans as an area where Russia does have energy leverage to pressure governments (Closson).

Other Economic Levers

Outside of the energy sector, the experts who considered this question identified several economic tools Russia has used to exert political influence. These include trade embargoes (Ivan), particularly against the Baltic States (Robinson) as well as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia (Ivan), and preferential trading agreements (Ivan, Merry). There are also indications that Russia is using its financial resources to invest in state banks in Latvia and the Balkans, granting it the potential to penalize governments (though the withdrawal of funds) for policy actions inconsistent with Moscow’s preferences (Ivan; Robinson) or to help control capital flight by Russian businessmen and oligarchs (Robinson).

EU Leverage Against Russia

Most of the expert discussion of EU leverage against Russia focused on sanctions, and the general opinion seemed to be that they have been of limited effectiveness. If their purpose was to change Russian policy in Ukraine, then they have not been effective (Closson). Furthermore, compared to the

¹⁰ For more detail on Russia’s influence over its near abroad see Question 4 in this section.

drop in oil prices, they have had a very small effect on Russians (Chow). In the longer term, however, the combination of sanctions and low oil prices might produce results, especially as EU states are not in dire need of Russian energy and lower oil prices also mean international oil companies are not pressing to operate in Russia (Closson). However, whether the political cohesion shown by the EU can be maintained remains a question (Chow), and Lamoreaux argued that not all EU states are as convinced of their utility as the United States and have more to lose due to their closer economic ties to Russia (Lamoreaux). Finally, there are the broader political implications of sanctions to consider. From standpoint of Moscow, economic sanctions constitute an act of war (Kuchins) and feed into Russia's perception that the West, the United States in particular, seeks to destroy Russian power. Kuchins argued that we need to stop punishing Russia economically; Putin does a good job of this on his own. Instead we need more strategic thought and resources devoted to strengthen the capacity of countries in Russia's near abroad to resist Russian aggression and economic leverage. (Kuchins).

Ivan disagrees with the assessment that the role of sanctions is to punish Russia economically. He argues that sanctions provide additional incentives to bring Russia to the negotiations table. The sanctions are not a goal in themselves; they are a tool. He argues that sanctions "are not (only) about changing Russia's policy in Ukraine but also a means to constrain Russia's actions (e.g., to reduce its resources) and also to signal the West's disagreement with Russia's behavior—both to Russia, to the international community and to the people living in the West. They are also a means to signal that the West is serious about defending the international rules and the security order in Europe. Sanctions are also a way to signal that the West is ready to inflict further pain (sanctions) should Russia continue to escalate the military situation so they also have a warning and deterrent function." The issue of sanctions is more complex than just asking whether or not they work to achieve one objective.

Chapter 2: Sino-Russian Relations

Q 35: Is Russia willing to become a client state to China? If not, how can the West exploit this potential seam to isolate China and attempt to integrate Russia with the West?

Q 36: How does China perceive its future energy relationship with Russia?

Q 37: Does Russia have any interests in developing diplomatic and/or economic relations with India as they have done with China?

Will Russia Become a Client State to China?

There is consensus among the experts who discussed this question that Russia does not want to become a client state of China. Some also noted that China does not desire this relationship with Russia either (Chow; Kuchins). Kuchins relates this to Russia's perception of its place in the world, stating that Russia cannot be a junior partner to China, any more than it can be to the West. This suggests that we should consider Russia's relations with China and other global powers in light of the more general question of how Russia sees its great power status in the 21st century (see Question 10).

Russia-India relations

Russia and India maintain good relations that are mutually beneficial (Merry; Chow), and Russia is eager to further develop this relationship (Reisinger). India has been part of Russia's attempt at an economic pivot to China and the BRICs, and welcoming to Russia as a possible partner (Reisinger; Sherlock), although this strategy has proved hard to accomplish (Stronski).

There have been discussions between the two governments concerning how to add energy trade to their historically warm economic and diplomatic relationship, but it is hard to see how this will be accomplished on any scale. The distance, topography, and infrastructure requirements create economic hurdles that are "almost insurmountable" (Chow). Russia has also been seeking to strengthen military trade with India (Reisinger). Another potential limitation on closer relations is the broader geopolitical environment. Russia is still more interested and sees more potential economic benefit from closer relations with China (Sherlock) and does not want to jeopardize this by getting too close with India (Reisinger). Although, as discussed above, Russia has no desire to be a dependent junior partner to any state, and increased economic ties with India would help them avoid "becoming China's gas station" (Reisinger). Similarly, while India, as leading member of the non-aligned group, has an interest in undermining attempts by the West to isolate Russia (Sherlock), but must balance these against its need to maintain relations with the United States in particular.

Nature of the China-Russia Relationship

Discussion of the China-Russia relationship suggests it is better viewed primarily as a relationship of convenience, rather than one of shared goals and outlook. In fact, what the experts identify as the key driver of closer ties between the two countries is their problematic relations with the West. Mankoff further points out that Russia has pursued a strategy of cooperation with China much more actively in the last year or two as Russian relations with the West have deteriorated. Chow and Mankoff note that

as China and Russia have found themselves in conflict with the dominant Western-led international system, they have an incentive to look for partners who can act outside that system.

So, for both China and Russia, closer bilateral relations are seen as a point of leverage in their relations with Western powers, the United States in particular (Kuchins; Cooper). Cooper suggests that the Russia–China relationship can be understood in terms of their position as dissatisfied powers. Historically, states dissatisfied with the status quo of international power and influence band together to oppose existing hegemons (in this instance the West). Both Putin and Xi Jinping have openly called for an end to US alliances in the Europe and Asia in recent years (Cooper).

Areas of Cooperation Between China and Russia

For a lot of Russians, China is seen as an alternative to West—if *the West won't have us on our terms, we'll turn to China* (Mankoff). This is particularly the case when it comes to trade and economic relations. Sanctions on Russia, and the potential for sanctions on China (over Chinese expansion in the South China Sea), make it important for both states to have an alternative to going through the international trade system (Chow). Russia, in the post-Cold War era, has also found China to be an important market for arms sales (Chow). More recently, as relations with the West have deteriorated, Russia has begun looking to China as an alternative market for oil and gas (Chow). In the latter area, China has not proven to be the sinecure Russia may have been expecting. The Chinese recognize that Russia is in a difficult position due to its heavy reliance on energy exports for government revenue and has negotiated very hard (Mankoff). Similarly, China has insisted on gaining very good deals, financially and otherwise, on all their investment projects (Mankoff). If oil prices go back up, Russia will become a more attractive force in the Central Asian region for China (Gorenburg).

Limits to Economic Cooperation

Although Russia's economic elites are unhappy about Russia's relations with the West, and economic ties with Europe, they have found the pivot to China and the BRICs hard to accomplish (Stronski). Russians are discovering that China does not have the same capabilities as the West (Mankoff). Western sanctions have halted joint ventures between Russia and United States and European energy companies (for example Shell's joint venture in the Arctic), and the Russians are finding that the Chinese do not have comparable technology that can compensate (Mankoff). Neither has China proved to be "an endless fount of technology or money." Especially with recent falls in the Chinese stock market, there is less Chinese money available for investment projects in the energy sector and elsewhere. The Russian elite is beginning to realize that they have, in fact, given something up economically by cutting themselves off from the West (Mankoff).

How Will the Relationship Develop?

Kuchins suggests that, rather than Russia choosing to "side" consistently with China against the West, it will pursue a multi-vector foreign policy designed to leverage China against the West, so it need not commit to being a junior partner to either. Returning to the issue of Russian identity, Kuchins also notes that Russia is more European than it is Asian, and it thinks of China as an alien culture. Furthermore,

Russia deeply hates and fears China, a sentiment that draws on historical experiences, in particular the actions of Genghis Khan—who, while not Chinese was perceived as a threat from the East (Kuchins).

Several experts also considered the future of Russia-China relations in terms of the compatibility of interests between the two states. Chow considers Russia to be a much more revisionist power than China, and argues that the overlap of interests between the two is becoming more and more remote. Furthermore, both China and Russia have interests that overlap more with the United States and the West, than they do with each other (Chow; Kuchins). This is particularly the case for Russia with regard to the Arctic, where Russian interests are much more in common with the United States, and Russia has expressed a preference for not having China even as an observer state in the Arctic Council (Kuchins).

Finally, there are also great long-term differences in outlooks for Russia and China. China is a growing country and, despite its current economic troubles, growth rates should continue. Russia, on the other hand, is struggling with economic problems and future demographic decline (Cooper). If oil prices go back up, Gorenburg argues, the economic boon to Russia would enable it to modernize its armed forces and diversify its economy. Its economy would then have the potential to rise to the point where it could become a strong counterweight to China and increase its economic influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Gorenburg). However, other experts are less sanguine about the potential for Russia to modernize, arguing that corruption and lack of political will prevent such necessary development and diversification (Chow; Conley; O'Loughlin; Sherlock; Reisinger).

How can the West Exploit This Potential Seam to Isolate China and Attempt to Integrate Russia with the West?

None of the experts directly addressed this part of the question, but several of their observations are relevant here. First, there is general consensus that Russia turned to China as a result of its deteriorating relations with the West and the pressure created by Western sanctions. Second, that Russia does not have significant common interests or identity ties with China. Third, that there are limitations on both sides to the ability of this relationship to compensate for reduced economic relations with Europe and the United States. This would imply that increasing opportunities for trade and joint ventures between Russia and the West would decrease the motivation for Russia to further develop relations with China. Second, that removing or modifying sanctions on Russia will be a necessary precursor to such moves. Finally, we must not lose sight of the fact that Russian hostility toward and distrust of the West are strong motivators for maintaining a relationship with China as a buffer to Western influence.

Chapter 3: Regional Balance of Power

Q 2 As Russia declines demographically will they be more likely to choose cooperation or conflict with NATO? What actions (political, militarily, economic) may they take to target NATO/US or EU/US cohesion?

Q 13 Will Russia become more assertive as its military capabilities continue to improve?

Q 31 Is Russia considered in compliance with its political and military treaty obligations, specifically with INF?

Q 28 Are Russia's actions in its "Near Abroad" such as disrupting energy supplies or severing trade agreements intended to affect political or economic stability?

Q 24 Given that we now know that Ukrainian Government's desire to align with the West was a 'redline' with Russia, what other 'redlines' may exist that, if crossed, could generate a Russia aggressive response?

Q 15 Describe the nature and interaction of military spending and arms transfer data between Russia and other European states.

As Russia declines demographically will they be more likely to choose cooperation or conflict with NATO? What actions (political, militarily, economic) may they take to target NATO/US or EU/US cohesion? (2)

Changes in Russia's Demographics

The experts who addressed this question (Bildt; Braun; Oliker; Vieira) warn against reading too much into overall demographics: demographics is not everything, it is not destiny (Braun). They challenge the assumption that Russia is dying, noting that the past few years have seen an improvement in the birth-death ratio (Braun; Oliker). Furthermore, the more immediate demographic effect of the current decrease in labor force is not expected to be sufficient to negatively affect the economy (Oliker) or prompt the Kremlin to change course (Vieira; Bildt). Ivan notes that even if Russia were to decline demographically, it remains the biggest country in the world with access to immense natural resources, and has the potential to inflict a lot of damage both in the region and more widely.

This is not to say that Russia does not face challenges due to specific demographic factors. In the reverse of what we see with the youth bulge facing many developing nations, Russia is facing a bulge in its elderly population that is only going to increase if healthcare improves. This large aging population is a potential time bomb for the government, requiring increases in funding for pensions and healthcare at the same time as government revenues are declining significantly (Braun). While the overall population in Russia has grown over the past few years, this growth has not been among ethnic Russians, rather among minority populations (Braun; Oliker). Given the Kremlin's reliance on nationalist rhetoric for legitimacy and its tendency to marginalize minority populations, this growth has the potential to increase social tensions (Braun; Oliker). Oliker suggests that the growth of the Muslim population in Russia might be the one demographic factor that could impact foreign policy (Oliker). Finally, there is

evidence that Russia is experiencing brain drain, losing both talent and the investment in education provided by the state. Whereas in the Soviet era, talent could be retained and directed by force, people can now leave relatively freely, and are doing so (Braun).

Effects of Demographic Changes on Russia-NATO Relations

Overall, the experts interviewed did not indicate they thought there was a strong correlation between demographic changes within Russia and its relations with NATO. Vieira did specify that she did not expect a demographic decline in Russia would decrease cooperation with NATO. However, there was a general consensus that although Russia has historically had a mixed relationship with NATO, both cooperating and conflicting with NATO actions and goals, the space for cooperation is decreasing and will continue to do so, particularly if sanctions continue or escalate (Galbreath). The EU-Russia Common Spaces Agreement (Galbreath) and anti- ISIS/radical Islamist actions (Oliker) were the only two specific instances of potential cooperation mentioned.

Possible Russian Actions to Undermine NATO-US or EU-US Cohesion

NATO is increasingly seen as a genuine threat to Russia: an American tool to contain Russia, penetrate its sphere of influence, and take its nuclear capacity (Truolyubov). This perception of NATO drives Russian interest in weakening and ideally breaking the organization. The Russian regime is looking for opportunities, through bilateral partnerships and influence operations (pushing Russian news into the European market, donating funds to right wing political parties, etc.), to drive a wedge between NATO member states (Oliker).

*Will Russia become more assertive as its military capabilities continue to improve?
(13)*

The Relationship Between Capability and Aggression

In addressing this question, several experts prefaced their answers with observations on the relationship between a state's military capacity and the assertiveness of its foreign policy actions. Allison noted that while there is probably such a relationship, over the last 20 years there is no clear correlation between Russian capabilities and practices. Rather, the strongest correlation is between mind set and likely action, with the most assertive actions taking place in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Allison). Marten suggests that it is more logical to reverse the question and ask whether military capabilities have been improved because Putin has decided to be more aggressive (Marten).

To What Extent is Capability Actually Increasing?

There were also a number of reservations raised regarding the extent to which Russian capabilities have actually increased and the implications of any increase. Marten notes that we need to keep in mind that the concept of capability is inherently relative. While recent increases will give the Russians greater influence over its closest and weakest neighbors (Marten), it still has little real capacity for power projection beyond its perimeter (Allison). Furthermore, increased spending is not the only determinant of increased capacity.

Budgetary Factors

Some experts also questioned the feasibility and effectiveness of increased military spending. Given current budgets, it is unclear how long the larger military budget can be sustained, and emergency funding is quickly running out (Marten). Schwartz considers it likely that reforms will fall short due to budget concerns.

In addition to budget constraints, there are also indications that money has been misspent. There have been some spectacular failures (jet crashes, barracks collapse, etc.) that suggest a lack of adequate investment in materials, lack of follow-up and oversight, and a tendency toward “doing things on the quick” (Stronski). Corruption creates an additional drain on the military budget. Putin’s cronies have the most power in the defense industrial complex (Marten), and high levels of corruption exist in the military and cronyism in the defence ministry (Stronski).

Finally, unless increased military budgets are retained in the longer term, maintenance of new facilities will become problematic. Marten notes that while some of the new military bases on the Ukrainian border may be easier to maintain, those in Arctic are both difficult and expensive (Marten).

Non-budgetary Factors

In addition to the complex relationship between spending and capacity, the experts identified several non-monetary factors that can affect Russian military capacity. First of these is the Russian defense industry’s technological limitations. Russia has long been dependent on the outside world for hardware, and it is not clear that they can compete in the areas of robotics and electronics (Marten). Without access to external electronic innovations, the technology gap between Russian and Western capabilities will likely increase (Marten).

Second, Schwartz and Marten both touch on organizational factors within the Russian military that can both help and hurt its capability. In recent years, the Russian military has improved coordination across the services and demonstrated better mobilization (Marten). The military reform embarked upon after their poor performance in the Georgia war has primarily involved structural changes and modernization, and the military is finally showing signs of real improvement (Schwartz). However reforms have led to internal conflict within the military, particularly over the continuation of conscript services (Marten), and they are experiencing manpower shortages and decline (Schwartz). It is unclear what the level of morale is within the military overall, although there are indications that contract soldiers in Ukraine may have been tricked into fighting and would have low morale (Marten).

How Important is Conventional Military Capacity

The experts also suggested that Russia’s increasing use of gray zone activities might be weakening the relationship between capacity and assertiveness. That is, Russia’s ability to “make trouble in other states” (Marten) is not solely or even primarily a function of its conventional military capabilities. Increasingly, we are seeing Putin turn to cyber attacks and other less traditional types of confrontation as a way of compensating for Russia’s military weakness relative to the West. Russia has embarked on an internal destabilization program in Ukraine, funding of far right political parties in other European states, attempts to break European consensus on the Balkans (Stronski), among other strategies to exert

its influence over the region through non-military means. When this has not proved enough, Putin has demonstrated a willingness to work with informal military forces in neighboring states to pursue Russian goals (Marten).

Pattern of Russian Assertiveness

Moving to the relationship between capability and assertiveness, there is no clear consensus among the experts that increased capability will lead to greater assertiveness. Allison points out that in the late 1990s, Russian policy rhetoric became more assertive, although the military at the time was “rather a shambles” (Allison). Significant increases in military funding did not begin until 2006 and were accompanied by increasingly assertive policies under Putin. However, capability was not the only changing military factor at the time, as Russia was also beginning an effort at military reform (Allison). Both Stronski and Allison question the trajectory of this rhetorical assertiveness, suggesting that Putin risks exhausting some of the extreme language and risking it becoming simply empty rhetoric if there is not actions to match (Allison; Stronski). Allison does note recent references to nuclear capabilities, which he considers alarming (Allison).

Other Factors Driving Assertiveness and Capacity

Issues at Stake

The experts also raised several other motivations that could explain changes in the assertiveness of Russian rhetoric and policy. The first of these are the issues at stake. Allison suggests the regime’s current priority is consolidation of Russian influence in the CIS, with Ukraine being the real prize (Allison), and more assertive policy to be expected here.

Regime Priorities

Looking at the Russian budget as a whole, Allison notes that although the military budget increased, more money proportionally was going to the security services. He suggests this reflects a priority on domestic control over foreign policy expansionism. Connected to this desire for domestic control is the rhetoric of nationalism and state strength that many of the experts have commented on. Allison suggests that any further military spending by Russia should be considered in this light. That is, rather than increasing Russia’s real capacity for power projection, its purpose is for domestic show or status (Allison). Concern for domestic control and regime support may also influence future spending decisions. Marten and Schwartz both question the sustainability of current military spending, given current revenue levels, and Merry notes that the modernization it funds is coming at the expense of the national health program.

Is Russia considered in compliance with its political and military treaty obligations, specifically with INF? (31)

Table 3. Russia Treaty Compliance

Treaty	Compliant	Non-Compliant
Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty		<p>US has said Russia is not in compliance, and there is speculation as to who is developing what. However, the treaty is still relevant and everyone is still at the table (Oliker)</p> <p>Russia has broken some provisions but refuses to acknowledge the violation and advances some counter-accusations against the US. Most probably, Russia would refrain from the risky step of withdrawing (Baev)</p>
1994 Budapest memorandum		Russia broke obligations unapologetically (Baev)
New START (2010)	Russia seeks to demonstrate compliance and provides all information required (Baev)	
Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)		Russia suspended participation in 2007 and withdrew in 2015. Moscow shows no interest in creating any new framework for conventional arms control (Baev)
Open Skies Treaty (1989/2002)	Follows provisions, allowing for a degree of military transparency (Baev)	

Are Russia's actions in its "Near Abroad," such as disrupting energy supplies or severing trade agreements, intended to affect political or economic stability? (28)

As answers from most experts demonstrate, both directly and indirectly, it is very difficult to separate politics and economics—both in terms of motivation for Russian actions and their effect on target countries. This is consistent with the nature of influence in the contemporary international system, where economic power easily translates into political influence. Closson states that in the 2000s energy was one of the tools Russia used to exert influence over neighboring states. Between 2000-2012 there were twenty-seven cases where Russia either decreased energy supplies, restricted access to pipes, or raised access fees (Closson).

There is an overall agreement that Russia is using energy as a political tool. The experts identified two general motivations for this behavior. First, energy supplies, embargos, and trade are used to influence the political decisions and choices of regional states (Closson, Ivan, Lamoreaux, Anon1). Lamoreaux argues that political stability is the target; Russia sees economic disruption as a means of triggering and influencing political change. Ivan points out that one third of all Russian gas imports to the EU goes through Ukraine and Russia is trying to develop alternative routes in order to get rid of that dependency on the Ukrainian route and automatically increase its leverage over Kyiv (Ivan). Second, Russia also uses its control over energy to punish countries it believes to have acted against Russia (Ivan, Anon1).

Vieira argues that Russia is interested in more than affecting political or economic stability; rather, they seek control. This is consistent with the perspective of another of the experts who notes that the current Russian regime is increasingly using a wide range of economic instruments in post Soviet states (Anon1). These are designed to be both restrictive and rewarding in nature. Russia has provided many central Asian states subsidies and economic benefits in return for a say in the domestic and external politics of these states (Merry; Ivan). They have also strongly pressured states such as Armenia and Belarus to move away from the EU and join the Eurasian Union (Braun; Vieira) and, in the case of Belarus (and similarly in Armenia), rewards for compliance (Vieira; Ivan). There is also a pattern of the Kremlin using its control of Russian markets, the labor market, and loans as coercive tools for achieving their own political ends. There have also been instances of expulsions of migrant workers from states dependent upon remittances.

The experts also raised some questions about the effectiveness of these economic sticks and carrots. Closson suggests that Russia's use of force in Georgia and Crimea may be an indication of the regimes frustration with the speed and success of sanctions and other economic tools (Closson). Russia's actions have also forced neighboring countries to rethink their economic connections and diversify to reduce their vulnerability to Russian pressure (Vieira). For example, after Russia cut off trade with Georgia, the Georgians were forced to look for other trade partners; as a result, instead of their export trade being targeted exclusively, it is now more global in focus, reducing their economic dependence on Russia (Anon1). The Moldovan wine industry provides another example of this (Ivan). Moldova has managed to diversify the exports market for its wine, sending most of its wine to the West whereas Georgia still sends most of its wine to Russia.

Given that we now know that Ukrainian Government's desire to align with the West was a 'redline' with Russia, what other 'redlines' may exist that, if crossed, could generate a Russia aggressive response? (24)

The experts identified a wide range of potential redlines for Russia. One important thing to note is that not all of these are responses to actions by the West. Indicative of Russia's wide-ranging security and influence concerns, regional states (including current allies) and China were all identified as potential triggers of Russian aggression. Please also keep in mind the common thread running through most of the discussions: that Russia identifies the United States as its main threat and considers itself to be at war with the United States—thus, by default, any increase in United States or Western influence, particularly in areas that Russia considers to be its own sphere of influence, are likely to be perceived as highly threatening.

Ukraine

There is not a consensus among the experts who discussed this question that Ukraine's desire to align with the West was the redline that prompted Russian actions. Allison notes that the previous Ukrainian government expressed a much more pronounced desire to align with the West and join NATO before the bases agreement had been finalized (Allison). Consistent with this reading of the situation, Tkeshelashvili suggests that the redline for Russia was crossed already when NATO helped Ukraine develop its defense capabilities. This raises the question of the timing of Russian action.

Baev offers an alternate explanation—also supported by Ivan—saying, “In my reading of the Ukraine crisis, it was the escalation of public protests and, in particular, the collapse of the Yanukovich government that prompted the aggressive response from Moscow. Putin's regime is obsessed with the threat of color revolutions, which are interpreted as direct and deliberate interference from the West and specifically from the US into sovereign affairs of various states, from Egypt to Georgia.” This interpretation is supported by other experts. Braun argues that what Russia really fears is democratic success and the loss of political influence, rather than the enlargement of NATO (Braun). Stronski suggests that the collapse of Yanukovich's government meant the loss of a leader with whose sympathies lay with Putin (Stronski). Tkeshelashvili goes even further, stating that not only amenable leaders, but also systemic corruption, is what Russia needs to maintain influence and create problems for the West (Tkeshelashvili).

Other Redlines

This interpretation of Russian actions in Ukraine sheds light on what other redlines may exist for Russia. If the Russians take over Ukraine, this signals to neighboring countries that the goals of democratic development and ties to the West (either economic or NATO) are not permitted in Russia's sphere of influence (Tkeshelashvili). It is consistent with the assessment that Russia is doing everything it can to maintain political and economic control in its near abroad (Braun). Given this strategic position, several specific actions or events were identified by the SME's as potential “redlines.”

Western Military Involvement in Ukraine

Braun suggests that the transfer of offensive weapons—for which Ukraine has been pleading—or troop deployment in Ukraine by the West may be a redline.

Increased Popular Protests/Democratic Transitions in CIS

A rise in public protests in near abroad states, in particular Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, might be seen as a threat to Russian influence that must be countered by force (Baev; Stronski; Tkeshelashvili; Ivan). Internally, Baev suggests that any rise in public protests within Russia, which could be triggered by the deepening crisis, could push the regime to “a desperate over-reaction” (Baev). The issue here is not directly one of actions the West does or does not take; rather, it is the internal political changes within a state that may lead it to seek closer ties with the West, eroding Russia’s sphere of influence. Stronski suggests that, although this is not something the United States can control, we need to be prepared for dealing with any regime changes in Russia’s near abroad (Stronski).

Western Influence in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

For Russia, the issue has never been primarily about NATO, but rather the implication for Russian influence of regional states’ desire to join NATO (Tkeshelashvili). Russia is trying to draw a redline around the perimeter of much of the CIS. Effectively, it is pursuing a policy of strategic denial; seeking to deny NATO access and influence to a region they consider to be within Russia’s sphere of influence¹¹ (Allison; Oliker). This perception on the part of Russia makes it probable that even providing a different sort of model or standard to these states could trigger a negative Russian response. For example, NATO membership aside, even partnerships with the United States (especially military), could be seen as threatening to Russian interests, especially given the strong anti-American feelings in Russia, and trigger a negative response (Vieira). Vieira calls out Transnistria as one area where military confrontation is possible, as Moldova has importance to Russia—but the risk is low (Ivan).

EU programs/expansion

While there has been a tendency to focus on NATO as a potential source of redlines for Russia, the experts indicate that EU programs and expansion may also increase tensions. Prior to the last few years, EU membership and programs were seen as fairly benign by Russia, but are increasingly being seen as normative challenges to Russia’s influence and rule (Allison; Vieira). Allison suggests that, consistent with Western influence in the CIS more generally, EU activities may inadvertently become redlines if they generate struggles for political control in CIS states that threaten the power of leaders under the influence of Russia (Allison). If countries adopt policies that bring them into line with EU rules, and receive economic support from EU programs, Russian influence would be difficult to maintain. In effect, the Soviet legacy would be transferred away from Russia, and Russia would no longer be the beneficiary (Vieira).

¹¹ For more discussion on Russia’s sphere of influence refer to questions 1, 4, 10, 11 in the Regional Outlook section of this report.

Expansion of NATO

Vieira considers any expansion of NATO to be a potential trigger for Russia as, in and of itself, it represents a loss in relative influence for Russia—as clearly provide by the recent NATO expansion to Montenegro (Ivan). Stronski argues that whether or not expansion of NATO is a redline for Russia appears to be a function of which countries are seeking membership. He considers that a move by Serbia toward NATO would cause unease, and that accepting Georgia or Ukraine is likely to create problems (Stronski).

European Missile Defense/Missile Placement

As discussed with relations to Ukraine, Putin’s regime is obsessed with the threat of “color revolutions.” In this light, a deployment (hypothetic as it is) of elements of a European missile defense system in Lithuania could trigger protestations from Moscow and attempts to find some sort of asymmetric response short of intervention (Baev). Toal also identifies the creation of military bases and missiles as a source of tension.

Increased Chinese Influence

As mentioned earlier, the experts identified possible redlines that are not directly related to United States or European actions. In particular, China was discussed as a potential trigger of Russian aggression. Although relations between Russia and China¹² have improved since the 1990s as border issues have been resolved, they remain uneasy (Allison). In addition to the decreased tensions, Russia’s capabilities are also restricting its options. If Russia had greater capacity further afield, Allison argues, there would be more clashes as China stakes out more claims. However, as it is, Russia is struggling to act on their more immediate claims in the CIS (Allison).

China has been increasing its investment and trade with central Asian states, in particular Kazakhstan, in recent years. Although they have been careful to leave it as a “collective zone of Russian influence” the question is at what point its economic activity will provide China with more influence over policies in this region that Russia (Allison). Allison considers it possible, in 10 year time horizon, that there might be a more significant clash over interests in central Asia—moderated by the states that do not feel culturally close to China and look towards Russia as a defender (Allison).

There have been long running concerns over the possibility of China trying to expand into the Russian Far East. The area is becoming more depopulated, and although there is little evidence that China has interest in that land as a resource, the potential has psychological import for Russia (Allison).

Loss of Control of Energy Supply Lines and Markets

Should the Baltic States become more aggressive in taking ownership and control of infrastructure completely away from Gazprom, such acts could be interpreted by the Kremlin as hostile to the servicing of neighboring Russian areas, such as Kaliningrad, which depends on pipelines flowing through Lithuania to deliver natural gas. The reality that much of this infrastructure was planned and put in place by the

¹² For a more detailed discussion of Russia-China relations see Questions 35,36,37 in the Russia-China Relations section of this report.

Soviet Union and is now being taken over by the EU and NATO member states could be viewed by Moscow as a provocation, rather than a defensive move (Robinson).

Describe the nature and interaction of military spending and arms transfer data between Russia and other European states. (15)

Only one expert felt equipped to respond to this question. While he felt this was not a clear question, he noted that “the really puzzling part of it is about the data on military spending. When the Russian 2020 Armament program was approved in 2011, it was possible to make estimates about the real scope of investments, but already the 2015 state budget approved in November 2014 was a remarkably abstract document, because neither the scale of contraction of revenues (and first of all, the petro-revenues) nor the real value of ruble could be estimated with sufficient accuracy. Presently, the allocation of the fast-shrinking state resources is a haphazard process, which cannot be made statistically comprehensibly by any measures of currency exchange or inflation. It is clear beyond doubt that the ambitious goals of rearmament cannot be achieved, but the lack of political will prevents any realistic revision. In the situation of severe and ad-hoc cuts in funding, it is logistics and maintenance that suffers most immediately, and the chain of accidents in the Air Force provides ample evidence of that. As defense industry gets progressively disorganized by the under-financing by the half-way-through programs, the arms export is also affected, because the producers has no access to the earnings from the contracts” (Baev).

Chapter 4: Russian Foreign Policy

Q 3: Explain the internal dynamics that are likely to motivate Russian actions in the EUCOM AOR over the next 15 years, outlining multiple plausible future pathways and a set of de-escalation considerations to help US planners, strategists, and communicators.

Q 14: Is Russia deterred by NATO's Article V and will they continue to be? How does Russia view its strategic deterrence posture? How is this evolving?

Q 12: How does the Russian conception of the use of information technologies to pursue its political and security interests compare to the US view of what constitutes political conflict and warfare?

Q 30: Given ongoing tensions, will Russia attempt to be constructively engaged with the West on regional and transnational security issues to include counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, and weapons proliferation?

Internal Dynamics Motivating Russian Actions in the EUCOM AOR

The experts who addressed this question identified two key internal dynamics that are likely to influence Russia's actions in the EUCOM AOR over the next 15 years: declining economic conditions and the national self-perception of Russia as a great power. Under Putin, both of these dynamics have encouraged a more aggressive foreign policy stance, and are likely to continue to do so in the future.

Economic Decline

Domestic Implications

Declining economic performance matters for Russia's foreign policy because it impacts the way the regime manages its social base. The majority of experts believe that Putin maintains stability primarily through the support of economic elites, which the regime provides with profit-making opportunities through embezzlement and rent-taking (Anon1, Gerber, Mastriano, Galetotti). In contrast, the state employs soft power mechanisms and the internal security services to control the mass population and civil society, which lacks the leadership and strength to mount any substantive opposition (Tkeshelashvili). While the regime is certainly sensitive to public opinion and seeks to actively manage it, it primarily does so to ward off elite challenges rather than from fear of a popular uprising (Zavisca).

At present, negative economic conditions spurred both by declining oil prices and Western sanctions are causing Putin's relations with his elite backers to grow increasingly strained, as the state has fewer resources to distribute (Galetotti; see Internal Stability Dynamics section for further detail). While certain experts agree that the current conditions are not dire enough to fully alienate Putin's elite support (O'Loughlin, Anon1), some argue that his time in office is limited (Galetotti) and, in the future, the greatest risk factor for regime change in Russia will stem from the abrogation of the de facto social contract between economic and political elites (Tkeshelashvili).

International Implications

To date, one way that Putin has managed the political fallout associated with declining state revenues is through a strategy of distraction, pursuing an aggressive foreign policy (see Question 9, Chapter 7) in the

EUCOM and CENTCOM AORs to redirect the attention of domestic audiences (Zavisca). In this sense, sanctions are a double-edged sword: though they may weaken Putin, they also drive him to provoke geopolitical crises that contradict Western interests (Gerber). Although Ivan points out that sanctions are widely believed to have played a role in refraining Putin from taking over the city of Mariupol and other areas in Ukraine. That said, other experts believe sanctions may only be effective in the short-term: while it boosts support for the regime among popular audiences by generating pride in national capabilities, it still contradicts the long-term interests of the economic elites, whose business interests are damaged by Russia's international isolation. To that end, as sanctions persist, several experts noted that this divergence of interests is causing Putin to become increasingly isolated from his elite backers as the economy continues to sour, resulting in a more insular and erratic policymaking process (Galetotti, Marten, Mastriano).

A second way that Putin seeks to manage elite perceptions of the regime during periods of economic decline is through sustained military spending (Hedlund, Marten, Vieira, Stronksi, Marten). Experts explain that military spending is a high priority of the regime because the defense industry functions as a venue for elite rent-seeking, which in turn bolsters regime stability. As a result, during the current economic contraction, defense spending is being maintained at the expense of social programs such as education and healthcare, which experts argue places Russia's long-term stability and growth potential in jeopardy (Hedlund). However, experts note that there are limitations to how long this strategy is sustainable, given current budget concerns (Marten, Vieira, Schwartz). Similarly, Marten cites a former Russian Finance Minister arguing that military spending is unsustainable at the current levels due to the long-term negative view of global oil prices (Marten). Beyond limiting Putin's ability to mollify the elites through rent-seeking, select experts suggest that a secondary effect of long-term economic decline could be a heavier reliance on nuclear weapons, which would allow Russia to maintain strategic balance with NATO should funds no longer be available to invest in conventional capabilities. For further discussion of the way the Russian security establishment perceives the utility of its nuclear program, see *Chapter 1: Regional Outlook*.

Effectiveness of diversionary approach

While Putin has been successful in slowing or limiting the collapse of elite support to date, experts question the extent to which his foreign policy adventurism will be a sustainable strategy for distracting public attention from the state's economic difficulties going forward (Zavisca, Gerber). Gerber assesses that broad Russian audiences are concerned about Putin's intervention in Syria, in which they see parallels to Russia's failed occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. In contrast, Putin's actions in Ukraine were initially highly popular and still have support, given the broadly-held view that Ukraine is part of the Eurasian world (Gerber; O'Loughlin). However, even there, O'Loughlin points out that while the majority of Russians support the Donbas, they do not want Russian forces involved in its defense, suggesting a limited popular appetite for military operations abroad. This analysis is confirmed by recent public polling data commissioned by the Levada Center, which said that 69.9% of Russians prioritize economic gains over military gains (Sherlock). While experts caution that it is nearly impossible to predict how these views may shift in the future, Marten underscores that the outcome of the current

economic instability facing Russia, “...will determine everything,” even though most of the factors driving it are out of Putin’s control (Marten).

National Perception of Russia as a Great Power

A second internal dynamic that experts highlight as critical to future Russian actions in the EUCOM AOR is Russian leaders’ perception of their nation as a great power that is to be simultaneously feared and respected by those around it.¹³ The impact of this perception on foreign policy is manifold.

Russian Notions of Sovereignty and Sphere of Influence

First and most critically, Russia views its neighboring countries through the lenses of a patron-client relationship and, accordingly, seeks to exercise a form of suzerainty with these states, providing various types of funding in exchange for influence in their domestic and external affairs (Merry; Ivan). Through this prism, states in Russia’s near abroad are regarded not as fully sovereign, but rather as part of the broader Russian Empire, irrespective of national borders. As a result, any attempt by these states to join supranational political or economic groupings affiliated with the West is seen as directly threatening to Moscow (Merry).

Prioritization of international goals over domestic needs

Second, this perception causes Russian leaders to place an inordinate amount of importance on their nation’s international standing during the policymaking process (Truolyubov). As a result, Russian foreign policy is frequently at odds with popular priorities (see Chapter 6), despite concentrated efforts by the Russian government to shape public opinion in favor of their foreign policy objectives. As Truolyubov explains, “Russia is convinced that it needs to move along as a great country that is feared. Domestic well-being is not the primary issue” (Truolyubov). For analysts, this suggests that domestic public opinion may only be marginally useful as an indicator of future Russian foreign policy actions.

Desire for international influence and attention

Third, this perception drives the expectation that Russia should be consulted in all matters of international governance, resulting in exasperation—and, in some cases, retaliation—when it is perceived to be excluded from high-profile efforts (Galeotti). Trenin notes that it is for this reason that Russia prizes its spot on the UN Security Council, where it can veto Western-backed initiatives that run contrary its interests (Trenin).

Attitude toward the United States

Finally, experts contend that in light of the Cold War and the prior disintegration of the USSR, Russia’s self-image as a great power causes it to be both sensitive and suspicious of Washington’s intentions, complicating efforts at bilateral cooperation (Cohen). For instance, Galeotti suggests that Russian leaders perceive Ukraine’s 2014 revolution as a coup instigated by the West “to bring down the hammer on Russia with sanctions” (Galeotti). Putin has responded to this situation as well as Russia’s perceived exclusion from matters of international governance with fiery rhetoric that attributes nearly all of Russia’s economic problems to? Western subterfuge, exacerbating an already competitive dynamic

¹³ This is discussed in greater detail in Q10, in the Regional Outlook section of this report.

between the two nations (Galeotti). So long as Putin feels slighted by the West on the international stage, it is likely this adversarial dynamic will persist.

The Deterrent Effect of NATO's Article V

The vast majority of experts responding to this question support the notion that Russia is credibly deterred by NATO's Article V to the extent that it will seek to avoid an unequivocal violation that can be expected to result in Western military response (Oliker, Baev, Bobick, Lamoreaux, O'Loughlin, Tkeshelashvili). Bobick affirms that Moscow knows it cannot win against the West in conventional warfare, while Lamoreaux insists that it does not want a war with anyone (Bobick; Lamoreaux). Further, O'Loughlin observes that it is the deterrent effect of Article V that precludes Russia from intervening in the Baltic States. At the same time, however, many experts concur that this does not stop Moscow from seeking to subtly degrade Article V by testing it, both in order to achieve its own political objectives within its perceived sphere of influence and to subvert NATO unity (Oliker, Baev, Bobick, Tkeshelashvili, Braun, Mastriano, Lamoreaux).

Article V is problematic for Moscow because it diminishes the Kremlin's ability to overtly intervene and exert influence in near abroad countries without fear of Western reprisal. Not only does this directly inhibit Moscow's ability to maintain a credible buffer zone against perceived external threats, it also directly contradicts the deeply-held belief in the greater Russian empire that drives much of Putin's foreign policy agenda (Nowak, Truolyubov). As a result, expanding NATO membership and subsequent Article V enforcement are extremely threatening to Russia, as evidenced by Moscow's bellicose reaction to Ukraine's 2008 expression of interest in joining the NATO alliance (Tkeshelashvili, Oliker). Superior Western military capabilities notwithstanding, Russian leaders ultimately view Article V enforcement as a test of political will, where that of Moscow far outweighs that of NATO member states. As Tkeshelashvili explains, "Russia ultimately understands Article V as both the weakest and strongest point of NATO—demonstrating that it is not ironclad undermines [NATO] credibility...Russia knows NATO is reluctant to be in conflict with Russia, not only militarily but economically." To that end, several experts noted that from Putin's perspective, it makes sense to actively try and undermine NATO cohesion because if Moscow's near abroad neighbors are unconvinced of NATO's willingness to defend them from Russian aggression, it is less likely that they will take the risk of joining NATO in the first place (Tkeshelashvili, Ivan, Conley).

Russian Challenges to Article V

Russia employs a variety of tactics to test the credibility of Article V, including violating neighboring countries' airspace (Lamoreaux), staging demonstrations and other political provocations (Baev), and deploying unmarked Russian forces—frequently referred to as "little green men"—outside of Russia's borders to assert Moscow's influence within its perceived sphere of influence (Galbreath). For instance, Bobick highlights the October 2014 abduction of an Estonian military officer by Russian security operatives as a successful mission that did not trigger a NATO military response but undermined Estonia's perceptions of sovereignty and their confidence in NATO's security guarantees (Bobick). Baev explains that the assumption behind this type of behavior is that Russia is prepared to take a greater risk

of confrontation than the “soft Europeans” and that this readiness for conflict translates to political advantage (Baev).

Going forward, experts anticipate Russia will continue to test the red lines of Article V enforcement with the dual goals of generating a rift between existing NATO member states and dissuading potential members from joining (Tkeshelashvilli, Braun, Mastriano, Oliker). There are diverging opinions over how aggressively Russia will do this: while Tkeshelashvilli and Ivan suggest that Moscow is unlikely to test Article V in large scale military events, Pavilonis asserts that Putin is preparing to use military force against a NATO country—potentially a Baltic state—as early as 2025.

Russia’s Strategic Deterrence Posture

Experts responding to this question asserted that Russia views its strategic deterrence posture as effective and rooted in two key components: nuclear weapons (see Question 10, Chapter 1) and soft power mechanisms (Oliker, Baev, Galbreath, Lamoreaux). Oliker explains that Russia regards its nuclear arsenal as a last resort guarantee against existential threats. As a result, they are concerned about Western military’s precision strike capabilities, and will pursue whatever actions necessary to maintain secondary strike capabilities (Oliker).

While we posed this question to the experts about deterrence, many responded by describing Russia’s influence operations, which we include here. The soft power mechanisms involved in Russia’s strategic deterrence posture include information operations within Russia and its broader area of influence, the covert intelligence operations designed to undermine the sovereignty of near abroad countries discussed in the previous section, and advocacy for ethnic Russians outside of Russian borders. Deemed “passport politics,” this tactic involves Moscow granting Russian passports to citizens of near abroad countries and then insisting on the right to protect and empower those citizens (Galbreath, Bobick). In the future, Tkeshelashvilli anticipates that Russia will seek to bolster their strategic deterrence posture by allocating more funds to conventional military capabilities and exercises (Tkeshelashvilli).

Russia’s Use of Information Technology

Across the board, experts assert that Russian leaders view the use of information technologies as a key tool of statecraft that they employ continuously in both domestic and international contexts to achieve their political and security goals (Tkeshelashvilli; Bobick; O’Loughlin; Peterson; Gerber & Zavisca; Mastriano). This understanding is rooted in the notion that modern warfare is conducted using a range of overt and covert tactics that can be used simultaneously and that military force is only a small component used to secure victory (Peterson). While experts did not directly address the US view of what constitutes political conflict and warfare, they acknowledged that given Russia’s long history of promulgating Soviet propaganda, information operations are an area where Moscow has a key advantage over its Western counterparts (Bobick, Gerber & Zavisca, Mastriano Zavisca; for further information see *Chapter 6: Internal Stability Dynamics*). What is interesting, is that Ivan points out that Russia’s most successful information and influence tools, like Russia Today, are based on Western television programming and do not resemble Soviet propaganda at all. Soviet propaganda was much less effective and less ‘professional’ than tools such as RT.

Experts note that Russia employs both defensive and offensive tactics in its use of information technologies, taking steps to control the flow of information, as well as crafting and perpetuating specific narratives that advance their interests. Domestically, Moscow invests heavily in funding and populating various media channels with pro-Russian narratives, many of which explicitly paint the United States and its NATO allies as malevolent powers bent on taking over Russia and its neighbors (Tkeshelashvilli, Gerber & Zavisca, Pavilionis). Tkeshelashvilli notes that Russia is so skilled at deploying these narratives that, “...in a bad way, [they] are a piece of art.” Experts debated the ultimate intent of these information operations, with some arguing that they were a means of passively mobilizing Russian society in the regime’s favor (Bobick), while others suggested that the goal was rather to foster confusion by crafting mirroring realities so the public was distrustful of everything (Tkeshelashvilli)—not only in the Russia, but in the West as well (Ivan).

While Galetotti expressed skepticism that broad Russian audiences actually believe the narratives espoused by state media, field research conducted by Gerber & Zavisca underscores the startling efficacy of Moscow’s efforts, highlighting a surging trend of anti-Americanism, and skepticism towards foreign funding of NGOs and the utility of political protest (Galetotti; Gerber & Zavisca). Separately, O’Loughlin highlighted the regime’s pragmatism when it comes to the flow of alternative information, explaining that Putin typically keeps communications platforms open so long as no popular mobilization exists, an approach that speaks to his degree of confidence in state media operations (O’Loughlin). Similarly, Zavisca expressed doubt that US-supplied counter-narratives would have any credible impact on Russian viewers who are so heavily saturated by state-sponsored messaging (Zavisca). Furthermore, the US does not currently have effectively means of reaching out to the Russian public (Ivan).

Internationally, Russia leverages its network of media assets to export similar programming to audiences abroad, in particular targeting the preponderance of Russian language speakers in neighboring countries. The investment in these influence operations are significant: for example, Mastriano comments that Moscow is spending as much as one million euros per day on Russian-language programming in the Baltic states. The intention behind these operations directly link back to the centrality with which Russia regards its near abroad region in its national security calculations. Gerber & Zavisca explain that through state-sponsored programming, Russia seeks to propagate the narrative that, “...Western institutions, norms, and practices...are all alien to Russia and to its Eurasian allies and sympathizers, [all of whom]...have distinctive institutions, norms and practices...superior to those in the West” (Gerber & Zavisca). Moreover, this programming seeks to shift blame from Moscow for policy failures to Western powers; for instance, O’Loughlin notes that through media spin, Putin was successfully able to frame Russia’s recent economic problems as an effort by the West to deny Russia its rightful place as a global leader (O’Loughlin).

By deploying a constant stream of pro-Russian programming in its near abroad region, Moscow is able to cultivate a subjective understanding of international affairs that is decidedly anti-Western. Accordingly, Bobick deems any and all Russian media, “...an arm of the military that can be used to create havoc in overseas environments with non-military means” (Bobick). Further, Mastriano suggests

that Russia's information operations are so effective that they even reach and convince US audiences, highlighting the critical difference between how Russia and the West perceive the media: while Western leaders still perceive objectivity as a central tenet of journalism, Russia feels no such allegiance, and uses this differential to their advantage. While experts cautioned that the United States cannot be complacent in the face of Russia's sophisticated information operations, they were unable to identify a clear path forward for how to best rectify this strategic divide (Gerber & Zavisca, Mastriano, Bobick).

The Future of US-Russia Cooperation on Transnational Security Issues

Experts discussing this question expressed cynicism that Russia will constructively engage with the West on transnational security issues if ongoing tensions remain unresolved (Marten, Reisinger, Galbreath). At the same time, experts discussed a variety of factors that could substantively alter this dynamic, including the cessation of Western sanctions, a leadership transition (Marten), the outcome of Russia-China relations (Mankoff; Kuchins; Cooper; Vieira), and an altered US engagement approach (Galeotti; Wood).

Experts identified counter-narcotics and counterterrorism as specific areas where the West and Russia have overlapping interests, but due to policy differences, are unlikely to expand cooperation in the future. While Reisinger noted that both Moscow and Washington seek to eradicate drug supply routes in Tajikistan, Marten observed that it is unlikely that Putin's government will commit to disrupting them, since they benefit Russian elites who support his regime. On counterterrorism, Russia and the West have a shared enemy (Vieira, O'Loughlin, Bobick), but Putin seeks to destroy extremist political Islamic elements through tactics—including concentrated force and torture, for example used by Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya—that are unpalatable to Western policymakers (Marten).

Conversely, several experts suggested exploration and management of the Arctic as a potential area for cooperation between Russia and the West, despite rhetoric to the contrary (Braun, Oliker, Stronski). Oliker explained that both sides have a shared interest in ensuring the free flow of oil tankers in the region, and that this economic basis for cooperation holds significant promise (Oliker). However, as the Arctic region becomes more populated, the risk of environmental issues or collisions between NATO and Russian forces will increase (Stronski, Wood).

To increase the chances for expanded Russian cooperation with the West in the future, experts suggested either altering the United States' engagement strategy to address Russian sensitivities (Wood) or appealing to the desires of Russian elites who can apply pressure on Putin (Galeotti). First, Wood suggests that when engaging with Russian counterparts, Western policymakers should consider symbolic ways to demonstrate respect, emphasizing that Russian leaders are highly concerned with their perceived inferior status in the global arena (Wood). Alternatively, Galeotti suggests that appealing to economic elites' desire to engage with the global economy could be a useful negotiating tactic, as they are not all necessarily committed to Putin remaining in power. At the same time, others suggest that it is in Putin's interest to keep the United States as Russia's enemy (Taras; Truolyubov; Wood). Accordingly as long as he remains in office, the prospects of expanded Russian cooperation with the West will remain dim (Marten).

Chapter 5: Leadership

Q 05: What is the likelihood that Putin's departure will lead to a significant change in Russian foreign policy? If it does, what direction will that change take?

Q 06: What do we know about potential successors to Putin? (Analyze the record of current and future leaders to predict their decision-making processes and attitudes / exposure to the West.) Who will lead Russia next, what changes can we expect, and how will Putin continue to exert influence after he "departs" government?

What Type of Leader is Likely to Follow Putin?

The experts saw one of two general paths Russian foreign policy could take with the replacement of Putin: either more confrontational and hostile to the West or more open to improving relations with the West. Galeotti suggests that the next leader is likely to be appointed by the elite with a mandate to try and maintain domestic political control, but improve relations with the West. Marten also considers it likely that the next leader will come from a similar background to Putin (with support from the KGB/FSB, as well as the same corrupt industrial enterprise networks), as such an individual is most likely to maintain the interests of the current elite (Marten). Allison also considers the assumption that a new leader will be more "pragmatic and Western-leaning" to be problematic and sees the reverse to be "quite possible" (Allison).

The general opinion seems to be, however, that significant change is unlikely, as "these regimes have crazy longevity," and change would also require a shift in the wider elite (Allison), and it would not be hard for Putin to find a way to maintain influence and "operate behind the scenes" (Reisinger). There is also some skepticism that Putin will voluntarily give up his position in the first place (Gorenburg; Reisinger).

Even if Putin does not remain in power, the likelihood of a leader significantly different coming to power is decreased by the nature of the system itself, and the success of Putin's efforts to stifle political opposition (Reisinger; Anon1). The government is run through an opaque patronage network with corruption at its foundation (Marten; Anon1), and this breeds inertia and like-mindedness (Marten). Furthermore, Putin's inner circle all have connections to old KGB or current FSB, and can destroy the career of anyone who crosses them (Marten). Galeotti suggests that a strong potential successor to Putin is also lacking because Putin has eliminated precisely that type of person from his inner circle and because, from the position of the elites, to elevate such a person runs the risk of not being able to control them, as they have discovered with Putin (Galeotti).

Possible Successors to Putin

The overall opinion of the experts regarding the possibility of predicting a specific successor to Putin is best summed up by Galeotti: "I think nothing would blight someone's career more than being described as potentially Putin's successor when Putin isn't willing... On the whole, people will only really mention

names to exclude them rather than there being any sense yet of the field” (Galeotti). Reisinger expects the decision to be a surprise, noting, “of the names I’ve given, my guess is it won’t be any of them” (Reisinger).

Table 4. Potential Successors to Putin

Name and Current position	Comments from Experts
<i>Igor Sechin</i> Head of national oil company, Rosneft	Former deputy PM, close ally of Putin (Reisinger)
<i>Sergei Ivanov</i> Putin’s Chief of Staff	(Reisinger)
<i>Nikolai Patrushev</i> Head of Security Council	(Stronski)
<i>Dmitry Rogozin</i> Deputy Prime Minister	Currently in charge of Arctic and defense industry. Anti-West due to his time at NATO (Stronski)
<i>Alexi Kudrin</i> Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, St. Petersburg State University	Former finance minister, puts himself out there as an alternative. Liberal minded, he would “change the image of Russia” (Stronski)
<i>Dmitry Medvedev</i> Prime Minister	Would be a consensus (“weak”) candidate for the elite. “No-one hates him, no-one fears him...he’s seen as a safe pair of hands” (Galeotti) Less likely than others because he is seen as weak (Reisinger) The fact that he has survived as PM is significant; he represents more liberal policy interests that may regain their footing in a post-Putin future (Sherlock) A temporary alternative, “If Putin keels over, he’ll step in” (Stronski)
<i>Sergey Sobyenin</i> Mayor of Moscow	A competent technocrat, “almost a throwback to old style of Soviet bureaucrats, but he’s done a very good job in Moscow” (Galeotti) “He has been a governor, if he remains as Mayor that hurts his credibility. Has the right kind of profile. Seems to be popular” (Reisinger)
<i>Sergey Shoygu</i> Defense Minister	Popular, competent, and not very corrupt, he is ½ non-ethnic Russian. Rather than a politician he is a technocrat (Reisinger; also Stronski)

Chapter 6: Internal Stability Dynamics

Q 26: Given changing social economic and demographic trends in Russia, how are they affecting government stability?

Q 29: What economic factors (current or near term) are having an impact on the stability of Putin's government?

Q 27: What type of political crisis could ultimately threaten the Russian style of government and do you see any signs or warnings of civil unrest?

The experts identified several factors that have potential to impact the stability of Putin's government. All the factors identified as negatively affecting stability are economic in nature: specifically, lack of economic development, low oil prices, and sanctions. These, however, are balanced by Putin's control over the media and elites, as well as his popular support, all of which increase the stability of his regime. Corruption was identified by several experts as influencing stability, but there are varying opinions regarding whether the effect is to enhance or erode stability.

Overall, the experts expressed more certainty regarding what type of political change would not occur in Russia than they did regarding the likely form transition away from Putin would take. There is no expectation of a major political shift in the next five years, primarily because there is "no better alternative to Putin even in economic decline" (Anon1). Putin has been so successful in eliminating political opponents that a coup is unlikely (Hedlund; Reisinger; Taras), and civil society is so weak that "a bottom up rebellion seems unlikely (Gerber; O'Loughlin; Taras; Tkeshelashvili; Zavisca).

Factors Threatening Stability

Lack of Economic Development

All of the experts who discussed Russia's economy for this and other questions agreed that lack of economic reform and modernization are significant barriers to Russia developing a more diverse and stable economy. There has been little attempt to diversify the petro economy, which leaves Russia vulnerable (O'Loughlin). Chow argues that it is not the current low oil prices that have created this problem for Russia, but rather the reverse. Historically, each time oil prices rise, Russia's leaders have decided that economic reform was unnecessary. Proposed reforms for decentralization and modernization have ended and corruption and dysfunctionality increased (Chow).

There is, they suggest, an awareness of the problems within the economic system, but an unwillingness to make the necessary structural changes (Braun, Wood) and have instead attempted to find "shortcuts" of which their Arctic development is a part (Braun). Reisinger argues that the regime is turning its back on the idea of economic and scientific development and no longer wants to do the things that Medvedev proposed. Both Reisinger and Braun consider that without a strategic vision for economic development, Russia will not be able to become the power that they seek to become. Conley expressed that she is increasingly of the view that Russia cannot modernize itself.

Oil Prices

There was consensus among the experts that the most significant threat to Russia's current economic stability is the severe drop in oil prices. The oil and gas sector account for 50% of government revenue (Chow; Hedlund), and for Russia to have any kind of sustained growth and economic development, or to provide resources to population, the price of oil needs to be \$75 barrel (O'Loughlin). Russia's dependence on oil means that the current low prices affect all aspects of the economy, not just the oil and gas sectors (Chow).

Sanctions

While sanctions were also identified as a driver of economic instability for Russia, their impact is considered to be far less than that of low oil prices (Chow). For sanctions to really undermine stability, Marten argues, they need to be unified and long-term, and damage key Russian industries. At the moment, existing sanctions are targeting income much more than wealth (Marten). The greatest impact of the current sanctions has been Russia's loss of access to long-term money. Both the sanctions and Russia's countersanctions, such as food embargoes will also contribute to inflation and diminish real income and purchasing power (Anon1). The combination of sanctions on top of low oil prices is, therefore, having a cumulative effect on the Russian economy. Until 2013, consumption was one of the drivers of Russia's economic growth (Anon1). Russians are now experiencing multiple sources of diminished income—lower employment in the oil and gas sector, potential reductions in government spending, and reduced purchasing power.

On the strategic level, sanctions have motivated Russia to turn to other potential economic and development partners, in particular China. Hedlund considers that Western sanctions are "increasing China's bargaining power in leaps and bounds". The Chinese are negotiating favorable deals with the Russians, increasing their influence while decreasing the economic leverage of the West (Hedlund).

Economic dissatisfaction

Key to Putin's success has been economic—stabilization of currency and living standards (Zavisca). As discussed below (catalysts for political change), economic downturn makes it harder for Putin to keep the elite happy, and sanctions—the result of Putin's policies—are also being felt most directly by Russia's elite. If elites see that being associated with Putin is no longer an advantage, it may crystallize some of their underlying concerns with his leadership and policy choices.

Similarly, although popular support for Putin has not yet been significantly undermined by the economic downturn, it is possible it will begin to cause real economic pain for "average Russians." Focus group findings indicate that price increases are the biggest concern, and problems with wage arrears and increasing unemployment will soon be seen (Gerber). Those same Russians who have done well under Putin are now in danger of losing all the economic gains of the past fifteen years, making them more likely to mobilize in opposition than if they had not experienced those gains in the first place (Sherlock). Whether and how this economic dissatisfaction and protest will translate into political action, however, is not so clear. Historically, economic protests in Russia have led to political demands; however, the uncertainty regarding what would replace Putin's regime (Anon1), and the upheaval that change would inevitably create, may in fact be inhibiting public demonstrations of dissatisfaction with Putin's policies.

Factors Buffering Stability

While all of the major factors experts identified as threatening the stability of Putin's government were directly or indirectly economic, in many cases their potential impact is dampened by non-economic factors. Most of these are rooted in the level of political control and support Putin has built through control of the media and elites, and stifling of civil society, all of which have helped bolster his popular support.

Control of Media

There was consensus among the experts that media control is critical to Putin's regime. By controlling the media, the Kremlin gains control over public opinion and can drive narratives (Oliker; Marten). Their domestic information campaign has high production values (Marten) and represents large government investment with technologies and well thought out narratives showing planning and progress. It is designed to be addictive and to brainwash (Marten; Tkeshelashvili). "In a bad way it is a piece of art," Tkeshelashvili stated. At the same time that the regime is attacking independent news agencies (Wood), they have left the Internet largely open, signaling to O'Loughlin, that they do not yet see it as a huge threat.

Control over the media means that regime-created narratives drive public opinion (Zavisca). For example, Putin has managed to frame the current economic crisis as an effort by the West to "bring Russia to heel," rather than as the result of flawed policy (O'Loughlin). 90% of Russians get their news from the television, and the TV message is that the West is seeking to diminish Russian power so the United States can control geopolitics and the world economy, and Russia must resist this (O'Loughlin). Even though the public is skeptical of these narratives (Zavisca), they are difficult to counter. Not only are the narratives amorphous, but there are few alternative sources of information for the population, most of whom have little or no direct contact with the West (Bobick). Zavisca mentions that a colleague from a Russian polling agency told her that even Russians who tend to get news from the Internet (outside regime control) still internalize the things that are consistent with the dominant Russian narrative. More broadly, Zavisca found that there is complete unanimity among Russians interviewed and polled, on unreliability of anything on Russian media, other than weather and sports. However, if she asks for impressions of specific events, people would reference what they had heard on the news (Zavisca). For these reasons, she doubts whether presenting counternarratives (though something like Voice of America) would gain much traction within Russia, although she does consider alternative sources of information as more important, and potentially influential, for Russian-speaking communities outside Russia (Zavisca).

Stifling of Civil Society

Despite the regime's fear of a color revolution occurring in Russia (Allison), the experts interviewed expressed the view that such a popular uprising was unlikely as civil society is so weak. Earlier attempts to organize were repressed very effectively and did not receive much media attention (Zavisca). Under Putin's regime, civil society and political opposition has for all intents and purposes been eliminated, and there is "very little politics in Russia (Anon1). Even within non-governmental sector, there is minimal ability to move around, or have political influence (Tkeshelashvili). Furthermore, O'Loughlin argues that

the opposition that does exist is concentrated in very small, pro-Western urban groups that “...don’t reflect the view of ‘average Russian’ to extent there is an average Russian” (O’Loughlin). Combined with the regime’s control over media, this serves to effectively buffer the government against the possibility of large-scale organized political opposition or revolt.

Control of Elites and Corruption

While Putin’s government relies heavily on control of information and stifling of political opposition to protect against popular revolt, with the elites it relies more on reducing the incentives for opposition. Over his tenure in office, Putin has also done much to eliminate any potential rivals for his position. As discussed in the section on leadership and succession, there is no clear alternative to Putin. Putin’s inner circle all has connections to old KGB or current FSB, and can destroy the career of anyone who crosses them (Marten). No prominent private sector leaders have turned into “opposition leaders” to provide an alternative to Putin. Rather, they are leaving the political arena, either remaining apolitical or moving to Europe (Reisinger). Lack of an alternative to Putin, combined with Putin’s control of the security sector, makes organizing a coup difficult.

Some of Russia’s oligarchs are very close to Putin and “will never betray him” (Taras). Even those who are not, however, benefit hugely from his patronage and their wealth directly depends on its continuation (Marten). After the imposition of sanctions by the West, Putin was careful to reward his inner circle in compensation for the damages caused to them (Anon1). Despite constraints on Putin’s resources due to sanctions and low oil prices, he still remains in control of the most lucrative sources of financial gain. Widespread corruption is the glue that holds the elites and Putin’s inner circle together (Anon1; also Marten). However, in the longer term, it undermines efforts to institute economic reforms and modernization (Sherlock) and popular perceptions of the legitimacy and intent of political leaders (Gerber), both of which threaten regime stability.

Uncertainty and Fear

It is possible that economic factors may have less influence on the political satisfaction of the Russian people than in countries that have experienced color revolutions. The current economic downturn in Russia comes after a period of almost uninterrupted economic growth and the formation of a middle class. Many Russians have personal reserves to weather the crisis. Furthermore, many will remember Russia’s experiences during the 1990s and conclude that it is “better to have this semi stability” than to try to change to an unknown government (Anon1). Although the Russian economy is in trouble, Putin’s government retains public support and is drawing on the “historical ability of the people to sacrifice to make things better” (Oliker).

Uncertainty among the population regarding what would replace Putin’s regime combined with Russia’s historical experience that strong governments can turn against them (Wood), effectively works to reinforce stability and hold Russians in place. For the elites, fear is also present, but generated more by the risks and consequences of challenging Putin’s control. The elite are rallying around the flag, knowing that if they express doubts about the regime, they will be reported (Merry). This creates resilience in the short term, but in the longer term erodes the stability of the regime (Merry).

Public Support for Russian Leadership

In spite of contradictions and conflicts, Putin's regime continues to enjoy massive popular support (Vieira). Putin's popularity rests as much on his image as a strong leader as it does on his earlier economic successes. It rises when he is seen as strong and decisive in foreign policy, even if he does not win (Wood). This ties into the importance Russians place on being seen as a great power. Gerber reports that in his focus groups and surveys, Russians expressed a willingness to "take a pay cut" to see Ukraine become part of Russia, and linked international respect and importance for Russia as one of the reasons they liked Putin. Even in more recent focus groups where contributors have expressed more doubts about what is going on in Ukraine, they blame the United States not Putin (Gerber). Gerber does warn, however, that it is "important not to mistake high levels of support for Putin and dislike of United States as social consensus around Putin's approach and policies... Russia is a divided, complex society, with no social consensus behind Putinism" (Gerber).

Catalysts for Political Change

Popular Revolt

High levels of popular support for Putin, bolstered by tightly controlled media narratives and the suppression of political opposition combine to make large-scale popular protest unlikely (Sherlock). This is not to say that popular protests might not be seen. Gerber points out that scattered protests and strikes over failures to pay wages have already been seen in different sectors (Galeotti; Gerber). Additionally, O'Loughlin sees the potential for protests among urban populations. However, neither expressed a belief that these actions would reach the scale necessary to threaten the regime, a view shared by Taras. The experts did emphasize that popular support is necessary for the stability of Putin's regime. Failure to sustain current economic policies (O'Loughlin; Tkeshelashvili) or popular disapproval of the militarization of the conflict in Ukraine were identified as factors that could significantly increase the level of popular dissatisfaction with the regime. Sherlock's analysis of opinion poll data find that, while Putin is still very popular, it is clear that Russians are unwilling to bear significant costs to support aggressive Kremlin foreign policy. He concludes that an adventurous foreign policy would be economically (and otherwise) detrimental to most everyday Russians, and Putin will find it difficult to mobilize public sentiment despite Kremlin control (Sherlock). Zavisca also considers that popular support is important for limiting factional competition among the elites.

Elite Coup (Political)

Top down change, in the form of an elite coup (political rather than military), was considered to be more likely, although still low probability, than popular revolt (Gerber; Zavisca). Putin's regime requires both popular and elite support for stability, and the support of each reinforces against opposition from the other. One of Putin's points of leverage for retaining elite support is his high public support, which makes elites unwilling to form factions. However, if Putin's policies erode popular support, and there is small-scale popular unrest, it could embolden some subset of elites to displace Putin (Gerber). Marten offers a similar appraisal and identifies loss of support among workers and pensioners in rural Russia as critical weakening Putin.

There is some evidence that Putin's elite is not as unified as it used to be, and some groups are very unhappy (Galeotti; Stronski, Zavisca). For most, dissatisfaction is driven by economic, rather than policy or ideological motivations. Putin's ability to keep Russia's elite happy and loyal is based on his control of economic benefits. As the economy contracts and the impact of sanctions increases, the cost is falling on Russia's elites directly. Additionally, Putin's resources are shrinking and a "disproportionate share of the opportunities for embezzlement" is going to a smaller subset of the elite (Galeotti). Regional governors—"creatures of the Kremlin"—may also lose faith in Putin as they face rising social problems without money from Moscow to address them (Reisinger). Stronski points out that many Russian oligarchs are buying property in Europe and the United States and sending their children to school there, in effect putting in place an "escape plan" (Stronski). Putin's failure to provide goods appears to be undermining the basis of his support among the elite and creating tensions among them. This may provide the basis for the intra-elite competition that Taras argues will be the most important internal dynamic in Russian politics.

There are also indications that Putin is losing credibility among the elite as a result of some of his recent policy decisions. He "scarcely goes into Moscow" and there is a smaller circle of people around him (Galeotti; also Marten). Galeotti discusses the sense of disempowerment that even senior figures are feeling as their input into the policy process is increasingly limited. "Instructions come from some where in the stratosphere and they are tasked with picking up the pieces" (Galeotti). Stronski also identifies dissatisfaction among the elite with Putin's recent policies. Conservative hardliners are split over Ukraine; they can keep Ukraine unstable but not "win," and many are pushing for stronger intervention. Economic elites are unhappy about deteriorating relations with the West and economic ties with Europe and are skeptical about Putin's hard pivot to China and the BRICs (Stronski). Although many elite groups are unhappy, none at the moment appear to be prepared to do something to change Russia's position (Stronski). Galeotti warns, however, that if a critical number of elites feel Putin is becoming a problem, "things will happen fast." If economic elites begin to pull back politically, this could provide room for those in the security services or military to come back into political influence (Anon1).

Chapter 7: Media and Public Opinion

Q 07: Conduct analysis of open source Russian media to understand key frames and cultural scripts that are likely to frame potential geopolitical attitudes and narratives in the region.

Q 08: How much does the US image of Russia as the side that “lost” the Cold War create support for more aggressive foreign policy behavior among the Russian people?

Q 09: How might ultra-nationalism influence Russia’s foreign policy rhetoric and behavior?

Nationalism

Many experts identified nationalism as a driver of Russian narratives and attitudes. However, a number of the experts cautioned that, prior to discussing the influence of nationalism, it was critical to clearly define what form of nationalism was being referenced. Looking across the experts’ responses to all questions, several variations of nationalism emerge, all of which have different implications for popular support of Russian foreign policy actions. The appeal of this narrative to the leadership lies in its power to defuse the negative impact of economic problems, turning them into virtues, rather than failures. It is a “cheap drug” to rally popular support, and lay blame for Russia’s problem elsewhere (Bobick).

Nationalism as National Greatness

Both Wood and Truolyubov discuss the importance of the idea of Russia as a great nation—a “feared country” (Truolyubov)—to many Russians’ sense of identity. Wood explains that that this is based in the perception that even if one is not great oneself, or personally fulfilled, the knowledge that one’s country is great can substitute for this lack. Putin’s image as a strong and decisive man capable of leading and unifying the nation (Wood) both feeds into this narrative as well as drawing support from it. It also helps explain why Russians take the situation with Ukraine so seriously and why the Crimea annexation was such a popular move domestically (Truolyubov).

Ethnic Nationalism and National Exceptionalism

This version of nationalism holds that Russia is the geopolitical center of a larger Eurasian state, with its own distinct civilization and presence that is neither East nor West (O’Loughlin, Taras). Elites supporting this view of nationalism, and the associated belief that Ukraine is part of the Eurasian world, have a lot of prominence in Russian media (O’Loughlin). It has gained more traction in Putin’s narratives and policies since fall 2013 (Wood), and Putin’s speech to the legislature calling for the annexation of Crimea was strongly influenced by Eurasianist ideas (Reisinger).

Associated with this version of nationalism is the idea that Russians and ethnic Russians need to save civilization and defend against the West and decaying moral values (Reisinger). Since 2013, Putin has increasingly called for a more conservative ideology for Russia’s government, issued a “dizzying number of decrees” against liberal values and required government officials to attend seminars focusing on aggressive, conservative social values (Wood). Putin has demonstrated a commitment to the idea that a unique Russian civilization exists, one that transcends borders (Stent). He has consciously elevated ethnicity and language over statehood, citizenship, and “the sanctity of borders” (Sherr), believing that there is a mismatch between state/political borders and national/ethnic/cultural that is both a historical injustice and a threat to Russia’s security (Stent).

Ultra Nationalism

Despite Putin's increasing use of nationalist rhetoric, the experts interviewed indicated there is little support for aggressive ultra-nationalism within Russia. Most of the Russian public does not support aggression in Ukraine or a "broader Russian neo-imperial project" (Sherlock). Sherlock's public opinion research indicates low support for bearing the costs of aggressive, military expansion and annexation, and low support for hybrid war in the Baltics (Sherlock). He argues that most Russians are essentially realists and that, despite Putin's switch to nationalist narrative, concern over economic conditions dominate popular concerns (Sherlock). Taras similarly concludes that despite the Kremlin's use of this rhetoric and narrative, "street nationalism" is not going to have a strong impact. He suggests that part of its appeal to political elites is the fear it generates in others (Taras).

Implications of Nationalism for Foreign Policy

All of the forms of nationalism discussed by the experts are variants of ethnic nationalism, rather than civic nationalism. As such, all are, in the longer term, "very corrosive to national cohesion" (Braun). Both Wood and Reisinger are worried by this strategy, designed to increase popular loyalty to the current leadership, as it is escalating popular belief that Russia is faced by enemies and under threat. This reflects Braun's assessment that nationalist framing of foreign policy issues increases the likelihood of risky behavior and miscalculation (Braun), both of which increase risk of unintended escalation.

Nationalist framing of foreign policy also acts to increase the costs of backing down for leaders. It effectively creates the perception that the stakes are critical—*it is up to us to defend us and others* (Reisinger)—which makes failure appear much more costly to the public. For the leader, failure or backing down is more costly as, given the frame, it signals that he is not capable of protecting the nation. So, while nationalism may indeed be a "cheap drug" for rallying popular support (Bobick), it is also a dangerous one, as it can place leaders in the position of having to escalate a crisis they do not want to escalate or face losing domestic credibility and support.

Russian Encirclement

Connected to, and building off, the ethnic nationalist/Eurasian state narrative is the narrative that Russia is encircled by enemies who seek its destruction and humiliation (Taras; Truolyubov). This narrative serves several purposes for the regime. First, it relieves the pressure on the government to resolve domestic problems by telling the population that they need to pay for the grand things the Kremlin is doing to keep them safe from the enemies everywhere and at the gate (Truolyubov). The regime can reframe concerns over domestic problems, such as corruption, as petty and out of place given these larger concerns. Second, it creates the perception among the population that they are in constant danger, and diminishes expectations about their own well being and future (Truolyubov).

Cold War Memory

In the 1990s, the Russian public's perception that the United States saw them as the losers of the Cold War did matter. They felt that, even after all the change that has achieved under Gorbachev, they were isolated from the West, when they wanted to be taken seriously and as an equal (Marten). In

contemporary Russia, however, this frame has little resonance or importance for most of the public; it was just “too long ago” (Taras; see also Marten; Sherlock).

Reisinger argues that it does, however retain importance for intellectuals and elites. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia’s elites had expected to be invited in Western partnerships in a way that they were not and felt betrayed (Marten; Reisinger). The failure of the West to integrate Russia, and Washington’s treatment of post-Soviet Russia as a defeated nation, capable, at most, of being a junior partner in US politics (Cohen), has created the conditions for the narratives and frames we see the Putin regime leveraging to emerge. It aggravated the nationalists (Marten) and provided a basis for their narrative that the West seeks to destroy Russia (Reisinger; Taras; Wood). It also damaged the relationship and undermined the political influence of the liberal elites, who, although pro-Western, were left without a partner (Marten).

Chapter 8: United States Foreign Policy and Regional Engagement

Q 17 How has the US-led discussion of the “new European security environment” changed Russian action to date? How does the USG influence NATO and the EU to maintain efforts to counter and deter Russian aggressive actions?

Q 18 How does the U.S. strengthen partner nations in the region in a constrained fiscal environment and how can USEUCOM better focus and identify requirements for theater engagement and security cooperation across its area of responsibility?

Q 22 Are recent U.S. assurance activities such as Operation Atlantic Resolve having a deterrent effect on Russia's decision making and its strategy for its near abroad?

Q 21 What U.S. military actions or posturing can be perceived as provocative in nature by Russia and potentially create an escalatory response?

Q 34 Despite U.S. efforts to communicate the operational and technical intent of its European Phased Adaptive Approach Missile Defense System to defend against only rogue nations, does Russia still perceive it as an escalatory in nature and a threat to its security, and if so, what overt and covert actions have or may they take in response?

How has the US-led discussion of the “new European security environment” changed Russian action to date? How does the USG influence NATO and the EU to maintain efforts to counter and deter Russian aggressive actions? (17)

The US-led discussion on the new European security environment has been forefront in the minds of European and NATO leaders in light of Russia’s recent aggressive foreign policy. So how has renewed attention to European and NATO unity altered Russian action to date? And how has, or should, the USG interact with NATO and the EU to encourage continued efforts to counter and deter aggressive Russian actions?

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Some experts believe there is no evidence that discussion between the USG and its EU allies has changed Russia’s decision calculus on foreign aggression (Ivan; Conley). While there has been a great deal of talk about the new security environment, it is political, security, and economic decisions and actions that influence Russian behavior—or at least are taken into consideration by Russian leaders (Ivan). Conley argues that the “only thing the Kremlin responds to is strength and actions.” All Russia sees now on the part of European and American leaders has been weakness and indecision (Conley). Russian leaders were surprised how little reaction their activities in Crimea generated. This has led to an expectation in Russia that the West will not confront Putin (Conley). Putin has made it clear that Russia is willing to use military for political ends; the West made it clear that they are not (Conley, 2015). Putin takes this lack of reaction for acquiescence (Conley). This undermines the West deterrent effect.

While discussion on its own has limited deterrent effect, discussion as a precursor of action does have some deterrent effect (Ivan; Jones; Kuzniar). How well NATO and EU members respectively come to

agreements and work together enhances the impact of the deterrence value of discussion. There is even greater deterrent impact when the EU and NATO, which have many common members, work towards the same goal or share a commonality of views (Ivan; Kuzniar). Jones argues that Russian aggression has already unified NATO and reinvigorated the OSC. He argues that the key to continued successful deterrence is consistency and unity of effort among European partner nations, especially in the face of Russian provocations.

Taking action to strengthening NATO, the EU, the OSCE, and other organizations is also a deterrent to Russian aggression when these organizations can coordinate to demonstrate European unity and strength (Kangas). These actions do not have to be security-oriented in nature; they can involve customs, commerce, infrastructure development, etc. (Kangas). Another part of demonstrating European unity and strength through actions includes NATO member states meeting their fiscal obligations to NATO (Mastriano). This shows commitment to NATO strength, success, and credibility.

Finally, military training exercises are an effective deterrent action (Mastriano). The Baltics exercise in June 2015, which included two non-NATO members (Finland and Sweden), had a particularly strong impact given Putin's angry threat of "consequences" if Sweden and Finland join NATO, clearly indicating concern on his part about a strong Europe.

How does the US strengthen partner nations in the region in a constrained fiscal environment and how can USEUCOM better focus and identify requirements for theater engagement and security cooperation across its area of responsibility? (18)

European Concerns

European nations seem hesitant to strongly deter Russia, which is due to several legitimate concerns. First, several European countries run the risk of economic blowback if they participate in sanctioning Russia (Mastriano). This explains some of the hesitance from the Germans and other nations, particularly in Central Asia, to act strongly against Russian aggression if it means they will experience an economic setback (Mastriano). Even countries that only receive a small percentage of fuel from Russia would result in economic setbacks if that supply were cut off (Mastriano). Russia knows this and is part of its plan to "divide and conquer." The United States and European nations will have to be willing to either increase cooperation to share limited resources or allow these countries to be at the mercy of Russian influence (Gorenburg).

Second, there is also a perception in Europe that the United States has an increasingly small presence in Europe, exposing those states to greater strategic risk (Mastriano). One expert stated that the United States does not have a credible force in Europe anymore (Mastriano).

Encouragement

SME listed many things the USG can do to encourage European nations to act with unity and strength to deter Russia.

US leadership is the first element in encouraging European allies to deter Russian aggression (Mastriano; Karber; Jones). NATO nations are willing to follow US leadership but will not assume the mantle of

leadership on their own. US leadership was critical during the Cold War, but leadership can only be successful where there is also burden sharing (Mastriano). This is a deterrent that could be effected in a fiscally constrained environment (Mastriano).

Second, the West needs to work toward decreasing European energy dependence on Russia (Mastriano; Lenczowski; Jones). As mentioned above, countries that are dependent on Russia for even a small portion of their energy needs are hesitant to take any action that could stop energy flows (Mastriano). Or, if the West cannot insulate countries against Russia blowback, it should attempt to mitigate the negative impact for allies and partners (Lenczowski).

Third, the West needs a concerted and real information operation effort to provide high speed, entertaining, opposing viewpoint to what Russia produces for audiences in Eastern Europe (as well as in Russia and the rest of the world) through outlets such as Russia Today (Mastriano; Lenczowski; Jones). The West is at a significant disadvantage when it comes to IO messaging. While developing IO capability on par with Russia's is an expensive proposition, it may generate significant return on investment for the West despite the fiscal constraints it now faces. Some experts echoed the adage that the United States "would rather kill someone than persuade them."

Fourth, the West could signal its commitment to European security by physically positioning US forces forward in meaningful numbers, particularly in the Baltics (Mastriano; Lenczowski). US troop rotations through Central and Eastern Europe are meant to be have a semi-permanent character, but they are not necessarily perceived as such (Ivan). A critical part of having troops forward includes helping allies to beef up border defenses (Anon1). "Unless there's physical skin in the game and the troops that are forward" the West will not have a credible, deterrent against further Russia absorption of ethnic Russian populations outside of Russia (Mastriano). This would be a significant deterrent that does not require a large number of troops or resources (Mastriano). Also, because the USG does not have enough forward deployed forces, we have limited interoperability with the other 27 NATO members (Mastriano).

Related, the West could also provide military advisors, equipment, and training to countries at risk of Russian aggression (Galbreath; Rotfeld; Lenczowski; Herbst). For example, teaching Georgian soldiers how to be better marksmen could have a deterrent effect (Galbreath). This is possible even under austere conditions. He added that providing arms is a different matter since it is costly and requires sustained investment to maintain the equipment. Part of shoring up European defenses means leading a European conversation about shared defenses (Rotfeld).

Fifth, one expert suggested developing a **forward intelligence capacity**, particularly on the human side, to engage with Russian ethnic regions in the Baltic States (Mastriano).

Sixth, a soft power lever would be to strengthen the economic, social, and governing stability of European allies. Making sure that young adults have good job prospects and safe schools could go a long way to creating a stronger, more stable Europe (Galbreath). Additionally, investing in institutions, capacity building, anti-corruption, and promoting investment and trade may strengthen partner resolve and provide an appealing alternative to the Russian people (Ivan; Jones). This also includes promoting

democratic values in NATO member countries (e.g., Hungary and Poland) where views of political leadership are a little out of tune with the others (Ivan). However, Kangas (2015) argues that softer approaches that focus on democracy and free markets have not historically been successful in deterring aggression.

Seventh, another deterrent is having credible plans in place to respond to provocative Russian action (Ivan). We need to provide reciprocal response to have a deterrent effect (Karber).

Eighth, we need to reach out to countries that are in Russia's traditional sphere of influence but are eager to engage the West, particularly given Russia's actions in Ukraine (e.g., Armenia) (Stronski). We need more strategic thought and resources on strengthen capacity of Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova (Kuchins).

Finally, perhaps the most effective, but risky, deterrent is engagement (please see Executive Summary for a discussion of deterrence vs. engagement). Some experts felt the West should use its leverage to encourage Russia to channel their energies into constructive efforts: economic growth, countering common threats, etc. (Lenczowski; Jones). Even in times of turmoil, opportunities can be found to increase ties with Russian civil society and populations, particularly the younger generation (Jones). However, other experts caution that engagement with Russia simply feeds Russian self-aggrandizement (Kuzniar).

Are recent US assurance activities such as Operation Atlantic Resolve having a deterrent effect on Russia's decision making and its strategy for its near abroad? (22)

When asked this question, many experts answered that they did not know whether Operation Atlantic Resolve was having a deterrent effect on Russian decision making largely because the Russian leaders and press have not discussed it broadly (Oliker). The Russian press has focused mostly on Ukraine (Oliker). In fact, Oliker suggested that the exercise, with its focus on the Baltic States, may indicate that NATO is concerned that Article V is not strong enough and that it was an effort by the USG to reassure its allies.

A small number of experts thought that the exercise might have a small deterrent effect on Russian decision making and strategy (Anon1). It reminds Russia that the United States is a formidable military power and cannot be ignored (Anon1). The exercise acts as a reminder that US forces must be factored into Russian decision making.

What US military actions or posturing can be perceived as provocative in nature by Russia and potentially create an escalatory response? (21)

As pointed out in the executive summary, Russians regard economic sanctions as a hostile act (Galeotti) and not a sort of tier two punishment intended by the West. Additionally, regardless of whether the government perceives Western actions as genuine threats, it seeks to play up any activities to build their case of Western aggression (Galeotti). In many ways, Russia expects and respects direct action on the

part of states (Galeotti). They saw the “reset initiative” as wishy-washy. Russia respects strength (Galeotti).

Furthermore, United States inaction has been perceived as weakness by Russian decision-makers (Anon1). Shows of political weakness, including refusing to take action to defense US interests as well as ally reassurance actions, encourages Russia to continue to push redlines (Anon1). Weakness is viewed by Russians as an “invitation to push further and see how far they can go (Anon1).

In general, the Russian population does not want to see Russian troops in Ukraine. However, Kuchins (2015) argues that the provision of US weapons to Ukrainian troops could change that perspective.

Despite US efforts to communicate the operational and technical intent of its European Phased Adaptive Approach Missile Defense System to defend against only rogue nations, does Russia still perceive it as an escalatory in nature and a threat to its security, and if so, what overt and covert actions have or may they take in response? (34)

Only one expert, Heather Conley (2015) from CSIS, felt equipped to respond to this question. She noted that the Russia Resistance to EPAA is not telemetry, but geography—that it impinges on Russia’s sphere of influence. This is particularly a challenge in relation to an EPAA installation in Poland. The purpose of this installation has still not been declared. This is a highly complex issue that is going to become extremely divisive.

Chapter 9: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ¹⁴

Q 16: If conflict occurs, will NATO be willing and able to command and control a response?

Q 23: Are recent NATO assurance activities such as the establishment of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) or their Readiness Action Plan (RAP) having a deterrent effect on Russia's decision-making and overall strategy for its near abroad? What does Russia perceive as NATO's intentions in its near abroad?

NOT INCLUDED DUE TO LACK OF SME RESPONSE:

Q 32: How supportive is the European Union (EU) and NATO with regards to EUCOM's reassurance activities and initiatives?

NATO's Command and Control Capabilities

Experts expressed skepticism regarding NATO member states' ability and will to effectively command and control a coordinated military response against Russian aggression (Ivan, Lamoreaux, Vieira, Dziak, Karber, Conley). Capability is hampered by both national level weaknesses and coordination between member states. These varying capabilities are exacerbated by divergent interests among nation states, which have varying degrees of political and economic vulnerability to Russia.

Military capability

In terms of ability, Conley highlights mobilization speed and the lack of secure, interoperable communication systems as key areas of deficiency that could impede a future NATO response. Moreover, she cautions that NATO frequently suffers intelligence lapses regarding the intent of Russian deployments. Russian deployments, she also notes, continue to increase in speed and frequency, exacerbating these NATO deficiencies (Conley).

Separately, Karber laments NATO forces' declining size and strength. Although there are several Eastern European national forces proficient in manpower and force structure, he notes that they lack proper equipment due to decades of NATO neglect (Karber). Finally, Karber discusses the state of NATO's contingency plans as an indicator of the alliance's battle-readiness, saying that current plans – oriented predominantly towards training rather than warfare – underscore that NATO is not ready to engage in serious conflict at this time (Karber).

Political Will

In terms of political will, Experts argue that divergent political and economic interests among member states may diminish NATO's ability to decisively respond to Russian aggression (Lamoreaux, Ivan, Chow, Dziak, Yost). From a political standpoint, citizens in many NATO states oppose confrontation with Russia, and this may undermine the ability of national political leaders to follow through on their stated security obligations should conflict occur (Lamoreaux, Ivan, and Vieira). The economic interests of some

¹⁴ One additional question regarding NATO was included in the EUCOM questions (Q 32: How supportive is the European Union (EU) and NATO with regards to EUCOM's reassurance activities and initiatives?), but none of the SME's we interviewed felt they were qualified to address this specific question.

European states are also threatened by deteriorating relations between Russia and NATO. Chow and Galbreath highlight dependence on Russian energy and business interests in Russia as potential factors driving popular aversion to conflict within certain European states. The value of these economic ties and vulnerabilities varies considerably among European states, and both experts caution against assuming uniformity among them (Chow; Galbreath).

Taken together, these factors point to a critical weakness at the heart of NATO: as the alliance grows bigger, member states' interests become increasingly diversified, making it more and more difficult to command unified action in the event of external aggression. Experts explored this dynamic in a variety of regional contexts, with both NATO member states and non-members. In the Baltics, Lamoreaux suggests that Western European nations do not perceive their eastern counterparts as strategically important, and would therefore be unlikely to come to their defense, especially if Moscow's actions could be construed as something other than an act of war (Lamoreaux). In Ukraine, Yost attests that NATO states' hesitation to provide Kiev with lethal aid stems from the fact that, "...the future status of Ukraine matters much more to Russia than to NATO and EU governments collectively" and, as a result, "...NATO is not prepared to fight Russia to defend [Ukraine's]...sovereignty and territorial integrity." Moreover, he cites EU governments' central fear of war with nuclear-armed Russia, raising questions over whether member states are confident of US assistance in the event of conflict (Yost). Lastly, Ivan discusses NATO's operational challenges from a structural perspective, noting that increased numbers of member states translate to an extremely slow decision-making process that can hamper command and control (Ivan).

Impact of NATO Assurance Activities on Russian Strategy

Experts are divided over the extent to which NATO assurance activities affect Russian decision-making and strategy in its near abroad region. While some argue that they reinforce NATO's military primacy (Galbreath, Galetotti, Anonymous), others believe that they fail to alter Russia's fundamental conviction that NATO members are reticent to engage in direct armed conflict (Conley, Braun). Experts were unable to address how EU and NATO governments perceive EUCOM's reassurance activities.

Galbreath and Galetotti both assert that NATO assurance activities serve as a tangible reminder of NATO's military might relative to that of Moscow; however, they differ in how they believe this affects Russian strategy (Galbreath, Galetotti, Anon1). While Galbreath commends NATO activities for assuring Baltic States that the alliance's defense pledges are credible, he argues that they nonetheless result in a more belligerent Russian foreign policy because they feed Moscow's paranoia that the West seeks to destroy it (Galbreath). Similarly, others suggest the flaunting of NATO's military power through assurance activities provokes jealousy within Moscow (Anon1). Conversely, Galeotti suggests that NATO assurance activities cause Russia to avoid confrontation by pursuing a strategy of asymmetry, intervening only in places where they believe that NATO will not respond (Galeotti). Conley concurs with this latter point, asserting that Putin seeks to undermine NATO's legitimacy by provoking them into publicly revealing their aversion to conflict, in doing so proving to near abroad states that Europe will never truly be able to protect them (Conley).

To this end, neither Conley nor Braun believes that NATO assurance activities are altering Moscow's decision-making calculus. While Conley recognizes the increased tempo and presence of NATO forces in Russia's near abroad, she questions whether these activities overstate the alliance's capabilities given coordination challenges and member states' aforementioned aversion for conflict (Conley). Similarly, Braun argues that while the gesture of assurance activities is appreciated by Russia's neighbors, they are perceived as credible by neither near abroad governments nor Russia, and as a result do not fulfill their primary objectives of reassurance and deterrence (Braun). Further, Braun brands NATO assurance activities as, "...too late and on too small of a scale," arguing for expanded measures going forward such as the permanent stationing of NATO troops in periphery member states, as well as a shift in organizational doctrine from collective defense to collective security. Others affirm this call for permanent basing in the Baltics, Black Sea region, or Central Europe as a critical assurance measure, noting that it would undermine Russia's denial of access capabilities and trigger a broader strategic readjustment in Moscow (Anon1). For further detail on how Russia views NATO's intentions in its near abroad region, see Chapter 4: Russian Foreign Policy.

Appendix A: List of EUCOM Questions

- 1 What are reasonable and pragmatic assumptions about the Eurasia region regarding Russia in five-year increments out 15 years, to include its diplomatic, economic and security interests in the Arctic region?
- 2 As Russia declines demographically, will they be more likely to choose cooperation or conflict with NATO? What actions (political, militarily, economic) may they take to target NATO/US or EU/US cohesion?
- 3 Explain the internal dynamics that are likely to motivate Russian actions in the EUCOM AOR over the next 15 years outlining multiple plausible future pathways and a set of de-escalation considerations to help US planners, strategists, and communicators.
- 4 Who are Russia's allies and clients and where is it seeking to extend its influence within the EUCOM AOR?
- 5 What is the likelihood that Putin's departure will lead to a significant change in Russian foreign policy? If it does, what direction will that change take?
- 6 What do we know about potential successors to Putin? (Analyze the record of current and future leaders to predict their decision-making processes and attitudes / exposure to the West.) Who will lead Russia next, what changes can we expect, and how will Putin continue to exert influence after he "departs" government?
- 7 Conduct analysis of open source Russian media to understand key frames and cultural scripts that are likely to frame potential geopolitical attitudes and narratives in the region.
- 8 How much does the US image of Russia as the side that "lost" the Cold War create support for more aggressive foreign policy behavior among the Russian people?
- 9 How might ultra-nationalism influence Russia's foreign policy rhetoric and behavior?
- 10 How does Russia see its great power status in the 21st century?
- 11 Where does Russia see the line between peace and war?
- 12 How does the Russian conception of the use of information technologies to pursue its political and security interests compare to the US view of what constitutes political conflict and warfare?
- 13 Will Russia become more assertive as its military capabilities continue to improve?
- 14 Is Russia deterred by NATO's Article V and will they continue to be? How does Russia view its strategic deterrence posture? How is this evolving?

- 15 Describe the nature and interaction of military spending and arms transfer data between Russia and other European states.
- 16 If conflict occurs, will NATO be willing and able to command and control a response?
- 17 How has the US-led discussion of the “new European security environment” changed Russian action to date? How does the USG influence NATO and the EU to maintain efforts to counter and deter Russian aggressive actions?
- 18 How does the United States strengthen partner nations in the region in a constrained fiscal environment and how can USEUCOM better focus and identify requirements for theater engagement and security cooperation across its area of responsibility?
- 19 Analyze the vitality of Russian energy reserves and their ability to expand market share in multiple markets.
- 20 How might Russia leverage its energy and other economic resources to influence the political environment in Europe and how will this leverage change over the next 15 years? How effective is the EU’s economic leverage (sanctions) on influencing Russian behavior and what is the political willingness of the EU (and its member states) to sustain or increase this leverage given Russian economic and political influence to counter it?
- 21 What US military actions or posturing can be perceived as provocative in nature by Russia and potentially create an escalatory response?
- 22 Are recent US assurance activities such as Operation Atlantic Resolve having a deterrent effect on Russia's decision making and its strategy for its near abroad?
- 23 Are recent NATO assurance activities such as the establishment of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) or their Readiness Action Plan (RAP) having a deterrent effect on Russia's decision making and overall strategy for its near abroad? What does Russia perceive as NATO’s intentions in its near abroad?
- 24 Given that we now know that Ukrainian Government's desire to align with the West was a 'redline' with Russia, what other 'redlines' may exist that, if crossed, could generate a Russia aggressive response?
- 25 What is Russia’s long term strategy (priorities, military infrastructure, activities, interests, and red lines) in the Arctic region?
- 26 Given changing social economic and demographic trends in Russia, how are they affecting government stability?
- 27 What type of political crisis could ultimately threaten the Russian style of government and do you see any signs or warnings of civil unrest?

- 28 Are Russia's actions in its "Near Abroad" such as disrupting energy supplies or severing trade agreements intended to affect political or economic stability?
- 29 What economic factors (current or near term) are having an impact on the stability of Putin's government?
- 30 Given ongoing tensions, will Russia attempt to be constructively engaged with the West on regional and transnational security issues to include counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and weapons proliferation?
- 31 Is Russia considered in compliance with its political and military treaty obligations, specifically with INF?
- 32 How supportive is the European Union (EU) and NATO leadership with regards to EUCOM's reassurance activities and initiatives?
- 33 Are Russian efforts to destabilize regions of Europe deemed credible by local populations?
- 34 Despite US efforts to communicate the operational and technical intent of its European Phased Adaptive Approach Missile Defense System to defend against only rogue nations, does Russia still perceive it as an escalatory in nature and a threat to its security, and if so, what overt and covert actions have or may they take in response?
- 35 Is Russia willing to become a client state to China? If not, how can the West exploit this potential seam to isolate China and attempt to integrate Russia with the West?
- 36 How does China perceive its future energy relationship with Russia?
- 37 Does Russia have any interests in developing diplomatic and/or economic relations with India as they have done with China?

Appendix B: List of Experts Consulted (Active Elicitation)

This list includes experts that were interviewed by NSI as well as individuals who presented briefs to the SMA community through the weekly SMA Speaker Series events. We refer to this as “active elicitation” to distinguish it from gleaning knowledge from attending events hosted by other organizations.

Anonymous (1)

Roy Allison, University of Oxford

Pavel Baev, Brookings Institute

Michael Bobick, University of Pittsburgh

Aurel Braun, University of Toronto

Cynthia Buckley, University of Illinois

Edward Chow, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Stacy Closson, University of Kentucky

Heather Conley, Center for Strategic and International Studies

David Galbreath, University of Bath

Mark Galeotti, New York University

Theodore Gerber, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Stefan Hedlund, Independent Consultant

Paul Ivan, European Policy Centre

Michael Kofman, Woodrow Wilson International Center

Jeremy Lamoreaux, Brigham Young University - Idaho

Jeffrey Mankoff, CSIS

Kimberly Marten, Barnard College, Columbia University

Douglas Mastriano, US Army War College

Tom McDermott, Georgia Tech

Harrison Menke, student, Missouri State University

John O’Loughlin, University of Colorado-Boulder

Olga Oliker, RAND

William Reisinger, University of Iowa

Roger Robinson, RWR Advisory Group

Thomas Sherlock, US Military Academy, West Point

Paul Stronski, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Adam Stulberg, Georgia Tech

Raymond Taras, Tulane University

Eka Tkeshelashvili, Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies

Gerard Toal, Virginia Tech

Dmitri Trenin, Carnegie Moscow Center

Alena Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira, European Foreign and Security Studies Network

Elizabeth Wood, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Jane Zavisca, University of Arizona

Appendix C: Other Sources Consulted (Passive Elicitation)

This section lists the speaking events the NSI analytic team attended (virtually or in person) that informed the production of this report. We refer to these events as passive elicitation to distinguish it from interviews or speaking events organized by NSI or SMA.

Samuel Brannen, Andrew Kuchins, Jeffrey Mankoff, Clark Murdock, & Paul Schwartz. (30 June 2014). An Assessment of Russian Defense Capabilities and Security Strategy. CSIS.

Daniel Rotfeld, John Herbst, Paul Jones, Roman Kuzniar, Marie Mendras, James Sherr, Angela Stent, & Sergey Utkin. (14 November 2014). Formulating a New Foreign Policy Approach Toward Russia: Opening Keynote and Panel. CSIS.

E. Wayne Merry, Matthew Rojansky, Maxim Trudolyubov, & Elizabeth Wood. (19 March 2015). The War in Ukraine: The Roots of Russian Conduct. Woodrow Wilson International Center.

Stephen Cohen, Gilbert Doctorow, Sergei Kislyak, Edward Lozansky, Ted Postol, & Dana Rohrabacher. (26 March 2015). Military Conflict in Ukraine. Major Crisis in US. Searching for a Way Out. US-Russia Forum.

Igor Sutyagin. (23 April 2015). Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) Event. RUSI.

Lucja Cannon, Marek Chodakiewicz, Ariel Cohen, Jack Dziak, Sebastian Gorka, Phillip Karber, John Lenczowski, Andrej Nowak, Zygimantas Pvilionis, Phillip Peterson, Joseph Wood, & Chris Zawitkowski. (25 April 2015). Between Russia and NATO Security: Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe. Institute of World Politics.

Carl Bildt & John Hamre. (29 April 2015). Europe Surrounded Not by a Ring of Friends, But a Ring of Fire. CSIS.

David Yost. (14 May 2015). The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's intervention in Ukraine. US Naval Postgraduate School.