



Demography's Pull on Russian Mideast Policy

By Ilan Berman

Summary

Demography is among the most underappreciated drivers of contemporary Russian policy in the Middle East. Yet Russia's ongoing population decline—and the expansion of Russia's own Muslim minority—has exerted significant influence over Moscow's attitudes and activities in the region in recent years. Most immediately and prominently, the growth and radicalization of "Muslim Russia" has helped propel the Kremlin into a leading role in the Syrian civil war since 2015. This same constituency will play an important role in shaping Russia's objectives in the Middle East in the years to come, as Moscow seeks to deepen and expand its strategic and political footprint in the region.

Introduction

What propels Russia's current policy toward the Middle East, and what will determine its trajectory in the future? Most contemporary analysis of Russia's return to the region in the past decade has focused on a number of conventional factors.

The first is geopolitics and the long-standing Russian aim of "multipolarity." This notion, popularized by former premier Yevgeny Primakov during the 1990s, was seen as a way of "ensuring the country's security under the conditions of a resource deficit" through the development of "strategic relations" with a range of international partners in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse.¹ Since then, the strategy has been perpetuated by President Vladimir Putin as a method of denying global primacy to the country that the Kremlin still views as its "main enemy": the United States.² In the process, the Middle East has become a critical zone of strategic competition between Moscow and Washington.

Second, and related, is a resurgence of imperial ambition on the part of Russia's leaders. The collapse of the Soviet Union remains a deeply traumatic event for Russian elites and ordinary

Russians alike, all of whom had grown accustomed to their country's superpower status. Not surprisingly, a broad political consensus persists within the country regarding the reestablishment of national greatness and the reclamation of former holdings. This sentiment, which former Russian finance minister Alexei Kudrin has described as an "imperial syndrome,"³ has shaped Moscow's covetous attitude toward the countries of its "Near Abroad" and steadily driven it back into the Middle East.

In these efforts, Russia has been greatly aided by the retraction of US power and strategic influence. During its time in office, the Barack Obama administration made a concerted decision to reduce Washington's strategic footprint and influence in the region. This "right-sizing" of US Mideast policy⁴ was driven by a range of considerations, not least a desire to disengage from a problematic region in favor of the comparatively more stable (at least at the time) Asian theater. But its practical result was to create empty political space that external powers such as Russia were quick to exploit.

Commercial opportunities have attracted Russia to the region as well. Historically, the Middle East and North Africa have cumulatively served as a key arms market for the Kremlin. But, as Anna Borshchevskaya of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has documented, US disengagement during the Obama era allowed Moscow to recapture a growing share of the regional arms trade, with annual sales rising from \$9 billion in 2009 to \$21.4 billion in 2016.⁵ So the situation has remained. Russia has recently concluded major new contracts with regional states such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and Morocco—ensuring that the greater Middle East will remain an area of intense commercial focus for the Kremlin for the foreseeable future.⁶

However, there is yet another, purely domestic driver that has propelled Russia back into the Middle East: the country's burgeoning Muslim population. While largely overlooked as a factor in the Kremlin's strategic calculus, the changing size and nature of this constituency has played a significant role in shaping official Russian attitudes regarding policy toward, and engagement with, the countries of the region.

The Rise of Muslim Russia

The growing importance of Russia's Muslims to the Kremlin's dealings with the Middle East finds its roots in the country's ongoing—and extensive—demographic decline.

At their core, Russia's population problems are neither new nor unexpected. For decades, the Soviet Union (and subsequently Russia) grappled with deeply negative demography. In stark contrast to the positive official predictions of Soviet authorities throughout the decades of the Cold War,⁷ a significant demographic downturn was already apparent in the USSR by the 1960s. By the following decade, total fertility had dropped to below two children per woman in almost all of the Soviet Union's European republics.⁸ With the Soviet collapse, the USSR's successor state, the Russian Federation, entered a protracted period of demographic decline driven by a range of societal factors, from poor health standards to rampant drug addiction to extensive abortion practices.⁹

This situation remains largely unchanged today. The last official Russian census, taken in 2010, tallied the national population at 142.9 million.¹⁰ That figure represented an overall decline of nearly 3 percent over the preceding decade.¹¹ Since then, Russia's population has expanded slightly; the annexation, in 2014, of the Crimean Peninsula as a result of Russia's ongoing conflict with Ukraine added two million new citizens, most of them Slavs, to the population rolls. This modest growth, however, is artificial in nature, insofar as it does not reflect a meaningful alteration of Russia's overall trajectory of population decline. As official figures released in May 2017 by the country's state statistics agency, ROSSTAT, reflect, Russia's demographic downturn (temporarily ameliorated by a range of social programs), has returned with a vengeance, with the country experiencing nearly 70,000 fewer births during the first four months of 2017 than it did a year earlier.¹² Thus, despite the triumphalist narrative propounded by the Kremlin (which argues that strong leadership and shrewd investments have allowed Russia to decisively turn a demographic corner), it is clear that the decline of Russia's population is actually accelerating.¹³

The most recent official data confirms this conclusion. Statistics issued by ROSSTAT in January 2018 indicate that Russia experienced a drop of more than 10 percent in births between 2016 and 2017, bringing the national birth rate down to its lowest point in a decade.¹⁴ Moreover, experts expect this decline to stretch into the foreseeable future, as the number of women of child-bearing age in Russia continues to dwindle.¹⁵

Russia's population downturn is not taking place in uniform fashion, however. While the country's demographic base is constricting as a whole, certain segments of the population are faring considerably better than others, with Russia's Muslims prominent among them. Indeed, a key feature of Russia's demographic transition is what could be termed "the rise of Muslim Russia."

According to Russia's 2002 census, while the country's overall population declined by nearly four percent between 1989 and 2002, the number of Russian Muslims grew by 20 percent.¹⁶ This imbalance still exists. Today, although Russia's Muslims remain a distinct minority (less than 15 percent of the country's overall population in the wake of the annexation of Crimea), differences in communal behavior—including fewer divorces, less alcoholism and a greater rate of reproduction—have given them a more robust long-term demographic profile than their ethnic Russian counterparts. As the United Nations has noted, the fertility of Russia's Muslims, at 2.3, is significantly higher than the overall Russian national fertility rate of 1.7.¹⁷ Other estimates peg the reproductive rate of Russia's Muslims higher still.¹⁸

The effects of this disparity are both cumulative and far-reaching. While estimates of the projected growth of Russia's Muslim minority vary,¹⁹ it is clear that this expanding constituency has begun to impact both Russian domestic politics and the country's foreign policy priorities.

Russia's Muslims on the March

The growing size and prominence of Russia's Muslim population is significant in and of itself. But it is all the more so given its fraught relationship with what is perceived to be an increasingly distant and unaccountable federal state under Vladimir Putin.

Since taking power in 1999, Russia's president has steadily incubated nationalist sentiment throughout the country via a variety of organizations (among them *Nashi* and the Young Guard), and simultaneously sought to harness nationalist ideas for his own ends.²⁰ The resulting rise of xenophobia and race-related violence within Russia has made Muslims, both native-born and labor migrants from Central Asia, a primary target of aggression. Simultaneously, Putin's government has fundamentally altered the relationship between Russia's regions and the "federal center," robbing the country's federal subjects of their historic autonomy and making them increasingly subservient to the Kremlin's "power vertical." The cumulative effect of these dynamics has been to exclude Russia's Muslims from contemporary Russian politics and society—and to leave them vulnerable to the lure of alternative ideologies.

Islamist groups have been notable beneficiaries of this trend.²¹ Indeed, since the Kremlin's formal intervention in the Syrian civil war in September 2015 there has been a marked uptick in Islamist activity within the Russian Federation. This has included a transformation of a significant portion of the country's most prominent *jihadist* organization, the Caucasus Emirate, into a formal affiliate of the Islamic State, as well as an extensive mobilization and migration of Islamist cadres to the Middle East.²² The Soufan Group, a leading Washington, DC, counterterrorism consultancy, has documented that Russia now represents the single largest contributor of foreign fighters to the *jihad* in Syria.²³ In fact, while the number of Islamic extremists who have joined the Islamic State originating from countries such as Saudi Arabia and Tunisia has declined appreciably since 2015, those from Russia has risen. In all, nearly 3,500 Russian nationals are believed to have joined the Islamic State to date—an increase of 40 percent from the 2,400 Russian nationals that were estimated to have affiliated with the group as of 2015.²⁴ Cumulatively, extremists from Russia and the countries of Central Asia now account for nearly 10 percent of the roughly 40,000 radicals estimated to have joined the "caliphate."²⁵ In turn, Russian was estimated to be the third most frequently spoken language among fighters of the Islamic State until its collapse in late 2017.²⁶

For its part, the Kremlin has sought to manage this dynamic in a variety of ways. Russia's various security services have facilitated the departure of terrorists from within the Russian Federation, essentially seeking to "externalize" the country's *jihadist* problem.²⁷ Simultaneously, the Kremlin has passed new and increasingly draconian counter-terrorism measures designed to constrict the domestic room available for political maneuver to Russia's Islamists—and to nudge them toward going abroad. Prominent among these has been the "Yarovaya Packet," a series of laws passed in 2016 which, among other things, expand the definition of "extremism" and allow the criminalization of a highly subjective range of acts, as well as expanding official oversight over the Internet domain.²⁸ In 2016, Russia also created a new super-security service known as the National Guard, ostensibly to help the Kremlin better fight terrorism and organized crime.²⁹ Finally, the Kremlin has launched an expansive—and open-ended—version of its own "war on terror" abroad. Most concretely, this has been manifested in Russia's ongoing military campaign in Syria, which is intended—at least in part—to target Russian-origin *jihadists* and neutralize them before they have a chance to return home.

The Shape of Russia's Mideast Strategy

The rise and radicalization of Russia’s Muslim minority has played a significant (if often overlooked) role in shaping the Kremlin’s strategic thinking about its current and future priorities in the Middle East. Today, that influence can be seen in at least three distinct initiatives.

A Persistent Presence in Syria

In early December 2017, Russian Chief of Staff General Valery Gerasimov formally announced that “[a]ll armed IS [Islamic State] groups on Syrian territory have been destroyed, and the territory itself has been liberated.”³⁰ During his subsequent surprise visit to Syria, President Vladimir Putin himself said much the same thing, announcing that—as a result of these successes—Russia was beginning the withdrawal of a “significant part” of its Syrian contingent.³¹

Despite these pronouncements, however, Russia does not appear to be eyeing an exit from the Syrian theater any time in the foreseeable future. To the contrary, the Kremlin has mapped out plans for a long-term military presence in the country. These include an open-ended naval basing arrangement concluded with the Syrian regime in mid-2017,³² as well as upgrades—underway as of this writing—to that facility and to the new airbase at Khmeimim, north of Damascus, that will make both installations capable of hosting expanded numbers of Russian forces and materiel.³³ Simultaneously, the Kremlin has begun a significant reconfiguration of the nature of its deployed forces in Syria to better achieve its strategic objectives.³⁴ These include not only strengthening the Syrian regime and maintaining military freedom of action in the Levant, but also maintaining a forward presence that allows the Kremlin to carry out anti-terrorist operations at a distance.

New Fronts for Strategic Operations

Over the past year, the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS has made major strategic gains against the Islamic State terrorist group. At the height of its power, in late 2014 and early 2015, the territory of the Islamic State covered 81,000 square miles—a geographical expanse roughly equivalent to the size of the United Kingdom³⁵—and held sway over some eight million civilians, a population on par with that of Switzerland.³⁶ It likewise generated annual revenue of nearly \$2 billion, making it the best-funded terrorist group in recorded history.³⁷

Today, however, the Islamic State had contracted considerably, both in terms of territory and resources. As a result of coordinated military action by the Coalition, as of late 2017 the group had lost nearly 90 percent of the territory it once held and some 6.5 million people had been liberated from its control.³⁸ But as IS has declined in its “core” caliphate of Iraq and Syria, the organization has begun to migrate to other strategic theaters. In particular, the group has come to view Libya, in the throes of a protracted civil war since the 2011 death of former leader Muammar Qaddafi, as an important “second front” where it can regroup and from which it can continue to stage regional and international attacks.³⁹ And, like they were in Syria/Iraq, Russian Islamists can be expected to be actively represented in this new IS theater of operations.

The Kremlin, for its part, has mapped out plans to follow these radicals as they disperse from the Syrian theater. Thus, in December 2017, the Russian government made clear that it plans to become more involved in the conflict in Libya, where it is “prepared to work with all parties” in order to stabilize the political and security situation in the country.⁴⁰ Moscow has also initiated

discussions with a number of other existing and potential regional partners (including Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco) about the possibility of an expanded strategic presence in those places.⁴¹ This activism is driven, at least in part, by the same dynamic of proactive counter-terrorism that propelled Russia into Syria—and which is likely to lead the Kremlin to further expand its political presence and military activities in North Africa in the future.

Engaging the Sunni World

For years, Russia has pursued what could be termed an “accidentally Shia” policy in the Middle East. Although the overwhelming majority of its Muslim population is Sunni, Russia’s principal strategic partners in the region have long been Shia: the Islamic Republic of Iran and the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. This feature of Russia’s regional policy, long a matter of resentment for regional states and among Russia’s own Muslims, made the Kremlin the focal point for considerable Sunni anger following its entry into the Syrian civil war in the fall of 2015. In October of that year, dozens of Saudi clerics issued a public letter urging Sunni militants to travel to Syria to join the fight against the “Crusader/Shiite alliance” of Russia and Iran.⁴² More directly, the Russian government’s intervention into the Syrian civil war has made the country itself the target of various extremist groups. Jabhat al-Nusra (since renamed Jabhat Fateh al-Sham), al-Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate, called for terrorist attacks within Russia as a retaliatory measure following Russia’s involvement in the Syrian conflict.⁴³ So, too, did the Islamic State, which released a video through its various social media feeds that warned “[w]e will take through battle the lands of yours we wish,” and predicted that “[the] Kremlin will be ours.”⁴⁴

None of this, however, means that Russia is prepared to abandon its strategic partnership with Iran. To the contrary, the ties between Moscow and Tehran appear more robust than ever.⁴⁵ Strategically, Iran has come to be seen in Moscow as a dependable proxy in the Middle East—and a force multiplier for Russia’s regional initiatives there. Commercially, meanwhile, the economic windfall received by Iran as a result of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action has made Tehran once again a major arms client of the Russian Federation, placing orders for billions of dollars in new military materiel.⁴⁶ Russia, now squeezed by multiple rounds of international sanctions as a result of its conduct in Ukraine, can ill afford to forego this business. At the same time, Iran—like Russia—has become a major stakeholder in Syria, and one that Moscow must accommodate in order to preserve a long-term presence in the country. Finally, both Iran and Russia retain a shared interest in curtailing the operations and capabilities of the Islamic State, albeit for different reasons.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin is now under pressure to “balance” its strategic partnership with the Iranian regime. Officials in Moscow are acutely aware that Russo-Iranian ties serve as an irritant to the country’s (Sunni) Muslim population. As a result, Russia can be expected to offset its ties to the Islamic Republic through heightened interaction with an array of Sunni states, the Sunni Gulf kingdoms prominent among them, in the years ahead as a way of conducting what would be considered a more representative foreign policy in the region.

The Russian government has already begun to do so on a number of fronts. Politically, the past year has seen a concerted effort by the Russian government to expand its diplomatic engagement with, and activism among, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.⁴⁷ Russia has likewise

started, however tentatively, to deepen its interaction with the region in the religious sphere. To this end, Russia concluded a memorandum of understanding with Morocco in March 2016 under which the Kingdom would begin to train Russian imams—an initiative that reflects a growing official awareness of the need to instill moderate religious teachings among the country’s expanding Muslim minority.⁴⁸

The Nexus of Demography and Ideology

Can Russia be a reliable partner in the Middle East? Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that question has preoccupied policymakers in Washington. The answer that has emerged so far as a result of Kremlin conduct is decidedly mixed.

President Putin’s early *laissez faire* attitude toward US and Coalition operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks greatly aided the early stages of the “War on Terror.” Gradually, however, this cooperation dissipated as Russia once again sought to compete strategically with the United States, both in the “Near Abroad” of Central Asia and the Caucasus and beyond.⁴⁹

Today, Russian policy can be said to be one of “selective counter-terrorism,” in which Moscow plays both sides in the struggle against radical Islam, providing support to a range of extremist actors in the region (including Afghanistan’s Taliban and the Palestinian Hamas movement) even as it battles others. As Svante Cornell of the American Foreign Policy Council’s Central Asia–Caucasus Institute has noted, this strategy is informed by the Russian view of “insurgency and terrorism as forces to be manipulated for the purpose of weakening America’s position in the world, undermine U.S. allies, and maximize Russian influence in world affairs.”⁵⁰ Thus, “[w]hile the United States may need to work with Russia on a case-by-case basis, it must understand that Russia views all its instruments of statecraft as interconnected, serving a common purpose; and that Russia’s aims are seldom, if ever, compatible with those of the United States.”⁵¹

Yet even those cases may become fewer and farther between as, over time, Russia’s changing demography fundamentally alters its engagement with the Middle East, and the Muslim World more broadly. As the country’s demographic transition progresses, Russia’s involvement in the politics of the region can be expected to increase, even as its potential to serve as a reliable partner of the United States there will continue to diminish. Fundamentally, Russian policy in the Middle East (and toward the Muslim World more broadly) is already competitive, seeking to assert Russia as a counterpoint to US alliances and interests. The demographic pressures exerted by Russia’s swelling Muslim minority are likely to reinforce these tendencies over the next several years. In the process, they will make Moscow’s already unconstructive, zero sum approach to the Middle East all the more so.

Notes

¹ Yevgeny Primakov, “Russia and the Outside World,” *International Affairs* 3, 1998: 7–13.

² Stephen Blank, “The Foundations of Russian Policy in the Middle East,” Jamestown Foundation, October 5, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/foundations-russian-policy-middle-east/>.

³ “Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin: ‘We Have To Take A Chance with More Democracy,’” *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), January 23, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-putin-ally-alexei-kudrin-on-democracy-in-russia-a-878873.html>.

⁴ See, for example, Marc Lynch, “Right-Sizing America’s Mideast Role,” *Foreign Policy*, January 11, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/01/11/right-sizing-americas-mideast-role/>.

⁵ Anna Borshchevskaya, “The Tactical Side of Russia’s Arms Sales to the Middle East,” Jamestown Foundation, December 20, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-side-russias-arms-sales-middle-east/>.

⁶ “Russia has \$8Bln Worth of Weapon Orders From Arab Countries,” *Sputnik*, November 15, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/military/201711151059127900-russia-weapons-orders-arab/>.

⁷ Perhaps the most striking was the estimate issued in early 1991, just months before the Soviet collapse, by the prestigious Soviet Academy of Sciences, predicting that and the number of ethnic Russians within the USSR would grow by as much as two million over the following half-decade, and that ethnic Russians would number 158 million by 2015. As recounted in Venyamin A. Baslachev, *Demografiya: Russkie Proriv. Nezavisimoye Isledovanie* (Demography: the Russian chasm. An independent investigation) (Moscow: Beluy Albii, 2006), 6.

⁸ Stephan Sievert, Sergey Zakharov and Reiner Klingholz, *The Waning World Power: The Demographic Future of Russia and the Other Soviet Successor States* (Berlin Institute for Population and Development, April 2011), <http://www.berlin-institut.org/publications/studies/the-waning-world-power.html>.

⁹ For a detailed review of these drivers, see Ilan Berman, *Implosion: The End of Russia and What It Means for America* (Regnery Publishing, 2013).

¹⁰ *Vserossiiskii Perepis Naselenie 2010*, <http://www.perepis-2010.ru/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Government of Russia, Federal Service of Government Statistics, “Natural movement of the population in the section of subjects of the Russian Federation,” May 30, 2017, http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/2017/demo/edn04-17.htm.

¹³ This is a view shared by observers of Russia’s overall demographic trajectory. See, for example, “The Extinction of Russians has Accelerated,” *NewsLand*, May 31, 2017, <https://newsland.com/community/5325/content/vymiranie-russkikh-uskorilos/5853964>.

¹⁴ “Birth Rate Hits 10-Year Low in Russia,” *The Moscow Times*, January 29, 2018, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/birth-rate-hits-10-year-low-russia-60321>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Vserossiyskaya Perepis Naseleniya 2002a Goda*, www.perepis2002.ru.

¹⁷ Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010–2030,” January 27, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-russia.aspx>.

¹⁸ “Muslim Birthrate Worries Russia,” *Washington Times*, November 20, 2006, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2006/nov/20/20061120-115904-9135r/?page=all>.

¹⁹ Based upon then-prevailing trendlines, experts estimated a decade ago that Russia’s Muslims will make up one-fifth of the entire population by the end of the that decade. See Jonah Hull, “Russia Sees Muslim Population Boom,” *Al-Jazeera* (Doha), January 13, 2007,

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2007/01/2008525144630794963.html>. Some of the more extreme estimates at the time predicted that the Russian Federation will become majority Muslim by mid-century. See “Cherez polveka Musulmani v Rossii Mogut Stat Bolshenstvom – Posol MID RF [In Half a Century, Muslims in Russia Could Become the Majority – Russia’s OIC Ambassador],” Interfax (Moscow), October 10, 2007, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/islam/print.php?act=news&id=20767>. More modest growth rates on the part of Russia’s Muslims over the past several years have revised these projections downward.

²⁰ Charles Clover, “‘Managed Nationalism’ Turns Nasty for Putin,” *Financial Times*, December 23, 2010, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/046a3e30-0ec9-11e0-9ec3-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2KtFLqYol>; Owen Matthews and Anna Nemtsova, “Fascist Russia?” *Newsweek*, August 7, 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/08/07/why-the-kremlin-aids-the-rise-of-russia-s-far-right-hate-groups.html>.

²¹ Alexei Malashenko, “The Dynamics of Russian Islam,” Carnegie Moscow Center, February 1, 2013, <http://carnegie.ru/2013/02/01/dynamics-of-russian-islam/f890>; David M. Herszenhorn, “Russia Sees a Threat in Its Converts to Islam,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/02/world/russia-sees-a-threat-in-its-converts-to-islam.html>.

²² For a detailed summary of the contemporary state of Islamism in Russia, see the Russia chapter in the American Foreign Policy Council’s *World Almanac of Islamism 2017*, available online at <http://almanac.afpc.org/russia>.

²³ Richard Barrett, *Beyond The Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees* (The Soufan Center, October 2017), <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v2.pdf>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Interview with Evgenia Albats, *Ekho Moskvy*, November 17, 2015, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/1659708-echo/>.

²⁷ See, for example, Michael Weiss, “Russia is Sending Jihadis to Join ISIS,” *The Daily Beast*, August 23, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/23/russia-s-playing-a-double-game-with-islamic-terror0.html>.

²⁸ Russian Federation, *Federal Law #1039149-6 on Changing Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation and Establishing Extra Counter-Terrorism Measures and Public Safety Guarantees*, March 6, 2016.

²⁹ Russian Federation, *Federal Order on Questions of Federal Service of a National Guard*, April 5, 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/51648>; Mark Galeotti, “Putin’s New National Guard,” *In Moscow’s Shadows*, April 5, 2016, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2016/04/05/putins-new-national-guard-what-does-it-say-when-you-need-your-own-personal-army/>.

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³³ "Russia Begins Development of Syrian Bases to Host Nuclear Warships & Warplanes," RT, December 26, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/414261-russia-permanent-bases-syria-nuclear/>.

³⁴ Suomenaro and Danbeck, "Back to the West: Russia Shifts its Air Campaign in Syria."

³⁵ Rick Noack, "How The Islamic State Compares With Real States," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/12/heres-how-the-islamic-state-compares-to-real-states/>.

³⁶ "In ISIL-Controlled Territory, 8 Million Civilians Living In 'State Of Fear' - UN Expert," un.org, July 31, 2015, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51542#.WDZYsKIrKYU>.

³⁷ Stefan Heissner et al., *Caliphate in Decline: An Estimate of Islamic State's Financial Fortunes* (London: ICSR, 2017), <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ICSR-Report-Caliphate-in-Decline-An-Estimate-of-Islamic-States-Financial-Fortunes.pdf>.

³⁸ "ISIS Lost Nearly 90% of Territory Seized on 2014: US-led Coalition," NDTV, October 17, 2017, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/isis-lost-nearly-90-of-territory-seized-on-2014-us-led-coalition-1764206>.

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⁴² "Saudi Clerics Call for Jihad Against Iran and Russia in Syria," Reuters and *VICE News*, October 5, 2015, <https://news.vice.com/article/saudi-clerics-call-for-jihad-against-iran-and-russia-in-syria>.

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⁴⁴ Malia Zimmerman, "ISIS Coming for the Kremlin, New Video Warns," *Fox News*, November 12, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/11/12/new-isis-video-says-jihadis-coming-for-kremlin/>.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Ilan Berman, "Why Russia Won't Help Trump On Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, February 10, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-02-10/why-russia-wont-help-trump-iran?cid=int-lea&pgtype=hpg>.

⁴⁶ Roland Oliphant, "Russia may sell Iran \$10 Billion Worth of Tanks and Jets in New Arms Deal," *Telegraph* (London), November 14, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/14/russia-may-sell-iran-10-billion-worth-of-tanks-and-jets-in-new-a/>.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Patrick Wintour, "Saudi King's Visit to Russia Heralds Shift in Global Power Structures," *Guardian* (London), October 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/05/saudi-russia-visit-putin-oil-middle-east>; See also Ali Younes, "Sergei Lavrov Calls for Dialogue to Resolve Gulf Crisis," *Al-Jazeera* (Doha), August 30, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/sergey-lavrov-calls-dialogue-resolve-gulf-crisis-170830113114395.html>.

⁴⁸ Larbi Arbaoui, “Morocco to Train Russian Imams,” *Morocco World News*, March 19, 2016, <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2016/03/182434/182434/>.

⁴⁹ For a detailed description of Russian policy post-9/11, see Ilan Berman, “The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2004–2005, <http://www.ilanberman.com/6002/the-new-battleground-central-asia-and-the-caucasus>.

⁵⁰ Svante Cornell, Testimony before the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, November 7, 2017, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20171107/106596/HHRG-115-FA18-Wstate-CornellS-20171107.pdf>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*