



Russia's Middle Eastern Position in 2025

By Stephen Blank

Summary

Through 2025, Russia will continue to enjoy the prominence it now possesses in the Middle East and can be expected to succeed in this quest because it has strategically built and deployed the instruments of power necessary to sustain such a position, all things being equal. Those instruments comprise diplomatic, military and economic elements of power as well as the fact that Russia has leveraged its position in Syria to obtain partners and even enablers for itself who now have and will continue to have over time a serious stake in the success of Russian regional policies. Moreover, Russia is eagerly building up military sinews to retain power projection capabilities throughout the Middle East and Africa for the period up to and even beyond 2025.

Introduction

Forecasting events and trends in the Middle East is an inherently precarious enterprise. But from the vantage point of mid-2018, we must consider what Russia's posture and the scope of its presence in the Middle East will be in 2025 and why. Compelling reasons exist for doing so today, and not only because 2025 is a little over six years from now.

More importantly, it is clear that Moscow, by its own strategic prowess, has seized an ascending position in the Middle East that goes far beyond Syria. That position enables it to be a major actor in the region for years to come—as it has long intended to be. All this underscores the fact that Russian actions, for all their tactical adaptation to a kaleidoscopic reality and flexibility, appear to be part of a larger strategy.

In other words, despite the incessant writing of American and even some Russian writers that Putin has no strategy, he is a strategist, and we are confronting a strategic plan that, like any sound blueprint for action, permits tactical adaptation and flexibility in the face of unforeseen events.¹ Moreover, by employing that strategy, Putin has maneuvered through the storm of events to bring

Russia to an unprecedented level of prominence in the Middle East. And in so doing he has created mechanisms that will likely ensure retention of that position until 2025, barring some major unforeseen catastrophe.

Without arguing over the merits of Putin's ability as a strategist in general (and we do not need to do so by merely noting there is a strategy), we can say with confidence that in Syria and the broader Middle East (in no small measure thanks to the victory in Syria), Russia has produced a winning military-political strategy. That strategy has allowed it to expand its regional position since the intervention in Syria. The economic, diplomatic, political, and military mechanisms that Putin has created and fostered, as well as the outcomes they have generated, create the momentum and impetus that will boost Russia's position as a major player in the Middle East through 2025, compared to its current role—again, barring any unforeseen catastrophe. While Moscow must now convert that military victory into the legitimacy of a functioning Syrian authority that commands popular support, there is no *a priori* reason to assume, in the absence of other contending forces, that Russian policy will fail to bring about that outcome in the future.

Instead, there is abundant evidence that Moscow is steadily gaining traction across the entire Middle East thanks to its multi-dimensional strategy. Failing to recognize that fact by the United States and much of the West is an act of willful blindness. Despite the region's inherent volatility, by 2025 Moscow will probably enjoy a position similar in nature but greater in substance compared to today. We can also expect that it will not willingly yield its gains except in return for massive Western political and strategic payoffs, which are unlikely to occur between now and then; there are no visible regional or other forces ready to undertake such an arduous task. Meanwhile, Russia has substantially enhanced its arsenal and therefore its overall capabilities and regional presence for defending and advancing those interests. It is highly unlikely that anyone can currently muster sufficient military forces to evict Russia from the Middle East.

Already Moscow is the acknowledged arbiter between Syria and Jordan.² Russia is also maintaining or attempting to maintain the equilibrium between Israel and Iran. One account even likens Russia to being a ringmaster between them.³ In that capacity the Kremlin now has Military Police and observers stationed in the Golan Heights.⁴ Moscow has also enmeshed Ankara. For example, Turkey is now dependent on Russia to be able achieve its objectives with respect to domestic Kurds and those residing in Syria. Moreover, Russia provides 60–70 percent of Turkish natural gas supplies. Similarly, already in 2016, Turkey had to ultimately surrender to Russian economic pressure following the period of chilly bilateral relations caused by the November 2015 incident involving a Russian jet shot down by Turkey over the Syrian-Turkish border. So despite Turkish claims that it is not excessively dependent on Russia, contradictory proof certainly exists.

Furthermore, the closeness of Russia's economic, political, and military ties with Turkey is well known and may grow given the crisis into which Ankara has plunged US-Turkish relations by having incarcerating Pastor Andrew Brunson and buying S-400 air defenses from Russia. The long-standing complex strategic rivalry with Russia in the Black Sea, Caucasus, and now Syria is unlikely to reverse those trends of ever closer Russian-Turkish links.⁵

In the Gulf, Russia and Saudi Arabia alone have essentially set the bar for current energy prices, reducing OPEC to a shadow of its past self. Moreover, Russia is now discussing bringing Iran into

the Eurasian Economic Union, clearly cementing its economic ties to the Islamic Republic even as it restricts Iranian policies against Israel.⁶ Finally, Moscow is, in fact, effectively supplanting Washington's former leadership role in the region. Russia has been able to regionally come out on top in this way thanks to, *inter alia*, the totality of Turco-Russian relations, Russia's cooperation with Iran and Turkey in Syria's civil war, diverse Russian energy and investment deals with the Gulf states, its ties with Israel, its push into the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa based on its accomplishments in the Middle East, as well as Moscow's proliferating relationships across North Africa. Those relationships along the southern coast of the Mediterranean, in fact, could well lead to a ring of naval and airbases there.⁷ Therefore we have every reason to believe that Moscow will fight to retain and augment this status as we approach 2025.

As the Helsinki summit showed, Putin apparently believes he can compel the US into reaching an agreement on Syria that reflects more of Moscow's interests than Washington's.⁸ In addition Russia has learned a great deal since 1990 and in many ways behaves differently than did the USSR, even if a certain level of continuity between the two regimes is apparent. Thus, the Russian state and military's ability to learn and then shift gears accordingly represent a growing challenge to the United States. Pointedly, Moscow has avoided becoming entrapped in intra-Arab or Arab-Iranian rivalries and is free to make deals with everyone in the Middle East, whether they be Sunni, Shia or Israeli.

Moscow and Its Enablers

Due to its strategic military and political successes across the Middle East, Moscow has attracted numerous local partners and enablers who facilitate its policies and help it advance its interests along with their own objectives. This represents a triumph of Russian diplomacy and overall strategy and is one of the principal mechanisms or factors that will make it possible for Moscow to play a major Middle Eastern role until and probably beyond 2025. For example, Russia's regional successes have led the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Zaid to say that both governments share open communication channels on all issues of international affairs and will form a strategic partnership to promote their relationship.⁹ And thanks to their economic and political partnership, the UAE is helping Russia penetrate Africa as well.¹⁰ Presumably, as the UAE visibly increases its capabilities for projecting influence abroad, it will likely bring Russia into at least some of those arenas, like Africa.¹¹ In the long term, Russia can expect to benefit from the UAE's sharing of economic and political resources to help cement Moscow's own quest for great power standing in the Middle East.

Indeed, success across the entire Middle East and North Africa has, in many ways, facilitated an expansion of Russian activities and quest for leverage in the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa, an area that it clearly believes to be of growing interest to Moscow.¹² And its growing presence across the African continent enhances the strategic importance of the Middle East to Russia as a springboard for future activities there. This is another reason why Moscow will be loath to yield its position in the region before 2025 and may seek to strengthen it instead, particularly given its expanding portfolio of interests in Africa and partnerships with states like the UAE further out to 2030.

Nor is the UAE Russia's sole regional partner. Iran and Iraq are clearly engaged deeply with Russia in Syria and over energy and arms sales.¹³ Saudi Arabia's partnership with Moscow in the energy sphere is sufficiently well known to suggest that their collusion has either effectively supplanted OPEC's role as a price setter for oil and gas or has greatly weakened that organization's role in this process. Egypt works with Russia not only to acquire a nuclear reactor, but also offers it bases and cooperates with Moscow against Libyan rebels.¹⁴ And Sudan has offered Moscow a base in return for arms sales to prevail against its rebels.¹⁵ The above examples do not even exhaust the inherent future prospects in these partnerships, which continue to progress two steps forward for every step back.

Moscow's ability to forge partnerships is partly based on its disregard for the domestic political character of its interlocutors and partly driven out of sheer necessity given the structural weaknesses of post-Soviet Russia. That approach has allowed the Russian government to even enhance its ties and develop partner-like relations with states directly opposed to Russia's preexisting partners like the UAE: Qatar is a prime example here.¹⁶ This capability has been and will likely remain one of the most important reasons for Moscow's enduring presence in the Middle East. As many commentators and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov have argued, this "network diplomacy" of dealing with everyone while remaining above the fray has long since become a characteristic hallmark of Russian diplomacy across the board.¹⁷ The British analyst Bobo Lo calls it a penchant for multilateralism (with Russia in the lead).¹⁸ Because this *modus operandi* has paid off handsomely for Moscow, there is no reason to assume that Putin or subsequent regimes will forego that practice. As such, Russia in 2025 can be strongly expected to enjoy approximately the same level of standing and power in the Middle East that it now enjoys if not a higher one, absent radical changes.

Russia's ability to work with everyone also helps it become or aspire to become an arbiter between rivals, as is now occurring with regard to Israel and Iran as well as between the UAE and Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Iran on the other. Moscow also mediates among the rivals for power inside Libya and is doing the same thing in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁹ This helps Moscow coordinate with every player in the Middle East and also highlights the tactical flexibility of Russian policy. For example, even as Russia consorts with Sunni Gulf monarchies and Israel to restrain Iran, Moscow is negotiating with Tehran to draw it into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU—the centerpiece Russian-led integrationist organization within the former Soviet space).²⁰ Doing so softens the blow of its collaboration with Israel, helps rescue Iran from the crushing pressure of United Nations sanctions and creates a new, enduring basis for Iranian dependency upon Russia. In turn that flexibility bolsters Russia's long-term ability to enhance its current position in the Middle East until 2025, if not later.

This tactic predates the intervention in Syria but has continued there and elsewhere since then.²¹ Not only has Moscow forged ties with partners and enablers, in the Middle East it executes the same policy it conducts elsewhere, namely an effort to regulate conflicts among regional actors to enhance its interests and control those wars' potential for escalation.²² Consequently, to the degree that Russia can enforce "escalation control" on local crises via its ability to straddle all sides in these conflicts, its standing in the Middle East grows. Moscow has taken a similar approach with regard to its standing in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the wider Eurasia. As Dmitry Adamsky has observed,

Apparently, three strategic principles, unwritten and implicit, drove Moscow's regional conduct towards and following the intervention. First, the Kremlin seeks to preserve controlled tensions in the region. This enables it to promote its goals through power brokerage in the regional conflicts. Ideally, it seeks to keep political- military confrontations between the parties high enough to sustain the prospects for Moscow's indispensability but not so high that they lead to a counterproductive escalation endangering its regional interests and assets. Consequently, Moscow seeks to act as mediator and dependence amplifier.

In all regional conflicts Moscow cultivates equal access to all parties—a clear competitive advantage vis-à-vis the U.S. Being at once part of the problem and part of the solution provides it with an ability to escalate or deescalate confrontations. It prefers the actors involved not to be too strong and not too weak, and in any political-military development it seeks to demonstrate to them the limits of their power and their dependence on the Kremlin's brokerage.²³

These enabling partnerships and capacity for controlling escalation strengthen Moscow's presence and reach across the Middle East. Moreover, they are now being replicated in Africa, where Russia has even been asked to mediate a number of local civil wars.²⁴ Because Moscow can and does make deals with everyone, each state has a stake in its continued ability to uphold and sustain those deals—and thus, each of these actors has an incentive in Russia preserving its long-term regional presence. Given that context, any diminution of Moscow's regional standing, voluntarily or otherwise, will reverberate throughout the Middle East and affect its partners in ways that they will likely perceive as negative. Therefore, Russian partners are likely to resist such negative trends, thereby strengthening Moscow's regional posture and helping it sustain its policies there. This factor marks another way in which Russia, by pursuing a productive strategy, is supplanting the US.

Russia's regional partnerships and those partners' own actions enable Moscow in various ways. For example, Russian deals with Arab sovereign funds and energy firms—such as the business agreements between Rosneft and the Qatar Investment Authority and Glencore—have enriched Russia and Rosneft, all while circumventing Western sanctions.²⁵ Moscow has also cemented long-lasting ties to economic and political elites that should continue well into the next decade thanks to investments in Russia by Arab sovereign funds.²⁶ These relationships not only grant Moscow access to most, if not all, Middle Eastern governments, they also strongly reinforce the economic-political foundations of Russian policy in the Middle East because those policies are now ever more entwined with the interests and policies of local and regional elites. Expanding vested interests and affiliations facilitate long-term, mutually beneficial working partnerships. Beyond economic-political gains, these partnerships also help Russia magnify its military presence in the Middle East and Africa.

Arms Sales

Arms sales—which involve military, political and economic policy considerations—represent one of the most successful ways Russia has enhanced its cooperation with military, economic, and

political elites in the Middle East and elsewhere. Moreover, they are a traditional method of inserting or augmenting Russian influence on the political, economic, and military sectors of host countries. Indeed, arguably the primary mission of arms sales, or at least one equal to the task of financing the defense-industrial sector, is to increase Moscow's political standing around the globe.²⁷ President Putin himself stated unambiguously, "We see active military technical cooperation [the official term for military exports] as an effective instrument for advancing our national interests, both political and economic."²⁸ Many states, to be sure, hold this view; but Russian officials follow Putin in openly articulating it as a rationale for arms exports, which they see as a means of directly influencing another state's ability to deter and defend itself and its interests. Then–Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin stated in late 2013, "The FSVTS [Russia's arms selling agency] at the moment is, it can be said, the country's second foreign policy agency, a second MID (Ministry of Foreign affairs), a second Smolensk square, because it strengthens what the diplomats do today, not just in political terms, but rather authenticated in metal, treaty relations, contracts, maintenance services, equipment repair, and its maintenance in a suitable state."²⁹ From Russia's perspective, when it seeks military export contracts, it is not simply searching for a consumer with a need, but is quite literally inserting weaponry, military personnel, technicians, and military technologies into a region to gain or increase its influence there. Rogozin indicated that this is Russia's stance when he said, "They [the FSVTS] trade arms only with friends and partners."³⁰ Arms sales are therefore critical tools for building relationships in regions where Moscow has interests. This is especially the case because arms exports are one of the few areas, including energy sales and related services, where Russia has any kind of comparative advantage relative to other arms sellers.

In a 2007 cable later released by Wikileaks, US Ambassador William Burns analyzed the motivations for Russian arms sales to countries in the Middle East:

A second factor driving the Russian arms export policy is the desire to enhance Russia's standing, as a "player" in areas where Russia has a strategic interest, like the Middle East. Russian officials believe that building a defense relationship provides ingress and influence, and their terms are not constrained by conditionality. Exports to Syria and Iran are part of a broader strategy of distinguishing Russian policy from that of the United States, and strengthening Russian influence in international arenas such as the Quartet³¹ or within the Security Council. With respect to Syria Russian officials believe that that Bashar [al-Assad]'s regime is better than the perceived alternative of instability or an Islamist government, and argue against a U.S. policy of isolation. Russia has concluded that its arms sales are too insignificant to threaten Israel, or to disturb growing Israeli-Russian diplomatic engagement, but sufficient to maintain "special" relations with Damascus. Likewise, arms sales to Iran are part of a deep and multilayered bilateral relationship that serves to distinguish Moscow from Washington, and to provide Russian officials with a bargaining chip both with the Ahmadinejad regime and its P5+1 partners.³² While, as a matter of practice, Russian arms sales have declined as international frustration has mounted over the Iranian regime, as a matter of policy, Russia does not support what it perceives as U.S. efforts to build an anti-Iranian coalition.³³

Russia exports military systems to the Middle East to purposefully achieve the following national security objectives: 1) to support its image as a global power, 2) to maintain a foreign policy

independent of Western power and pressure, 3) to expand its influence in these regions, 4) to obtain resource extraction rights, 5) to initiate and strengthen defense relations, and 6) to secure military basing rights. Moreover arms sales everywhere link up with energy deals and Russia's quest for military bases as component parts of a coordinated multi-dimensional policy to advance Russian interests.³⁴

Arms sales and natural gas deals are frequently correlated. For example, Russian arms sales to Algeria and other Middle Eastern and North African states are linked not just to Russia's unremitting efforts to regain its former place in the Middle East but also to the Russian strategy to become the world's dominant gas exporter and to gain decisive leverage upon Europe through its access to Middle Eastern and African energy sources.³⁵ Thus Russian arms sales to Turkey and Gulf states have strengthened Russia's ties with those governments and created lasting bonds between members of both countries' political and military elites.

But these enhanced relationships between Moscow and Middle Eastern governments also owe much to the widely observed failure of US strategy under the present and preceding administrations as well as the sense of a US withdrawal or failure to grasp or accept regional governments' interests. This certainly is the case with Turkey, where threats of US sanctions have only stimulated Ankara's further defiance of Washington.³⁶ Consequently, we run the risk of a lasting long-term estrangement of Turkey if we impose sanctions upon it for buying Russian arms, even though Ankara knows full well the value of its alliance with Washington and membership within NATO.

Certainly, Russian arms sales have been successful in forging effective working relationships with Middle Eastern states and their militaries by answering those governments' perceived defense needs. Yet, as importantly, selling weapons has also translated into obtaining basing rights in perpetuity. Syria, not surprisingly, has asked Russia to keep its forces there for a long time, which was ultimately legally codified in a bilateral treaty allowing for long-term basing.³⁷ Sudan has also requested Russian arms for use in its conflict with South Sudan, and it offered Moscow a base on its coast in return.³⁸ And beyond Sudan, as shown below, other countries are permitting Russian bases as well.

The Learning State: Moscow's Clinic on Clausewitz

Indeed, apart from exploiting US policy failures throughout the Middle East, Russia's accomplishments since 2015 demonstrate the fatuity of earlier US assumptions that Moscow neither wanted to nor could displace Washington in the Middle East and that it lacked any power projection capability. Moreover, it punctured the belief in US policy circles that Russia had limited material and other means to influence Middle Eastern trends.³⁹ Indeed, Syria has not proven to be, at least as of now, the quagmire for Russia that President Barack Obama predicted it might become.⁴⁰ Instead, it has provided a springboard for boosting Russian power, influence and leverage across the entire region, largely at US expense, since perhaps as early as 2007. Meanwhile, the US' strategic accomplishments and vision in the Middle East for arguably the last decade have been meager, inconsistent, and self-defeating. Indeed, it is still difficult, if not impossible to ascertain what US objectives in Syria are, other than fighting against the Islamic State.

In contrast, Russia has displayed an impressive ability to learn from its past failures and from the study of contemporary war. It has used those lessons to avoid the trap the US has fallen into: of inconclusive, protracted, militarily indecisive wars that disseminate threats beyond their actual theater and elude escalation control. And importantly, the Russian government and military have learned many of the harsh lessons of contemporary warfare even as they are conducting operations in Syria. Indeed, the Russian system has been set up there to enable Moscow to do just that.⁴¹ Yet, in so doing, the Russian government and military, has also built on past traditions of Russian Middle East policy and the factors that drove it.

Beyond the impressive accomplishments of Russian arms, military strategy, and statecraft in the Middle East, there are enduring domestic imperatives that have historically impelled Moscow to seek prominence if not hegemony in the Middle East. And those factors today and until 2025 are no less important than they were in the past. For example, a 1984 report by CIA analyst Fritz Ermarth observed that,

The future of the Soviet Union as a superpower, the East-West power balance, and the chance of a major US-Soviet conflict in the next two decades are likely to be determined, more than anywhere else, in the region south of Soviet borders stretching from India to the Eastern Mediterranean. The Southern Theater is by far the most important major region of the Third World to the Soviets, rivaling the strategic status of East Asia and even Europe in some ways.⁴²

Ermarth further argued that while Moscow coveted access to regional waterways and energy resources, it also had good reason to fear the power of Islam that threatened to “undermine essential parts of the Soviet system at home if the Soviets do not eventually control it.”⁴³

Although the course of the Cold War did not go as Ermarth predicted, the importance of the Middle East to Moscow is still based on its role in the superpower competition and the primacy of its anti-American drive (and Moscow still thinks of itself as a global superpower).⁴⁴ To an extent that few Western analysts want to acknowledge, Moscow sees itself as being a foreordained global superpower; otherwise, it becomes the object of others’ policies, a mere modern appanage principedom like medieval Russia. Thus, the drive to restore superpower status is paramount and has been the mainspring of Putin’s policy since he became president.⁴⁵ Russian elites and policy analysts openly express both their aspiration to regain that status and the anti-Americanism associated with it. Konstantin Zatulin, first deputy chairman of the Duma’s committee for relations with the CIS and Russians nationals abroad, told an interviewer that, Russia seeks larger influence over international affairs: “If by the restoration of the Russian empire, one means restoring the big role that the Russian empire or the Soviet Union played in international life, then we would of course be happy to have such a role today.”⁴⁶

And Ambassador Extraordinaire and former deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Spassky has similarly written,

At the same time, there is no greater joy for a Russian intellectual than to speculate about a decline of America. The problem is that the Russians still do not see any other worthy

role for their country in the 21st century than the role of a superpower, as a state that realizes itself primarily through influence on global processes. Characteristically, such sentiments are widespread not only among the elites, but also among the public at large. This is true for people in their 40s–50s who remember the Soviet Union fairly well, and for young people who never saw the superpower that actually destroyed itself in the late 1980s. And there are no signs of an alternative vision of Russia—as a country for itself and for its citizens.⁴⁷

In this context, it also bears noticing that Spassky has additionally written, “There is no greater joy for a Russian intellectual than to speculate about a decline of America.”⁴⁸

The attraction of controlling or at least gaining access to Middle Eastern energy in order to insert Russia into regional politics and gain leverage on both local regimes and European energy supplies has become, if anything, more important given the paramount role of energy in Russia’s economy and politics. As the Russian economy stagnates while energy behemoths like Rosneft appear to prosper, the Middle East’s energy holdings become all the more strategically tempting to Moscow.⁴⁹ At the same time, the threat from Islamic terrorism has been a prominent justification for Putin’s national security policy since its inception. Moreover the historic attraction of Russian power that has sought dominance or at least bases in the Middle East and the Mediterranean since Catherine the Great’s time serves as a compelling memory and motive for Russia to project itself as a military superpower again throughout the region.

Even before the intervention into Syria, Russia was significantly enhancing its standing and presence in the area despite the misplaced complacency of the Obama administration and the numerous observers who dismissed the idea that Russia could become a Middle East actor.⁵⁰ Thus, history, the domestic imperatives of great power politics and standing for purposes of regime consolidation at home, and the necessity to challenge Washington if not the entire West while also resisting and defanging Islam all have driven and will continue to drive Russian policy for the foreseeable future. And beyond those considerations, Russian spokesmen have frequently justified Russia’s Middle Eastern policies by referencing the fact that Russia is an increasingly Muslim country whose Islamic population is the most dynamic factor in Russian demography.⁵¹

Therefore, both the internal and external factors driving Russia to intervene militarily and in many other ways across the Middle East will lose none of their salience between now and 2025. And Moscow has enhanced its capabilities to meet those challenges, particularly, though not exclusively, the external ones. This insight applies to military policies, energy policies and domestic affairs as well as to the dissemination of information warfare by Russia as part of its Middle Eastern strategy.⁵²

In Syria, Moscow has conducted a clinic on Clausewitz that revealed it to be both a learning government and a learning military, something Washington has conspicuously failed to do. Thus, as was the case in Iraq, Washington has no adequate political vehicle capable of ruling Syria to complement its military presence there. This is the same mistake the US made in Vietnam and, apparently, also in Afghanistan. In contrast, Russia’s military operations in Syria represent a classic successful manifestation of Clausewitz’s dictum that war is an act (or acts) of force intended to compel the enemy to do our (i.e., in this case, Moscow’s) will. Surprisingly, this banal

observation evidently comes as a surprise to many Russia observers as if it were conceivable that Putin would use force for no discernible strategic or policy purpose.⁵³ As Dmitry Adamsky has shown, Russia understood from the outset the need to tailor military capability to the objectives it had postulated at the level of the principle of reasonable or rational sufficiency (*Razumnaia Dostatochnost'*)—that is, using the minimum amount of force needed to secure those objectives.⁵⁴ Such thinking prevented Moscow from overshooting its “culminating point.” In turn, that allowed it to focus on attaining its political goals rather than on being seduced by purely tactical or operational objectives. Moscow’s lessons and newly created systems of battle management will come in handy for it in future conflicts, whatever their provenance. Thus Moscow’s or anyone else’s “intervention” in a third party civil war like Syria, for that matter, is an act of war to compel one or more side to do the “intervener’s” will. Equally, if not more importantly, Russia’s intervention and subsequent operations there carry important lessons for us about war in general, contemporary combat operations as well as about Russia itself. We must learn or ignore these lessons at our own peril. But beyond those cases of strategic learning, Adamsky highlights numerous examples of operational and other strategic learning that show careful attention to the requirements of the theater and a willingness to absorb lessons that will prove useful in future conflicts in the Middle East if not elsewhere.⁵⁵

This Syrian clinic on Clausewitz’s teachings about war can also serve as a textbook example of how to use limited forces to attain strategic, political objectives or, as Clausewitz would say, to use war successfully as an instrument to achieve the goals of policy or politics (the word *Politik* in German means both things) by other means. And from today’s vantage point, clearly the greatest of those objectives is the entrenchment of Russia as a permanent and widely accepted Middle Eastern power broker and great power. Beyond this point, Syria has provided the world with an object demonstration of the improvements in Russia’s war fighting, battle management, and strategy-making capabilities that it will continue to refine through 2025. Thus, Syria has been and will remain, until completely “pacified,” a laboratory for the execution of Russian military operations and strategy as well as a test-bed for its weapons systems—the latter being a point that Russian military and civilian leaders have repeatedly reiterated.⁵⁶ And because of the fact that Russian weapons have been showcased in Syria to good effect, this battleground has become proof of performance for new arms sales that further enrich Moscow’s coffers, sustain its military capabilities, and enrich the defense industrial complex while also reinforcing ties with consumers in and beyond the Middle East.⁵⁷

Moscow also learned to innovate in other ways, namely the creation of private military companies (PMC), like Wagner Group. Sergey Sukhankin traces much of the innovative aspect of this creative adaptation of both Russian tradition and the contemporary Western example of mercenary forces.⁵⁸ But he is hardly alone in underscoring the importance of Moscow’s ability to create diverse “special” or private forces of diverse provenances to promote its objectives in Syria if not also in Ukraine.⁵⁹ Like Adamsky, Sarah Fainberg has found that Moscow’s “boosted use of “special operations forces” and “special purpose forces” also illustrates the Russian shift toward a new warfare economy: the use of limited or minimal military means that can generate a maximum military and diplomatic effect.”⁶⁰

Fainberg also agrees with other analysts that,

As a result of its new military doctrine and the reorganization of Russia's Armed Forces, Moscow's new involvement mode, as implemented and honed on the Syrian frontlines, is liable to improve the country's operational capacities and military power, both offensive and deterrent, whether in Russia's "near abroad" or in any potential operation beyond its immediate zone of influence.⁶¹

But as we now see from events in Africa, Moscow is expanding the use of this innovative force into Russian national security policy. And as regards the Middle East,

...one may imagine two models of their activation. In postwar Syria, they could be used as a security force in the energy and critical infrastructure installations. If the situation on the ground deteriorates, they can act as a rapid reaction force, before major reinforcements arrive. Another *modus operandi* might be deploying them elsewhere in the region, in conjunction with Russian needs. In this case, they will be a reconnaissance by force of sorts—they can explore operational configurations in the theater, gather intelligence and prepare a bridgehead for the main assault force. In both cases, however, given their relatively limited logistical capabilities, coordination and cooperation with the local hosts will be needed.⁶²

Thus the use of both regular and private or irregular forces, or anything in between, as shown in Syria, Ukraine, the Balkans and Africa, has opened up a new range of opportunities for Moscow to demonstrate its military prowess and the capabilities of these forces to interested onlookers and to dispose of an especially flexible "proxy war" instrument for use in conflicts in and beyond the Middle East at minimum cost to the government. Therefore, Moscow need not commit regular forces abroad in future conflicts if it feels that option to be disadvantageous. But Moscow can reap the benefit of support for clients and partners by dispatching these groups, as in Africa. As such, Russia has added a highly flexible military capability to Moscow's repertoire in a highly volatile zone that will probably allow it to use those kinds of forces in conflicts occurring between now and 2025.

Beyond being a showcase for foreign arms sales, the Syrian experience also imparts new tactical, operational and strategic lessons to Russia's military and "irregular" or private forces. Syria has given those forces both the reputation and proven capability of intervening in and managing, if not terminating, potential conflicts on behalf of one side or another. This factor clearly is attractive to governments in Egypt, Sudan and the Central African Republic.

Thus, to the extent that Moscow can pacify Syria, that success will enhance its attractiveness in providing help to allies or partners who are or feel at risk. Beyond that, the success of Russian arms in Syria will go far to making Russia a real, not just a potential arbiter of potential future conflicts. Illustratively, Moscow now wants to mediate Israel-Palestinian relations, Jordan-Syria and Israel-Iran, to list only a few. So it can fulfill the functions cited above by Adamsky of being a conflict regulator if not preventer and thus a regional security manager in the future.⁶³

The Naval Dimension

However, the military factors that make for Russia's robust military presence in the Middle East by 2025 do not end here. Thanks to its wars in Ukraine and Syria, Moscow has obtained control or maybe even command of the Black Sea. Moreover, today, its navy can deploy permanently in the Eastern Mediterranean and is busily obtaining a network of bases, plus the capability to build another anti-access, area denial (A2/AD) zone there—in this case both maritime and aerial denial against NATO forces. Finally, its armed forces in Syria now have an unprecedented veto over what Israel can do with its air power in Syria and the Levant. These strategic outcomes and their implications have not been sufficiently explored in the West. Nevertheless, the capabilities Moscow has developed and will develop promise to make it an even more formidable obstacle to Western interests in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East by 2025. Furthermore, those capabilities and outcomes make Russia both more attractive and more intimidating to many Middle Eastern governments and will incentivize them to facilitate Russian military plans through 2025.

Even though the navy has traditionally been and most likely will be the overlooked stepchild of the new Russian military procurement plan through 2027, programs now in force demonstrate Moscow's intention of striking at Western navies or restricting their access to critical waterways significant for European security. This program is particularly visible in the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and all the way to Central Asia. If fully consummated, it could put much of European energy supplies along with Western navies under permanent Russian threat. Indeed, if and when the grand design is realized, Russia will have achieved something the Soviet Navy sought but could not sustain or realize with incomparably greater conventional firepower.

The first step was the conversion of the Black Sea into a *Mare Clausus* (closed sea) after 2014. As this writer and others have observed, since 2014 a sustained buildup of Russian forces in Crimea and the Black Sea have gone far toward creating a layered A2/AD zone in that sea, although NATO has begun to react to the threat and exercise forces there.⁶⁴ That layered defense consists of a combined arms (air, land and sea) integrated air-defense system (IADS) and powerful anti-ship missiles deliverable from each of those forces. Moscow has also moved nuclear-capable forces to Crimea and the Black Sea to further display its determination to keep NATO. Additionally, Russia aims to use the umbrella it has created as the basis for an even more expansive strategy (resembling that used by the Egyptian Army in the Yom Kippur War of 1973) from which it can project power further out into the Levant and deny new areas to NATO or at least threaten the North Atlantic Alliance with heavy costs.⁶⁵

Certainly, Russia regards any presence in the Black Sea as illegitimate and a threat. And true to the Catherinian dictum that it can only defend its lands by expanding them, the defense of the Black Sea inevitably entails excluding NATO from the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, if possible. Bases and a functioning A2/AD network throughout the Levant are a perfect answer for this strategic mission. For example, in response to talk of NATO exercises, Andrei Kelin, a spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, labeled such exercises destabilizing and further added that, "This is not NATO's maritime space and it has no relation to the alliance."⁶⁶ The Russian defense establishment has announced that "Kalibr" (SS-N-27) ship-based missiles will be "permanently based" in the Eastern Mediterranean, thus providing a capable and reliable reach for Moscow's forces in the region.⁶⁷ Such missiles, with a range of up to 300 kilometers, give even older Russian vessels a sufficient offensive as well as defensive counter-punch to strike at naval or even shore-based targets.

Having poured these weapons systems into the Black Sea and having strengthened the Mediterranean Squadron, Russia has created a permanent force in being in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, Moscow is seeking to make good on the request stated by Defense Minister Shoigu on February 26, 2014 (as the Ukraine invasion was beginning) for a global chain of air and naval bases. Shoigu announced then that Russia had made progress in talks with eight governments to establish a global network of airbases to extend the reach of Russia's long-range maritime and strategic aviation assets and thus increase Russia's global military presence. Shoigu stated, "We are working actively with the Seychelles, Singapore, Algeria, Cyprus, Nicaragua, Venezuela and even in some other countries. We are in talks and close to a result." Shoigu cited Russia's need for refueling bases near the equator and asserted that, "It is imperative that our navy has the opportunities for replenishment."⁶⁸

In August 2014, responding to NATO's heightened naval presence in the Black Sea due to the Ukrainian crisis, Shoigu demanded a new naval modernization plan to "improve the operational readiness of Russian naval forces in locations providing the greatest strategic threat."⁶⁹ Indeed, in June 2014, Russian ships even deployed for the first time west of the Straits of Messina.⁷⁰ These moves show why dominating the Black Sea is critical for Russia's power projection into the Mediterranean and Middle East.⁷¹

However, the Mediterranean Squadron may be as much a response to previously declining NATO deployments that created a strategic vacuum there, as it is a conscious strategy.⁷² Since 2014, Moscow has moved to reinforce the Black Sea Fleet to use it as a platform for denying NATO access to Russia, Ukraine, and the Caucasus and to serve as a platform for power projection into the Mediterranean and Middle East.⁷³ And since the intervention in Syria, Moscow has started to fortify the missile, air-defense and submarine component of its Mediterranean Eskadra (Squadron) to impart to it an A2/AD capability against NATO fleets in the Mediterranean. What is thus emerging is Moscow's sea denial strategy against the Alliance and other fleets in the area just as in the Black Sea and other maritime theaters.⁷⁴ And by May 2016, US intelligence confirmed that Moscow was building an army base at Palmyra.⁷⁵

But matters do not end there. Western military analysts have described Russia's efforts to build its IADS, anti-ship, and overall A2/AD networks in terms of "bubbles" at certain "nodal points," namely in the Baltic Sea, around the Black Sea, and around Syria. They also include the Caucasus. Just as Moscow has delivered Iskander-M missiles to Kaliningrad—a move that garnered much attention—it has also deployed them in Armenia, ostensibly, though not actually, under Armenian control. Indeed, it is virtually inconceivable that Moscow would grant Yerevan operational as well as physical control over those missiles, which are dual-capable and could take out any target in Azerbaijan within a radius of 500 kilometers (if not more), i.e. including parts of Turkey. Air and air-defense deployments at Moscow's Gyumri base in Armenia thus provide coverage of the entire Caucasus and eastern Turkey. Those deployments in Armenia have received virtually no publicity in the West. But they have vital strategic significance far beyond Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Coupled with the emerging IADS and A2AD networks that Russia is building in and around Syria and the Black Sea, as well as the base in Hamdan, Iran, which Moscow used in 2016, Russia is constructing an elaborate network of air and naval defenses. This not only interdicts foreign

intervention in Syria's civil war; it also places the entire Caucasus region beyond the easy reach of NATO and Western air or military power. Additionally, it surrounds Turkey from the north, east and south with Russian forces and capabilities that can inhibit any Western effort to come to Turkey's aid, should another conflict—however unlikely at this point—flare up between Moscow and Ankara. These capabilities also include the naval and A2AD capacity in the Caspian and the deployment of Russian ships with Kalibr or other cruise missiles there, as well as the possibility of introducing nuclear-capable systems like the Iskander into the Baltic—an already highly volatile theater—if not also the Black Sea.

Indeed, in 2017 this net further tightened. First, Moscow began construction of a new naval base at Kaspiisk, in Dagestan, to control the Caspian Sea. It will accommodate all of the Caspian Flotilla's guided-missile vessels and ensure rapid deployment for use of high-precision strike assets. This base is supposed to become the most advanced of all Russian bases, compared to those in the Arctic, Black, and Baltic Seas. Clearly, this move by Moscow is the latest example of Russia's consistent strategy to dominate not only the former USSR but also to project long-range military power into the Middle East as well. Indeed, we have seen the previous use of Caspian Flotilla ships to launch the deadly Kalibr sea-launched cruise missile into Syria.⁷⁶ Russian expert Sergei Mikheyev openly stated the reasons for this base: "The region is of growing interest for third countries. It is rich in oil and gas. Besides, an alternative corridor from Central Asia to the West via post-Soviet Transcaucasia [South Caucasus] can go through it. The idea is promoted by the Americans and the Europeans, but Russia and Iran are against it."⁷⁷

We can and probably should also expect that Moscow will soon announce an accompanying air-defense network to add to this base and to the other air- and ship-defense "bubbles" that encase the so-called southern tier of the Black Sea, Caucasus and Central Asia. These bubbles comprise the land-, air-, and ship-based anti-air defenses at Gyumri in Armenia, the Black Sea and around Ukraine and in Syria. Indeed, it already is the case that, for all practical purposes, Russian forces encircle Turkey to its north, east and south—in the Black Sea, Caucasus and Syria. The new base will only increase that encirclement.

Similarly, this new base expresses Moscow's ongoing determination to project long-term and long-range military power into the Middle East and even close to the Persian Gulf. The Russian Ministry of Defense has long since proclaimed its desire for this regional network of naval bases, and experts are no less candid in explaining the strategic justification for this policy. Thus, defense analyst Mikheyev also said the Caspian Sea is a valuable asset for the Russian military as it is located close to the Middle East and directly borders on Central Asia. "The Syrian operation showed that the Caspian Sea is a safe launching pad for cruise missiles. It can accommodate our warships armed with high-precision weapons. The sea is out of reach for potential adversaries and third-country navies," he noted.⁷⁸ Also in this vein, the Russian newspaper *Gazeta.ru* cited an anonymous high-ranking defense ministry official, on November 21, 2017, who declared, "The Russian military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean is necessary for keeping the balance of power and the interests that we lost after the USSR's [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] disintegration 25 years ago."⁷⁹

Beyond this development, Russia has, for some time, showed this intention with prior statements and actions to ensure a network of bases from Cyprus and Syria to Egypt and Libya, where we can

expect a request for a base once that country is stabilized. In Yemen, where Russia is aiding the Iranian-backed Houthis, Moscow announced an interest in a base as early as 2009.⁸⁰ Indeed, already in 2008, Admiral Ivan Kapitanets (ret.), a former first deputy commander-in-chief of the Soviet and Russian Fleets, stated that Russia needs ports anchorages and access to bases in the Mediterranean—and specifically in Libya.⁸¹ Mattia Toaldo, a Libya expert and senior fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations in London, has commented that, “Russia could get a foothold in Libya that could be helpful in strengthening its overall position in the Mediterranean,” adding, “There is increasing talk of a Russian base or even just docking rights in Benghazi. Coupled with Syria and in view of the rising ties with Egypt, this would allow Russia to have a much stronger position in this part of the world.”⁸²

Meanwhile in Yemen’s case, Moscow has dramatically upgraded its political profile in that country’s civil war. Russia’s deepened commitment to ensuring a cease-fire in Yemen can be explained by a mixture of strategic considerations and broader geopolitical aspirations. From a strategic standpoint, a cessation of hostilities could allow Russia to construct a naval base on Yemeni soil. Indeed, a Russian military official told *ITAR-TASS* back in 2009 that establishing a naval base presence in Yemen was a medium-term strategic objective. A Yemeni base would have significant strategic value for Russia, as it would increase Moscow’s access to Red Sea shipping lanes and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.⁸³

A Russian naval base in Yemen—presumably at or near Socotra, where the Soviet Union had such a facility—would give Moscow significant monitoring and power-projection capabilities over the Gulf of Suez, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, Bab-El Mandab, the Arabian Sea and the Western reaches of the Indian Ocean, possibly including the Persian Gulf. The implications for Middle Eastern and European energy transports are obvious. Another interesting fact about the apparent quest for bases in Yemen is that it is apparently tied to Russia’s effort to position itself as a mediator in the Yemeni civil war. In that case, we would see the confluence of its diplomatic tactic of inserting itself into a conflictual relationship and engaging both sides in return for a lasting strategic foothold in a key spot, in this case a naval base overlooking the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.⁸⁴

Nor do reports of Russian interests in bases in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea stop here. In 2014, Foreign Minister Lavrov openly stated that Russia wanted a base in Alexandria, Egypt: “The naval base is certain, and I say it loudly,” he replied. “We want to have a presence in the Mediterranean because it is important for Russia to understand what is happening there and to enhance our position.” He said that the Syrian port of Tartus will be the fuel base for Russia’s Mediterranean Fleet.⁸⁵

In April 2018, local media reports from Somaliland indicted that Russia had requested a small naval and air facility, housing no more than 1,500 personnel, outside the city of Zeila.” The naval facility should serve two destroyer sized ships, four frigate-class ships, and two large submarine pens. The air facility will include two airstrips and will be able to host up to “six heavy aircraft and fifteen fighter jets as well as space for fuel, ammunition, and base defenses.” In return, Moscow is allegedly promising to assist Somaliland in obtaining international recognition and “is willing to send more military advisors, both tactical and strategic, to assist the emerging Somaliland military.”⁸⁶

Finally, toward the end of 2017, Moscow pulled off what might be its greatest coup. The Egyptian government agreed to host a Russian airbase and allow Russia freedom to use its air space (undoubtedly to fight Russian-backed forces in Libya). Furthermore, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir announced he was seeking Russian protection and arms against the United States and discussed with President Putin the idea of a Russian naval base on the Sudanese coast.⁸⁷ Additionally, at the end of 2017, Russia announced that its Syrian naval facility at Tartus will be upgraded to the full status of a naval base and will be under Russian control for 49 years, along with the Khmeininim airbase. The strategic implications of these Russian moves are enormous. Moscow will undoubtedly utilize its Egyptian airbase to strike at anti-Russian and pro-Western factions in Libya. It also now has acquired for the first time direct reconnaissance over Israeli airspace and increasing leverage through its Egyptian and Syrian airbases, something Israel had sought to reject since its inception as a state in 1947. And in addition to the projected base in Sudan, it now has the capability to strike at Saudi targets as well. Lastly, as shown above, these bases are tied to long-term political and military relationships—either in the form of mediation of civil wars or intervention on behalf of one or another side, or long-term programs of military training and reinforcement. All such approaches have a pedigree that dates back to the Soviet advisors in Egypt and Syria in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁸

But the dimensions of Moscow's achievement actually go much further. These bases showcase Russian military and political influence throughout the region. Moscow will now have potential strike and/or intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities across the entire Middle East. In practical terms, this means that Russian bases in Syria, Egypt (and probably in Iran)—along with its additional bases inside Russia, including in Crimea, as well as in Armenia—give Moscow the capability to project power across the entire breadth and length of the Middle East, much if not all of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea. Bases in Libya, Cyprus (which it has also sought), Yemen and Sudan would further extend that range to the Central Mediterranean, including Italy and parts of the Balkans, the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. Closer to home, Moscow would have secluded the Caucasus and Central Asia from Western power-projection capability, drawn a cordon around Turkey, and attained the capability to threaten Israel in ways Soviet leaders could have only dreamed about.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, Russia will probably deploy its fire-strike weapons and integrated air defenses across these bases. Moscow is likely to outfit those naval and airbases with long-range cruise missiles, UAVs, unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAV), unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV), as well as EW and intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) capabilities. In that case, Russia could then thoroughly contest Western aerospace superiority over these areas. In other words, given the bases already acquired and those that Moscow still seeks—a naval base in Alexandria and bases in Libya and Cyprus—Moscow would be able to contest the entire Eastern Mediterranean. And given its strong ties with Algeria we should not rule out the possibility it is seeking a deal along these lines with that government as well. With the ability to contest the entire Mediterranean, Russia will be able to place NATO land, air, and/or naval forces further at risk.

The acquisition of the above-mentioned regional bases will enable Moscow to integrate its deployed long-range strike capabilities and air-defenses into a single overarching network with coverage of the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Gulf, thus making

Western operations in any of those theaters extremely hazardous and costly. Given Russia's existing bases in the Black Sea, Caucasus and the Levant, Turkey is already almost totally surrounded by Russian forces; and the Balkan states and Italy could be vulnerable as well. Arguably Russia is attempting to create what Soviet Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov called a reconnaissance-strike complex across the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf by integrating its ISR and fire-strike capabilities from these naval and airbases. This is not only an issue of challenging the West's reliance on an aerospace precision-fire strike—and thus Western and US air superiority—in the first days of any war. These Russian capabilities also threaten international energy supplies because Moscow can then use the threat of its naval and/or air power in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Mediterranean to interdict or curtail energy supplies that traverse these waterways.

The completion of this network of naval and airbases will challenge Western aerospace superiority, naval assets and lines of communications, and key NATO or Western allies. But additionally, these foreign bases will consolidate Russia as a key regional arbiter and also as an arbiter within each host country's politics—e.g., Syria, Libya, Yemen and Sudan. Moscow also stands to gain enormous leverage over Middle Eastern energy supplies to Europe because it will have gained coverage of both defense threats and international energy trade routes. Undoubtedly, Russia will then take advantage of all these situations and assets to attempt to free itself from sanctions by pressuring Middle Eastern countries (as it is already doing) or by pressuring European states to repudiate the sanctions.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, Moscow's main interest in the Middle East is not peace but the controlled or managed chaos of so-called controlled conflict. Since "power projection activities are an input into the world order," Russian force deployments into the greater Middle East and economic-political actions to gain access, influence and power there represent competitive and profound, attempts at engendering a long-term restructuring of the regional strategic order.⁹¹ Ultimately, Moscow is clearly not content merely to dominate the Caspian and Black Seas and their littorals. In other words, Russia is maneuvering Turkey, as well as Georgia and Azerbaijan, into its orbit through combined economic, ethnic, military and political pressures to ensure that these countries will be placed behind an air-defense umbrella. The completion of that umbrella would then allow the Russian army and/or navy to advance into foreign territories, much as the Egyptian army regained Sinai during the Yom Kippur War in 1973—a war that featured precisely this kind of offensive and that led to far-reaching strategic implications for all concerned. Russian military units would likely be able to move with impunity since Western forces would be deterred by the likely high rate of casualties they would incur. Indeed, when this system is complete, Moscow will not need to invade but only threaten to undermine the sovereignty or integrity of these countries or their pro-Western affiliations and economic-political ties.

But beyond the Caucasus and Central Asia, Moscow also wants to project lasting and long-range military power into the Middle East and connect those forces to the installations it is now building in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Black Sea. So while Russian naval operations and undersea threats to the sea lanes of communication (SLOC) in the Atlantic and Mediterranean are formidable and important threats that merit constant and close scrutiny, they are only part of a grander naval and maritime design that goes back at least to 2008–2009, as we have seen. Moscow's naval probes in the southern tier, therefore, merit no less careful and constant scrutiny by NATO and its Middle

Eastern allies. If we remember that the cardinal point of the post–Cold War settlement was the indivisibility of European security and understand how imbricated European and Middle Eastern security issues are, then we can see this naval grand design as an element of Moscow’s professed desire to overturn that very post–Cold War settlement.

Domestic Politics, Economics and Energy

Apart from the factors listed above that relate to diplomacy and so-called “hard power,” there are compelling domestic and “soft power” factors driving Russia’s overall Middle Eastern policies. It has utilized them to fashion durable modalities for prolonging and reinforcing its regional presence. First, Russia’s quest under Putin has been to reaffirm strongly that Moscow is an Islamic country by virtue of its large and growing Muslim population. Virtually everyone who has studied the demographic issue agrees that a rising overall Muslim segment of the Russian Federation’s population will impel the government to take Muslim interests more seriously at home and abroad and to strengthen its presence in the Middle East as well. Moscow’s goal is to prevent the influence of extremist, Salafist, and terrorist ideologies from penetrating Russia.⁹²

Already in 2003, Putin conceived of an ambitious project to define Russia as an Islamic country and to join the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). He has sought to establish Russia as a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world and to “do everything to promote the idea of the similarity of the Russian and ‘Islamic’ approaches to many international issues.”⁹³ Everything since then has only reinforced elite opinion that Russia must persevere along this course for its own security against terrorism and due to its particular demographic profile.⁹⁴ And as that demographic profile becomes more skewed or weighted toward a large Muslim influence in Russian politics and the danger of internal terrorism, Russia will have little choice but to pursue a proactive course in the Middle East, not unlike what it has been doing for several years.

Economic factors also weigh heavily here and may well have moved Russia toward a closer engagement with the Middle East and Asia, particularly as regards energy. This reorientation likely would have occurred even without the post-Ukraine sanctions due to the nature of the energy economy and Western reactions to Russia’s predatory energy policies in Europe and Eurasia.⁹⁵ Indeed, even before the Syrian intervention in 2015, Moscow was adroitly combining its ability to play both sides in conflict-ridden areas that possess large energy deposits. In Iraq, Russia employed the lure of arms sales to gain enduring leverage upon Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurds.

Yet, Russia’s actions in Iraq cannot be abstracted from its objectives in the Middle East as a whole. Certainly the deals with Iraq combined with Russia’s efforts to enter Iran, Israel, Cyprus and Turkey confirm that for Moscow, if not for other major actors, “Geopolitical power is less about the projection of military prowess and more about access and control of resources and infrastructure.”⁹⁶ Russia’s energy deals in the Middle East, if not elsewhere, also demonstrates the fundamentally strategic and political motives behind its overall energy policy.

For Russia, energy security means “weaponizing” energy. It is not a philosophy that aims at some future self-sufficient “clean energy” paradise. It is a doctrine for today, which takes the world as it is, vulnerable and addicted to “dirty energy” such as natural gas, oil and coal, and exploits that dependence to make Russia stronger. With this cynical way of looking at the world, much akin to

the way Colombian drug lords regard cocaine addicts, Russia pursues energy deals in a way that is quite alien to what most Americans dreamily think it to be.⁹⁷

Additionally, the linkage of energy and arms deals represents another important factor in Russian policy toward Iraq and throughout the Middle East as well as North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Increasingly, it appears that the actual sequence of deals does not matter. So it does not matter whether energy or arms sales come first. But they are certainly more and more often linked. Whatever benefits they bring to the host state, they have been correlated to Russian foreign policy for some time. It was already clear by 2009 that arms sales and gas deals shaped Russia's policies toward Algeria and Libya, for example.

Thus, the subsequent deals chronicled above—which are also explored in the papers by Rauf Mammadov and Theodore Karasik—build on a pre-existing foundation that predated the intervention in Syria and are essential to Russia's multi-dimensional strategy. Today and into the future, the pressure of sanctions, the location of Russia's newest oil and gas fields, and the general evolution of the global economy and its energy component to where Asia is the most dynamic factor will impel Moscow to make more deals with Middle Eastern energy holders and/or consumers in the future.⁹⁸ And these collocated energy deals and arms sales, together with the performance of the Russian military and Russian diplomacy, enable Moscow to repeat on a grander scale in the Middle East what it did with Iraq, the Kurds and Turkey in 2012–2015, when it combined energy deals and arms sales to gain lasting leverage on all three of them. Moscow will hunt with the Iraqi hounds and simultaneously run with the Kurdish hare, all while also trying to prevent Turkey from reducing its excessive dependence on Russian energy.⁹⁹

Indeed, one of the reasons it has supported Syria is also that Syria opposed a Qatari gas pipeline to Europe that would have cut into Moscow's ability to dominate Southeastern and Central European gas markets through an alternative Iranian-proposed pipeline.¹⁰⁰ While that is still the case and despite the Saudi-UAE pressure against Qatar, Qatar and Russia are discussing arms deals and arms sales, further testimony to Russia's flexibility, and the benefits that confers upon Moscow.¹⁰¹ Nor do the examples of Russian energy deals in the Levant and wider Middle East presented here exhaust the full scope of Moscow's regional energy interests. After all, Russia has long been interested in gaining entrée to the Eastern Mediterranean gas finds in Egypt, Israel and Cyprus, as well as Algerian gas. And Russia's dominance in the Turkish gas market, where it supplies 60–70 percent of domestic gas, is well known and a clear source of Russian leverage upon Turkey.

Conclusions

The foregoing narrative spotlights the coordinated interaction of all of Russia's instruments of power, save for information. Yet, Donald Jensen's paper shows that Moscow has not neglected that vital component of its foreign and defense policy in the Middle East.¹⁰² This permanent interaction among all these instruments and tactics of Russian power, diplomacy, information, military and economic instruments belies any idea that Moscow is merely a regional power or that Russian policy is essentially improvisatory and lacking in strategy. Indeed, and as this and other papers in this project have shown, Russian objectives in the Middle East and the policies to reach

them are long-standing and have deep roots in Russian and Soviet thinking if not the 1990s, when Russia was counted out as a Middle Eastern player.¹⁰³

Precisely because Moscow has combined an impressive learning capacity with a focus on long-standing goals and flexibility in meeting them, it has been able to take advantage of the United States' continuing failure to articulate a coherent or sustainable strategy for the Middle East. US writers already argue that Moscow has supplanted Washington as the "go to" power in the Middle East.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, as the foregoing assessment shows, Russia has built upon these deep roots of its policy and is constantly strengthening its capability to take advantage of opportunities, not only in the Middle East but in nearby Africa. Consequently, there is no reason to believe, all things being equal, that Russia in 2025 will enjoy a markedly weaker position in the Middle East or would barter away its hard-won gains for anything less than massive American concessions (which Moscow appears to think will come inevitably due to US decline).

Fedor Lukyanov, the editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*, has contended that the Arab Spring showed Russia up to that point was not a key player in the Middle East. But it also shows that Russia is trying to create a situation whereby if it does not participate in or support the resolution of a major issue—e.g., Syria's civil war or the Kurdish issue in Iraq—it will not be possible for anyone else to seriously influence the course of events there. Thus, Moscow, as it has aspired to be since Yevgeny Primakov's tenure as foreign minister and prime minister, still seeks to play the role of a great equalizer against the US and any other potential rivals in the Middle East.¹⁰⁵ Not only has it succeeded in achieving that outcome in Syria, but its triumphs in Syria (amidst US fecklessness) have ensured that it is replicating and extending that victory throughout the region, both spatially and temporally. The idea that Moscow cannot sustain or bear the costs of its Middle Eastern projects are clearly illusory. Indeed, its policies aim to force others to share in those costs as well as the benefits, thereby extending and deepening its presence. Thus, if we are to understand Russia's policies in the Middle East in order to be able to counter them, the first thing the US will need to do is embrace Samuel Johnson's admonition to "clear our minds of can't".

Notes

¹ Ekaterina Stepanova, "Russia In the Middle East: Back To a Grand Strategy" – Or Enforcing Multilateralism," *Politique Etrangere*, No. 2, 2016, pp. 1–14; Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *Mr. Putin Operative In the Kremlin: Geopolitics in the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015, Revised Edition, 2015, pp. 339–340.

² Osama Al-Sharif, "Russia Key To Reset Of Jordanian-Syrian ties," www.al-moonitor.com, July 23, 2018.

³ Nikolay Kozhanov, "As Ringmaster: Russia Runs Israel-Iran Balancing Act In Syria," www.al-monitor.com, August 6, 2018; Stephen Blank, "Russia In Syria: Between US-Turkey Dealings and an Iran-Israel Conflict," August 1, 2018, <https://www.cgpolicy.org/articles/russia-in-syria-between-u-s-turkey-dealings-an-israel-iran-conflict/>.

⁴ "Russia To Deploy Military Police On Golan Heights," www.reuters.com, August 2, 2018.

⁵ Pavel K. Baev and Kemal Kirisci, *An Ambiguous Partnership: The Serpentine Trajectory of Turkish-Russian Relations in the era of Erdoğan and Putin*, Turkish Policy Project Paper No. 13, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/pavel-and-kirisci-turkey-and-russia.pdf>, 2017.

⁶ “Iran In Talks To Join Eurasian Customs Union, Official Says,” www.azernews.az, August 4, 2018.

⁷ Jessica Tuchman Matthews, “Russia Replaces America As the Power Player In the Middle East,” www.carnegieendowment.org, March 6, 2018; “US Sidelined As Russia Steers New Regional Course In Syria,” November 26, 2017.

⁸ “Press-Konferentsiia Po Itogam Peregovorov Prezidentov Rossii I SShA,” Helsinki, July 16, 2018,” <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58017>.

⁹ Theodore Karasik and Giorgio Caflero, “Russia and the UAE: Friends With Benefits,” <https://intpolicydigest.org/2017/04/26/russia-uae-friends-benefits/>, April 26, 2017.

¹⁰ Stephen Blank, “Russia Returns To Africa,” Forthcoming, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/>.

¹¹ Camille Lons, “Battle Of the Ports: Emirates Sea Power Spreads From Persian Gulf To Africa,” www.newsweek.com, August 6, 2018; “UAE Ready To Take On Greater Security Burden In Middle East, Minister,” www.reuters.com, July 28, 2018.

¹² Blank, “Russia Returns to Africa.”

¹³ Stephen Blank, “Energy and Russia’s High-Stakes Game in Iraq,” *EGS Working Paper* 2015-2-1, Center for Energy Governance and Security, Hanyang University, 2015.

¹⁴ “Russian Nuclear Energy deals With Egypt Reach Almost \$60bn,” <https://www.rt.com/business/424343-rosatom-russia-egypt-contracts/>, April 17, 2018; “Russia Deploys Special Forces on Libyan-Egyptian Border, Reuters Reports,” <https://www.libyanexpress.com/russia-deploys-special-forces-on-libyan-egyptian-border-reuters-reports/>, March 14, 2017; David D. Kirkpatrick, “In Snub To U.S., Russia and Egypt Move Toward Deal On Air Bases,” www.nytimes.com, November 30, 2017; “Egypt ‘Ready To Agree’ New Russian Air Base On Coast,” *Middle East Eye*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-ready-agree-new-russian-air-base-coast-reports-1845388280>.

¹⁵ Stephen Blank, “From Sochi To the Sahel: Russia’s Expanding Footprint,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, November 29, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/sochi-sahel-russias-expanding-footprint/>; *Real Clear Defense*, November 30, 2017, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/11/30/russias_expanding_footprint_from_sochi_to_the_sahel_112703.html.

¹⁶ Kirill Semenov, “Russia, Qatar Explore Partnership Potential,” www.al-monitor.com, March 28, 2018.

¹⁷ Stefanie Ortmann, “The Russian Network State As A Great Power,” Arkady Moshes and Vadim Kononenko, Eds., *Rusisa As a Network State: What Works in Russia When State Institutions Do Not?* New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 20–11, pp. 139–164; Article of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, “Russia’s Foreign Policy Philosophy” Published in the magazine “International Affairs” of March 2013 http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/Article_of_Russian_Foreign_Minister_Servey_Lavrov.pdf.

¹⁸ Bobo Lo, *Chujtzpah and Realism: Vladimir Putin and the Making Of Russian Foreign Policy*, *Russie. NEI*, No. 109, Institut Francais des Relations Internationales, www.ifri.org, June, 2018, pp. 10–13.

¹⁹ Press Review: Moscow Mediates Libyan Crisis and Ukrainians Bypass Russian Social Media Ban,” <http://tass.com/pressreview/975718>, November 15, 2017; Blank, “Russia Returns To Africa.”

²⁰ “Iran In Talks To Join Eurasian Customs Union, Official Says.”

²¹ Samuel Charap, “Is Russia An Outside Power In the Gulf?” *Survival*, LVII, No. 1, February 2015, p. 154.

²² Stephen Blank, “Russia, Iran, and the Middle East: What comes Next?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 18, 2018, www.jamestown.org; Remarks of Dmitry Adamsky at the conference, Russia in the Middle East: A View from Israel, Kennan Institute of Advanced Russian Studies, Washington, D.C., June 27, 2018.

²³ Dmitry Adamsky, *Moscow’s Syria Campaign Russian Lessons for the Art of Strategy*, Russie. NEI, No. 109, Institut Francais des Relations Internationales, www.ifri.org, July, 2018, p. 8.

²⁴ Blank, “Russia Returns To Africa.”

²⁵ “Russia Signs Rosneft Deal With Qatar, Glencore,” www.reuters.com, December 10, 2016.

²⁶ Rauf Mammadov, “Russia in the Middle East: Energy Forever?” <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-middle-east-energy-forever/>, March 8, 2018; Theodore Karasik, “Russia’s Financial Tactics in the Middle East,” <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-financial-tactics-middle-east/>, December 20, 2017.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, “Meeting of the Commission for Military Technology Cooperation with Foreign States,” accessed March 12, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/4121>.

²⁹ “Rogozin discusses Glonass, Defense Order, Exports” Interfax-AVN Online, Moscow, Dec 11, 2013.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ The Quartet on the Middle East (also referred to as the Madrid Quartet) is a grouping of countries and international entities established to lead mediation in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The members of the Quartet are the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia.

³² P5+1 is the common shorthand for the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council plus Germany, who negotiated the Joint Cooperative Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran in 2015.

³³ William J. Burns, Addressing Russian Arms Sales,” Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy NO. 07 Moscow 5154a.

³⁴ Stephen Blank, Younkyoo Kim, “Russia and Latin America: The New Frontier for Geopolitics Arms Sales, and Energy,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, LXII, NO. 3, May–June, 2015, pp. 159–173; Stephen Blank, “Russia’s New Greek Project: the Balkans in Russian Policy,” Margarita Assenova and Zaur Shiriyev, Eds., *Azerbaijan and the New Energy Geopolitics of Southeastern Europe*, Washington, D.C., Jamestown Foundation, 2015, pp. 121–176.

³⁵ Stephen Blank, “Russia’s Mideast Role,” *Perspectives*, XVIII, No. 3, May, 2008.

³⁶ Constantine Courcoulas, Benjamin Harvey, Onur Ant, and Inci Ozbek, “Erdogan Defiant While Turkey Slips Toward Financial Crisis,” <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-11/with-turkey-crisis-erupting-bankers-gather-for-emergency-talks>, August 11, 2018.

³⁷ “Syria’s Assad Says Russia Military Needed In Syria Long Term: Agencies,” www.reuters.com, July 26, 2018.

³⁸ Blank, “Russia Returns To Africa”; Blank, “From Sochi To the Sahel: Russia’s Expanding Footprint.”

³⁹ Charap, pp. 153–166

-
- ⁴⁰ Liz Slay, “No Sign of Obama’s Predicted ‘Quagmire’ As Russia’s Engagement in Syria Escalates,” www.washingtonpost.com, September 30, 2016.
- ⁴¹ Adamsky, *Passim*.
- ⁴² Quoted in Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War’s Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace*, New York: Harper Collins, 2018, pp. 492–493.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 493.
- ⁴⁴ Zvi Magen, “Russia and the Middle East: Policy challenges,” Memorandum NO. 127, Institute for National Security Studies, Tel-Aviv University, 2013.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Dmitri Alexander Simes, “A Russian Perspective On Foreign Affairs: An Interview with Konstantin Zatulin,” <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russian-perspective-foreign-affairs-interview-konstantin-zatulin-27302>, July 30, 2018.
- ⁴⁷ Nikolai Spassky, “Can Russia Become a Superpower Again – And Does It Really Need It,?” *Russia In Global Affairs*, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru>.
- ⁴⁸ N. Spassky, “The Island of Russia,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 2, 2011, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru>.
- ⁴⁹ “Russia’s Rosneft More Than Triples Q2 Net Profit, Shares Hit Record,” www.reuters.com. August 7, 2018.
- ⁵⁰ John W. Parker, *Understanding Putin Through a Middle Eastern Looking Glass*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Fort Leslie McNair, Washington, D.C, 2015 John W. Parker, *Putin’s Syrian Gambit: Sharper Elbows, Bigger Footprint, Stickier Wicket*, <http://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-25.pdf>, 2017.
- ⁵¹ Ilan Berman, “Demography’s Pull on Russian Mideast Policy,” <https://jamestown.org/program/demographys-pull-russian-mideast-policy/>, March 8, 2018.
- ⁵² Donald N. Jensen, “Russia In the Middle East: A New Front In the Information War,?” <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-middle-east-new-front-information/>, December 20, 2017.
- ⁵³ Samuel Charap, “Russia’s Use of Military Force as a Foreign Policy Tool: Is There a Logic.?” http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm443_Charap_Oct2016_4.pdf.
- ⁵⁴ Adamsky, *Moscow’s Syria Campaign Russian Lessons for the Art of Strategy*, p. 9.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid. Passim*.
- ⁵⁶ Anton Lavrov, “Russia In Syria: A Military Analysis,” Stanislav Secieriu and Nicu Popescu Eds., *Russia’s Return to the Middle East: Building Sandcastles?* Chaillot Paper No. 146 Institute for Security Studies, European Union, July 2018, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/russia%E2%80%99s-return-middle-east-building-sandcastles>, pp. 47–57.
- ⁵⁷ Anna Borshchevskaya, “The Tactical Side Of Russia’s Arms Sales To the Middle East,” <https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-side-russias-arms-sales-middle-east/>, December 20, 2017.

-
- ⁵⁸ Sergey Sukhankin, “‘Continuing War by Other Means’: The Case of Wagner, Russia’s Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East,” <https://jamestown.org/program/continuing-war-by-other-means-the-case-of-wagner-russias-premier-private-military-company-in-the-middle-east/>, July 13, 2018.
- ⁵⁹ Sarah Fainberg, *Russian Spetsnaz, Contractors, and Volunteers In the Syrian Conflict*, Russie. NEI, No. 105, Institut Francais des Relations Internationales, www.ifri.org, July 2018.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ⁶² Adamsky, *Moscow’s Syria Campaign Russian Lessons for the Art of Strategy*, p. 31.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁶⁴ Stephen Blank, “The Black Sea and Beyond,” *Proceedings of the US Naval Institute*, October, 2015, pp. 36-41; “NATO Military Exercises Begin In Black Sea,” <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-31828111/nato-military-exercises-begin-in-black-sea>, March 11, 2015; Alex Gorka; “Exercise Sea Shield-2017: NATO Provokes Russia in Black Sea Before Defense Ministers’ Meeting,” <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2017/02/10/exercise-sea-2017-nato-provokes-russia-black-sea-defense-ministers-meeting.html>, February 10, 2017; Damien Sharkov, “NATO To Strengthen in Black Sea Region Despite Russian Warning,” *Newsweek*, June 15, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/nato-strengthen-black-sea-despite-russia-warning-470717>.
- ⁶⁵ Blank, “The Black Sea and Beyond,” pp. 36–41.
- ⁶⁶ Sharkov, “NATO To Strengthen in Black Sea Region Despite Russian Warning.”
- ⁶⁷ “Korabli s ‘Kalibrami’ otpravlyatsya na postoyannuyu vakhtu v Sredizemnoye more,” *Izvestia*, May 16, 2018, <https://iz.ru/744028/2018-05-16/korabli-s-kalibrami-otpraviatsia-na-postoiannuiu-vakhtu-v-sredizemnoe-more>.
- ⁶⁸ Bruce Jones: “Russia searches for strategic airbase partner” IHS Jane’s Defense Weekly. March 4, 2014, <http://www.janes.com/article/34916/russia-searches-for-strategic-airbase-partners>.
- ⁶⁹ “Russian Defense Minister Vows to Strengthen Navy,” Agence France Presse, August 19, 2014, www.defensenews.com.
- ⁷⁰ Moscow, Interfax, in English, June 20, 2014, *FBIS SOV*, June 20, 2014.
- ⁷¹ Moscow, Interfax, in English, May 20, 2014, *FBIS SOV*, May 20, 2014; Stephen Blank, “Russian Strategy and Policy in the Middle East,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Relations*, VIII, NO. 2, May 2014, pp. 9–25.
- ⁷² Captain Thomas S. Fedyszyn, USN, “The Russian Navy ‘Rebalances’ to the Mediterranean,” *Proceedings of the US Naval Institute*, December 2013, www.usni.org
- ⁷³ Stephen Blank, “The Black Sea and Beyond,” pp. 36–41.
- ⁷⁴ Stephen Blank, “The Meaning of Russia’s Naval Deployments in the Mediterranean,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 4, 2016, www.jamestown.org.
- ⁷⁵ Bassem Mroue, “Russia Builds Military Camp Near Ancient Site in Palmyra,” Associated Press, May 17, 2016, <http://www.cbs46.com/story/31990649/russians-building-army-base-at-syrias-palmyra-site>.
- ⁷⁶ Huseyn Panahov, “Where Does the Caspian Sea Figure in Russia’s Strategic Calculus,?” *Eurasia Insight*, www.eurasianet.org, October 23, 2015.
- ⁷⁷ Stephen Blank, “Russia’s New Caspian Base,” <http://www.caspianpolicy.org/news/russias-new-caspian-naval-base/>, October 12, 2017.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Quoted in “Russian Media Comments Following Tripartite Sochi Summit: A New Yalta That Excludes The Americans,” *MEMRI*, November 27, 2017, <https://www.memri.org/reports/russian-media-comments-following-tripartite-sochi-summit-new-yalta-excludes-americans>.

⁸⁰ “Russia Plans Navy Bases in Libya, Syria, Yemen: Report,” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-navy-mideast/russia-plans-navy-bases-in-libya-syriayemen-report-idUSTRE50F3H120090116>, January 16, 2009.

⁸¹ Moscow, *Interfax-AVN Online* in Russian, October 31, 2008, *Open Source Committee Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Central Eurasia CEP 20081031950354*, (Henceforth *FBIS SOV*), October 31, 2008.

⁸² “Russia Seeks Influence in Libya,” <http://www.dw.com/en/russia-seeks-influence-in-libya/a-36663867>, December 6, 2017.

⁸³ Samuel Ramani, “Moscow’s Shifting Strategy in Yemen,” <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/russia-ambassador-yemen-houthis-hadi-military-influence.html>, July 26, 2017.

⁸⁴ Maher Farrukh and Tyler Nocita, “Yemen Situation Report,” <https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/yemen-situation-report/2017-yemen-crisis-situation-report-april-28>, April 28, 2017.

⁸⁵ “Russia Seeks Naval Base In Egypt,” *Middle East Monitor*, January 30, 2014, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140130-russia-seeks-naval-base-in-egypt/>.

⁸⁶ “Russia May Build Military Base In Somaliland-Media,” <https://southfront.org/russia-may-build-military-base-in-somaliland-media/>, April 4, 2018.

⁸⁷ Stephen Blank, “From Sochi To the Sahel: Russia’s Expanding Footprint,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, November 29, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/sochi-sahel-russias-expanding-footprint/> also in Real Clear Defense, November 30, 2017, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/11/30/russias_expanding_footprint_from_sochi_to_the_sahel_112703.html; David D. Kirkpatrick, “In Snub to U.S. Russia and Egypt Move toward Deal on Air Bases,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2017, www.nytimes.com.

⁸⁸ Isabella Ginor, and Gideon Remez. *Foxbats over Dimona: The Soviets’ Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007; Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War 1967-1973: The USSR’s Military Intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli Conflict*, London: Hurst Publishers, 2017.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁰ Theodore Karasik, “Russia’s Financial Tactics in the Middle East,” The Jamestown Foundation, December 20, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-financial-tactics-middle-east/>.

⁹¹ Henk Houweling and Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, "Introduction," Mehdi Parvizi Amineh and Henk Houweling, Eds., *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security, and Development*, International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology, Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2004, p. 15.

⁹² Ilan Berman, “Demography’s Pull on Russian Mideast Policy,” The Jamestown Foundation, March 8, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/demographys-pull-russian-mideast-policy/>; Valdai Discussion Club Analytical Report, 2013, www.valdaiclub.com, pp. 100–105.

⁹³ Leonid Gankin and Vladimir Serebryakov, “Islam Receives Vladimir Putin,” Moscow, *Kommersant*, in Russian, October 16, 2003, *FBIS SOV*, February 7, 2005.

⁹⁴ “Islam In Politics: Ideology Or Pragmatism?” pp. 100–105.

⁹⁵ Morena Skalamera and Andreas Goldthau, *Russia: Playing Hardball Or Bidding Farewell To Europe? Debunking the Myths of Eurasia's New Geopolitics of Gas*, Geopolitics of Energy Project, Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, Discussion Paper, 2016-03, June 2016.

⁹⁶ Corey Johnson and B. Matthew Derrick, "A Splintered Heartland: Russia, Europe and the Geopolitics of Networked Energy Infrastructure," *Geopolitics*, XVII, NO. 3, 2012, p. 495.

⁹⁷ Cited in Keir Giles, *Russian Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Carlisle Barracks, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2013, p. 26.

⁹⁸ "The Energy Fix With Nick Trickett," Bear Market Brief (BMB) Russia, www.fpri.com, August 7, 2018.

⁹⁹ Stephen Blank, "Energy and Russia's High-Stakes Game in Iraq," EGS Working Paper 2015-2-1, Center for Energy Governance and Security, Hanyang University, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Charis Chang, "Is the fight over a gas pipeline fuelling the world's bloodiest conflict?" <https://www.news.com.au/world/middle-east/is-the-fight-over-a-gas-pipeline-fuelling-the-worlds-bloodiest-conflict/news-story/74efc9554c10bd35e280b63a9afb74>, December 2, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Aurangzheb Qureshi, "The Qatar-Russia Energy Deal That Might Lead the Way To Peace In Syria," <https://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/can-qatar-russia-energy-ties-translate-peace-syria-1234735369>, December 21, 2016; "Russia and Qatar Discuss S-400 Missile Systems Deal TASS," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-qatar-arms/russia-and-qatar-discuss-s-400-missile-systems-deal-tass-idUSKBN1KB0F0>, July 21, 2018.

¹⁰² Jensen, "Russia in the Middle East," 2017.

¹⁰³ Stephen, Blank, "The Spirit of Eternal Negation: Russia's Hour in the Middle East," Stephen J. Blank, Ed., *Mediterranean Security Into the Coming Millennium*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1999, pp. 443–513.

¹⁰⁴ Matthews, "Russia Replaces America," 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Fyodor Lukyanov, "Why Iraq Refused Russian Arms," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, November 15, 2012, www.rbth.ru; Blank, "The Spirit of Eternal Negation: Russia's Hour in the Middle East," pp. 443–513.