

# per Concordiam

*Journal of European Security and Defense Issues*

■ **A SHIFTING WORLD ORDER**

What Moscow and Beijing want

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A complex interdependency

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How aligned are Russia and China?

PLUS

Nonstrategic nuclear weapons and the war in Ukraine

The High North and future global geopolitical dynamics

India's position in a post-Ukraine war world order



## **STRATEGIC COMPETITION** In The Modern Era

# features



## 7 Strategic Competition, World Order and the Recurring Role of Proxies

By **Dr. Graeme P. Herd**, Marshall Center professor, and **Matthew Funk**, researcher for the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy



## 10 Accomplice or Victim?

By **Pavlo Troian**, Marshall Center alumni scholar  
Is Belarus a Russia-Occupied Territory or Russian Ally?

## 16 Resilience After Russia's Invasion

By **Dr. Kseniya Sotnikova**, political officer, EU Advisory Mission, Ukraine  
How International Donor Programs Responded



## 22 Geopolitical Shifts in the Middle East

By **Dr. Tova Norlén**, Marshall Center professor  
How the War in Ukraine Impacts Russian Influence in the MENA Region

## 30 The Dragon and the Bear

By **Falk Tettweiler**, Marshall Center researcher and analyst  
The China-Russia Relationship is More Partnership of Convenience Than Alliance



## 34 Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons Deterrence and Russia's War on Ukraine

By **Dr. Pavel K. Baev**, nonresident senior fellow, the Brookings Institution, and research professor, Peace Research Institute Oslo

## 40 Arctic Dynamics in an Evolving World

By **Cmdr. Rachael Gosnell**, U.S. Navy, and **Dr. Katrin Bastian**, Marshall Center professor

## 48 The Strategic Triangle Post-Ukraine

By **Dr. Marcin Kaczmarek**, University of Glasgow lecturer, and **Dr. Vinay Kaura**, Marshall Center adjunct professor  
How Will the Russia-China-India Relationship Change?

## 52 Reshaping Russia After Ukraine

By **Lt. Cmdr. Travis Bean**, U.S. Navy  
Putin's War of Choice and What Comes Next

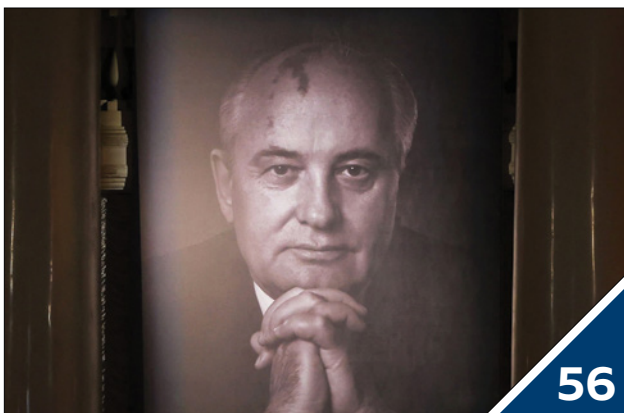
## 56 Putin's Abuse of Gorbachev's Legacy in Strategic Conflict

By **Dr. Graeme P. Herd**, Marshall Center professor

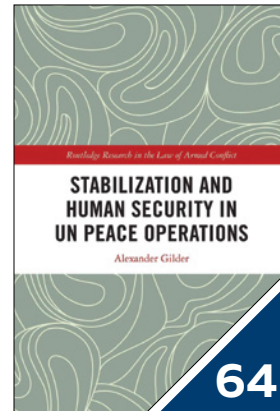
# departments

In Every Issue:

- 4 DIRECTOR'S LETTER
- 5 CONTRIBUTORS
- 7 VIEWPOINT
- 64 BOOK REVIEW
- 66 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS



## Book Review



### Stabilization and Human Security in UN Peace Operations

Written by: **Dr. Alexander Gilder**  
Reviewed by: **Dr. Karen Finkenbinder**,  
deputy associate dean, the Marshall  
Center

Peacekeeping operations that emphasize human security empower institutions and communities, and promote peaceful outcomes.

## On the Cover



Geostrategic rivalries are intensifying between the liberal West and revanchist powers such as China and Russia.

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**GEORGE C. MARSHALL**  
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*Welcome* to the 48th edition of *per Concordiam*. This edition focuses on the ongoing impact that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is having on the nature of strategic competition and on the shifting geopolitical power relations between key actors, such as Russia, China, India and Turkey, in different theaters, from the Arctic to the Middle East, to South and East Asia.

In the opening Viewpoint article, Marshall Center professor Dr. Graeme P. Herd and Matthew Funk, a researcher for the Munk School of Global Affairs, chart how post-Cold War contemporary strategic competition is still promoted through proxies, though the patron-client relationship has changed. Ukrainian diplomat Pavlo Troian addresses Russia's "occupation" of Belarus, while Ukrainian political analyst Dr. Kseniya Sotnikova examines how donors continue to provide Ukraine with assistance despite Russia's war of imperial aggression. Marshall Center professor Dr. Tova Norlén examines the war's impact on Russian influence in the Middle East-North Africa region and its attempts to leverage the region's vulnerabilities to exert influence.

Power relations among key actors are shifting. Falk Tettweiler, a Marshall Center researcher and analyst, sheds light on the Sino-Russian institutional axis. While Russia's military forces are degraded daily fighting trench warfare in Ukraine, China aims for complete modernization by 2027, with an emphasis on informatization and intelligent integration of its armed forces. Despite its threats, Russia is unlikely to cross the nonstrategic nuclear weapons-use threshold, Pavel Baev, a Brookings Institution nonresident senior fellow, argues, in part because it needs to maintain strategic relations with China. U.S. Navy Cmdr. Rachael Gosnell and fellow Marshall Center professor Katrin Bastian explore the shift from Arctic "High North, low tension" exceptionalism to freezing Russia out of regional cooperation, which creates greater incentives for Russia's dependency on China. Vinay Kaura, an assistant professor at Sadar Patel University in India, and Marcin Kaczmarek, a University of Glasgow lecturer, help unpack how the war in Ukraine has influenced the Russia-India-China strategic triangle, arguing that stronger Russia-China relations help India align with the West against China, if not Russia.

Russia's military performance in Ukraine raises the specter of military defeat and brings into question stability in Russia itself and the prospect of a post-Vladimir Putin period. U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Travis Bean highlights the need for thinking through the West's role in engaging a post-conflict Russia. This theme is emphasized in Marshall Center deputy associate dean Dr. Karen Finkenbinder's review of the book "Stabilization and Human Security in UN Peace Operations," which notes that the human security agenda is central to achieving long-term peace. Finally, Mikhail Gorbachev's death (August 30, 2022) prompts Dr. Herd to reflect on the distance traveled over the past three decades, from cooperation, arms reduction and negotiations that ended the Cold War, to Putin's promotion of crisis and conflict and Western strategic cooperation to counter it, exemplifying a tragic element inherent in strategic competition.

Sincerely,

Barre R. Seguin  
Director



## Barre R. Seguin

*Director, George C. Marshall  
European Center for Security  
Studies*

Barre R. Seguin retired from the U.S. Air Force as a major general in October 2020 after more than 31 years of active service. His last assignment was as the Deputy Chief of Staff, Strategic Employment, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, Belgium. He entered active duty in 1989 as a distinguished graduate of the Reserve Officer Training Corps after graduating from the State University of New York at Potsdam. His flying assignments included serving as a flight examiner, instructor pilot, wing chief of safety and operations officer, with commands at the squadron, group, wing, and Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force levels. His command and staff positions included Commander, 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force-Afghanistan and the NATO Air Command-Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan; Director, Strategy, Engagement, and Programs, U.S. Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany; Commander, 31st Fighter Wing, Aviano Air Base, Italy; and Inspector General, Headquarters Air Combat Command.



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## Strategic Competition

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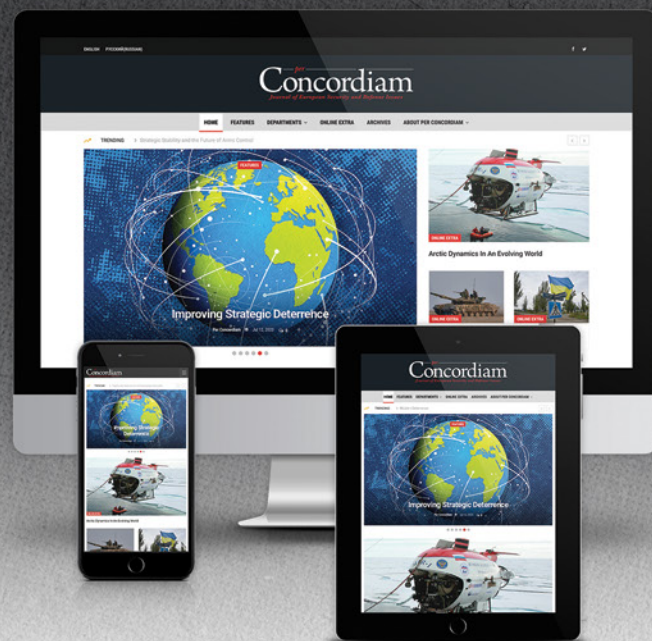
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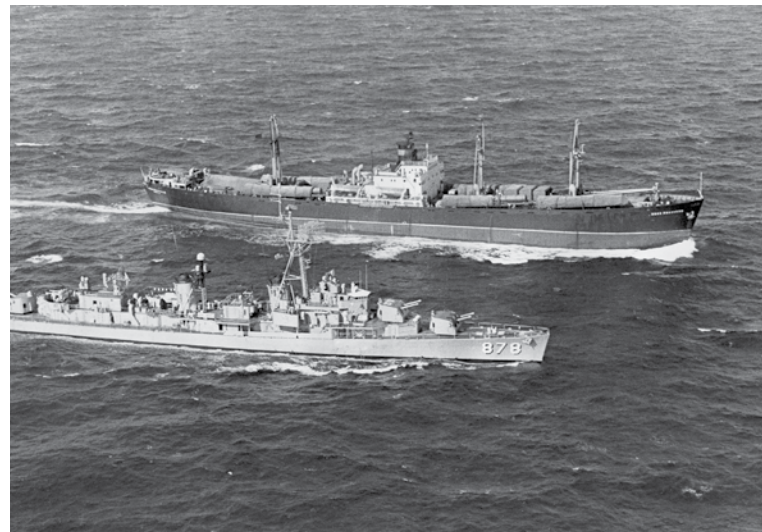


# STRATEGIC COMPETITION, WORLD ORDER AND THE RECURRING ROLE OF PROXIES

By **Dr. Graeme P. Herd**, Marshall Center professor, and **Matthew Funk**, researcher for the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy  
PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**A**fter World War II, the previously predominant way of direct, interstate warfare came to an end, replaced by indirect, irregular warfare, or war by proxy. The Cold War paradigm was defined by political-ideological competition, military confrontation and economic opposition between the First and Second worlds (the United States and its allies versus the Soviet Union and its allies), and as a struggle for influence in the nonaligned Third World, now understood as the Global South. The major proxy-war flashpoints in the Cold War were located outside the European theater and included the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cuban missile crisis and the Afghan-Soviet War. China was also an actor in this respect, with what Dominic Tierney, a professor of political science and senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, characterized as its “militant anti-imperialist (and anti-Soviet) foreign policy” and sponsorship of “wars of national liberation.” Superpowers avoided direct interventions that might lead to interstate conventional clashes that risked nuclear Armageddon by recruiting, training, arming and leading third-party military surrogates or proxy forces to further their interests and hamper or reduce those of the adversary. Ideologically driven insurgencies were the proxy wars of choice.

The following assumptions, conditions and characteristics appear to be common features of proxy wars in the modern era. Two or more parties have conflicting political-ideological, military or economic interests, leading to the proxy of third-party forces. In addition to domestic irregular armed forces that use violence (separatists, insurgents, paramilitaries, vigilantes and militias), proxies can include private military companies (PMC), transnational terrorist groups, transnational organized crime gangs and cartels and, more recently, “cyber warriors” or hackers for hire. The relationship between the external actor and the proxy is sustained through the provision of direct assistance, including lethal material aid, by the external actor to its proxy. Assistance from the external sponsor to the proxy is conditional and represents some sort of alignment between the aims of both parties against a common target.



A U.S. Navy destroyer, foreground, steams alongside a Soviet freighter outbound from Cuba after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

Proxy relationships suggest that the sponsor seeks a number of possible benefits, including reducing costs, limiting the risk of escalation to interstate conflict, obscuring casualties and avoiding legal challenges and political exposure. If the proxy sponsor remains unrecognized as a party to the conflict, it reserves the option to act as mediator (combining arsonist and fireman roles). State sponsors of proxies can use their own territory as a haven, base of operations, and training and recruitment facility. Proxy force conflicts are more manageable than interstate war. Many proxies offer additional benefits, such as their greater knowledge of local physical and human terrain, as well as specific tactical and operational capabilities that the external sponsor otherwise lacks.

## The End of the Cold War — In Search of a Paradigm?

After the collapse of the bipolar world order, proxy wars — and so proxies — continued to operate, with new ones emerging, but within a different international order paradigm. In this new order, the ideological constraints



A Falcon 9 SpaceX rocket carrying 60 Starlink satellites stands ready for launch at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, in 2020. Ukraine's military depends on the satellites.

of the Cold War became much less relevant. The stable balance-of-power system gave way to uncertainty, ambiguity and unpredictability. Old alliances withered and the seemingly enduring sets of patron-client relations were weakened. Resource wars and illicit political economies run by nonstate and state-sponsored actors increased. The assumptions of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, in their book “Power and Interdependence,” was that multilateral interstate negotiations between multiple actors would lead to complex interdependence — that is, reciprocal mutual cooperative gains, entanglements and the emergence of decentralized networks that generate new opportunities for cooperative diplomacy. Power would become “power with,” rather than “power over.” This understanding translated into the notion of market-democratic universalism in the 1990s as proposed by Francis Fukuyama in his “End of History” thesis. Within this paradigm of ever-expanding peace, proxy wars would be redundant. However, as economic interdependence increased and nuclear weapons proliferated, not least to South Asia (India and Pakistan), major interstate war became less likely. Global order became more uncertain, unpredictable and ambiguous.

By the early 2000s, in an increasingly multipolar and polycentric world, we could envisage a “Global Concert of Great Powers.” This would be the equivalent of the 19th century European Concert of Nations. In this world-order paradigm, a “Yalta-2” or “Helsinki III” conference of the five U.N. Security Council permanent members (P5) and India and Japan, which collectively represent 70% of global GDP, would exercise an influential leadership role on the world stage. Through transactional strategic dialogue and informal negotiation, this Global Concert would direct and manage the global strategic agenda (for example, over WMD proliferation, climate change, regional crises and terrorism), while each great power member of

the Concert would still be able to take unilateral action in its sphere of privileged interest. In this context, proxies would not have a global role — mitigation and management of such conflict would be the prerogative of resourced United Nations-mandated multilateral peace operations. Proxies would operate regionally, within their geographically defined spheres of influence, on behalf of the center. Their role would be to police elites, enforce the doctrine of limited sovereignty and discipline states within their spheres. Clearly this is not the case, as our case studies demonstrate.

Rather than a Global Concert, are we reaching a Cold War 2.0 inflection point as relations between the U.S. and its friends and allies on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other, rapidly deteriorate? If this is the case, we can expect that “proxy war” will also take on a Cold War 2.0 hue. However, national interests likely place limits on the inevitability of a slide into a new Cold War. First, unlike the late 1940s, the world is globalized and increasingly multipolar. In this context, Cold War-style “containment” is not possible. Second, in the current context of strategic competition short of war, the U.S. prioritizes countering China over Russia. From a U.S. perspective, countering China is enabled by the support of coalition partners, not least Germany, Japan and South Korea. Thus, trans-Atlantic unity is at a premium. This suggests a targeted Containment 2.0 in that the political West seeks to contain (or constrain) Russian aggressive and malign strategic behavior within stable and predictable lines. Moreover, a Russian alliance with China would expose Moscow’s asymmetric dependencies on Beijing and render Russia a junior partner within a Sino-centric bloc (Pax Sinica 2.0), with little or no strategic autonomy.

By the 21st century, key global economic networks have converged toward “hub and spoke” systems, with important consequences for power relations. Adversaries, understanding the structure of internet, food or energy supply networks, can directly — or using proxies — exploit network chokepoints to weaponize interdependence. Analysts point to 50 “black spots” globally where we witness the entangled threats of crime, corruption and terrorism. At a national level, transnational organized crime groups try to infiltrate state structures to protect themselves from, and so avoid, state law enforcement intervention. But internationally, and in the context of strategic competition, a state can seek to expand and institutionalize its malign sphere of influence, as Pavlo Troian’s article on Russia’s “occupation” of Belarus in this edition of *per Concordiam* illustrates, or strengthen the statehood (territorial integrity and sovereignty) and resilience of democratic partners, as Dr. Kseniya Sotnikova’s contribution to this edition makes clear.

Civil wars evolve into multiple proxy wars waged by regional and global actors. Regional crises and fragile states are driven by economic and demographic inequalities, the rise of ethnic and sectarian violence, climate change, the growth of technology and the failure of current institutions



to respond. Given the proliferation of nuclear weapons and rise of global economic interdependence, as during the Cold War, states avoid direct interstate war and advance strategic competition through various proxies, including militarily capable ones. For example, in this digital age of space-enabled warfare, SpaceX shapes Ukraine's ability to wage war because Ukraine is dependent on the U.S. company's Starlink satellite network for military communications and command and control. Market principles apply: demand signals (sponsors in need of proxies) generate supply (proxies). Increased financing, expanded recruitment opportunities based on a glut of foreign fighters, and more advanced communication technologies enabled the emergence of more lethally capable (e.g., drones, cyber weapons and antiship missiles) PMCs, such as Blackwater (U.S.), the Wagner Group (Russia) and SADAT (Turkey), and other proxies.

### The New G-Zero World Order Paradigm

These trends, drivers and dynamics highlight the difficulties of a group of states exerting leadership and management of the global strategic agenda. The U.N. Security Council is increasingly paralyzed by the use of the P5's veto power. This world order can be termed G-Zero, i.e., a group in which no members lead; or put another way, leadership of the global strategic agenda is absent. A G-Zero world order favors states that thrive in ambiguity, unpredictability and contestation, where transactionalism is the order of the day. States with well-developed alliance systems are disadvantaged, while states without (not least, Russia, China and North Korea) are freer to maneuver. A Russia in decline can participate in asymmetric competition by embracing asymmetric strategies and the use of proxies, irregular warfare and hybrid tools to close the gap. States with a spoiler-role ability and a higher tolerance for risk-taking thrive and flourish. A G-Zero world order best secures and protects the influence of a Russia in power decline relative to China. Russia cannot achieve G3 status and can hardly accept unipolarity, or even bipolarity, if it cannot be one of the poles. Russia's order-producing and managerial role in its shared neighborhood is increasingly compromised by third parties, not least the European Union, Turkey and China. This G-Zero world order is the default and most likely outcome of current confrontation, systemic rivalry and strategic competition.

Given that a G-Zero world order will be heavily shaped by the nature of Sino-Russian strategic alignment, what are the trends for and significance of proxy war? A Xi-Putin summit on February 4, 2022, declared a friendship with "no limits" and "no forbidden areas of cooperation," and described the nexus between the two as superior to Cold War alliances. We see multifaceted, broad security and other policy coordination between China and Russia, facilitated by respective State Council-Security Council and Xi-Putin dialogue.

China and Russia have not formed a treaty-based alliance with mutual defense commitments for defensive or offensive military collaboration against shared threats. They retain their strategic autonomy, flexibility and policy independence. They do, though, share a great-power pragmatic alignment based on a common interest of providing a strategic counterweight versus the U.S. hegemony/liberal international order. However, China and Russia have different development trajectories and so there is no "deep-rooted and long-lasting convergence" between them. Rather, China determines the level/tempo of bilateral engagement and as Russia becomes less integrated in the global economy, cooperation becomes more challenging for China — there is no replacement for the Western market. Russia aligns its positions with India, Japan and Southeast Asia to counterbalance China's geopolitical influence and become a third pole and leader of a new Non-Aligned Movement.



The PMC Wagner Center, an office complex associated with Yevgeny Prigozhin, founder of the Wagner private military group, during the center's opening in St. Petersburg, Russia, in November 2022.

### Conclusions

China, as a core contemporary external sponsor of proxy groups, builds on a rich Cold War history of proxy use. But today, China's use of proxies has broadened to include PMCs guarding One Belt, One Road projects and shadow "police stations" abroad to monitor its own diaspora. It embraces cyber actors and algorithmic authoritarian surveillance. But China and Russia seek different global orders — Beijing wants a revisionist, stable sphere-of-influence system in which China exercises global leadership via control of Asia, but Moscow wants a revolutionary G-Zero world order of uncertainty and crisis with no global leadership. As a result, proxy wars fought to prevent escalation are pregnant with the risk of accidental and unintended escalation. □



# ACCOMPLICE



# VICTIM?

## *Is Belarus a Russia-Occupied Territory or Russian Ally?*

By **Pavlo Troian**, Marshall Center alumni scholar

**W**hat is the extent of Belarus' participation in Russian aggression against Ukraine? It was from Belarus that Russian troops invaded the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Zhytomyr regions of Ukraine in February 2022, reaching Bucha, where they committed an infamous massacre. It was from Belarus that Russian troops entered, shelled and captured the Chernobyl power plant — with its spent nuclear fuel storage facilities and its new confinement shell, which prevents radiation leaking from the melted-down reactor — thereby risking nuclear contamination.

From the very beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, there have been missile attacks from Belarusian territory on Ukraine. The U.S. Department of Defense confirmed this as early as March 3, 2022. On February 27, 2022,

President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus attends joint Russia-Belarus military exercises outside Minsk on February 17, 2022, just days before Russia invaded Ukraine from Belarusian territory.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

even Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko admitted to such missile strikes.

According to some reports, missiles also were fired at Ukraine from Belarus on Ukrainian Independence Day

in August 2022, a few days after Lukashenko had cynically congratulated the Ukrainian people on the holiday, wishing "A peaceful sky above their heads."

Belarus also provided and continues to provide numerous substantial forms of support for Russia's war, as well as provision of logistics and military infrastructure. After the invasion began, a significant number of Russian soldiers wounded in Ukraine were treated in Belarusian military and civilian hospitals, as confirmed by Lukashenko. Belarusian service members and civilians were also involved in organizing the transportation and burial of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine. Russian-mobilized troops receive training at Belarusian training grounds. Belarus also apparently supplies ammunition, missiles and military equipment to the Russian army, shares intelligence, maintains and repairs damaged Russian military vehicles and aircraft, and provides various other forms of support.

However, as of September 2023, there had been no clear evidence confirming the presence of regular Belarusian army units in Ukraine. In addition, there is no information indicating that Belarusian troops have shelled Ukrainian territory.

## Legal Understanding?

Given what is known, is there legal evidence of Belarus' complicity in Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine? In fact, international humanitarian law has no clear definition of "complicity in aggression." Dozens of research papers have been written on this topic in which the authors discuss legal and political aspects and provide various definitions of this term. One can find more on this topic in such books as "Complicity and the Law of State Responsibility," by Helmut Philip Aust, "Complicity in International Law," by Miles Jackson, or "Complicity and its Limits in the Law of International Responsibility," by Vladyslav Lanovoy.

Because the purpose of this article is not to delve into the subtleties of international humanitarian law, we will instead look at some definitions from international legal documents regarding what constitutes complicity in aggression.

On December 14, 1974, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 3314 (XXIX) as a nonbinding recommendation to the U.N. Security Council on how to define the crime of aggression. Article 3 of the resolution contains a list of acts that qualify as aggression. Paragraph (f) of Article 3 states: "The action of a State in allowing its territory, which it has placed at the disposal of another State, to be used by that other State for perpetrating an act of aggression against a third State." This clearly implicates Belarus, which openly offered its territory to Russia to be used for the invasion of Ukraine.

In addition, in 2001 the U.N. International Law Commission adopted the Articles on the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA). The U.N. General Assembly commended ARSIWA to governments later that year. The General Assembly has yet to formally adopt ARSIWA, however, according to Chatham House's Harriet Moynihan, it instead commends them to the attention of governments on a regular basis.

ARSIWA includes Article 16 on the responsibility of states

that aid or assist internationally unlawful acts by other states, which declares: "A State which aids or assists another State in the commission of an internationally wrongful act by the latter is internationally responsible for doing so if: (a) that State does so with knowledge of the circumstances of the internationally wrongful act; and (b) the act would be internationally wrongful if committed by that State." This is also applicable to Belarus, as Minsk has publicly acknowledged its awareness of Moscow's intentions to attack Ukraine.

It can also be stipulated that Belarus violates Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter, which requires member states to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state; as well as violating Article 41 of ARSIWA, which requires states to refrain from providing assistance to violations of peremptory norms of international law, such as the prohibition of aggression.

Some experts may note that certain forms of Belarus' support for Russian aggression against Ukraine may not be considered as complicity in aggression. For example, Siarhei Bohdan, from the Friedrich Meinecke Institute of History at the Freie Universität Berlin, points out that from the perspective of international humanitarian law, to aid injured Russian soldiers does not equate to complicity in the war. That may be so, in that particular case. However, Belarus has been supporting Russia's war in so many ways and over such a long period of time, that it is difficult to argue against Minsk's complicity in the war as a whole.

Perhaps it is the variety of Belarus' forms of support for Russia's war against Ukraine that has caused several international organizations, such as the European Union and the Council of Europe, to classify it as an accomplice of aggression. The EU, in particular, linked its adoption in 2022 of several packages of sectoral sanctions against Minsk with Belarusian complicity in the war. The United States also imposed sanctions for Belarus' participation in Russian aggression against Ukraine.

However, the primary international legal document confirming Belarus' complicity is U.N. General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1, adopted on March 2, 2022. In the resolution, the U.N. General Assembly "deplores the involvement of Belarus in this unlawful use of force against Ukraine and calls upon it to abide by its international obligations." This resolution was supported by 141 countries, including practically all the countries of Europe and most of the states of Asia, Africa, the



A Russian Yars ballistic nuclear missile on a mobile launcher rolls through Red Square in Moscow during Victory Day parade rehearsals in 2018. GETTY IMAGES



Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, left, speaks with Belarusian counterpart Viktor Khrenin in Minsk several weeks before Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Ukrainian Border Guard members patrol near Ukraine's border with Belarus and Russia. GETTY IMAGES

Pacific Islands and the Americas. Only Belarus, Russia, North Korea, Eritrea and Syria voted against. The passing of this resolution certainly refutes the argument that only the West has condemned Russia's war of aggression, and it acknowledges the complicity of Belarus in this war.

Of the well-established international organizations, only the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in a report dated April 12, 2022, states that Belarus is not a participant in the war. Accordingly, relevant quotes from this OSCE report were widely circulated by the Belarusian state media. However, in later reports, the OSCE states that Russia's war against Ukraine is "supported by Belarus."

### Does Russia fully occupy Belarus?

In March 2022, Belarusian opposition leader Pavel Latushka called for Belarus to be recognized as under temporary Russian occupation. In May 2023, opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya repeated this call, requesting that the U.N. make such a determination and continue to tighten sanctions on the Lukashenka regime. A similar resolution has been proposed in Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada. Moreover, European Parliament Resolution P9\_TA(2022)0418, which was adopted on November 24, 2022, also states that Belarus "should be recognized as an occupied or de facto occupied territory by Russia." Some Belarusian opposition politicians, such as Zyanon Paznyak, suggest that not only is their country occupied, but also that the Russian Federation may go so far as to annex it.

There is a separate section of international humanitarian law called "occupation law." It defines the rights and obligations of the occupying party and largely focuses on ensuring the rights and freedoms of the inhabitants of a territory that is under occupation. At the same time, when it comes to defining what actually constitutes an occupation, international organizations and courts are still largely guided by the 1907 Hague Regulations (HR) concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. Article 42 of the HR states that a "territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised." As we can see in the HR, an occupation is directly linked to an army and hostilities. International organizations also often refer to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. In this treaty, the connection between occupation and war is attenuated. Article 2 of the Convention provides that



Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and other Belarusian opposition leaders want international organizations to designate Belarus as an occupied country.

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the convention “shall apply even to an occupation that meets with no armed resistance.”

At the same time, studies by many acclaimed scholars and practicing lawyers clearly demonstrate that in most cases, actual occupying powers deny they are engaged in an occupation and often do not create formal occupation administrations. Instead, they tend to use proxies, establish puppet states or governments, or directly annex parts (or all) of the territory of the occupied state. In particular, according to Cambridge University international law professor Eyal Benvenisti in his book “The International Law of Occupation,” occupiers will rarely acknowledge the status of the occupant because such an acknowledgment limits their future actions and claims regarding the ultimate status of the territory.

Exiled Belarusian opposition members wave the pre-Soviet Belarusian flag in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2021 in protest of the Minsk government.

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So, what is an occupation? International humanitarian law in this matter cannot rely on the 1907 HR, a document more than a century old that concentrated more on the rights of monarchs than ordinary citizens. Because there is no single, universally accepted definition of this term, let us take a look at two definitions offered by established researchers.

David M. Edelstein, a professor of international affairs at Georgetown University in Washington, proposes in his book “Occupational Hazards: Success and Failure in Military Occupation,” that “occupation is the temporary control of a territory by another state that claims no right to permanent sovereign control over that territory. An occupying power must intend at the onset of the occupation to vacate the occupied territory and return control to an indigenous government. A precise date for evacuation need not be specified, but the occupying power’s intention must not be to stay indefinitely.”

However, in his book, Benvenisti defines occupation as “the effective control of a power (be it one or more states or an international organization, such as the United Nations) over a territory to which that power has no sovereign title, without the volition of the sovereign of that territory.”

Benvenisti’s definition is more apt, as it does not focus on the intent or lack of intent of the occupier to return control of the territory to the domestic government (this may vary depending on the political and military situation). However, neither definition implies mandatory military control by the occupier of a particular territory or a precursory military



conflict, but focuses instead on effective control. In this regard, one can also give an example of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission, established with the mediation of the U.N. The Commission claimed that “the international law of occupation does not suggest that ‘only territory the title to which is clear and uncontested can be occupied territory.’”

There have been numerous examples in history of occupations without armed resistance or preceding military conflict, such as the occupations by Nazi Germany of Czechoslovakia in 1939 and of Denmark in 1940. Occupation can also come as a result of an armistice — the occupation of the Rhineland by Belgium, France and the United Kingdom, which lasted 12 years from 1918 to 1930, was the result of a truce — or as a result of a peace agreement or the surrender of one of the parties to war, such as the occupations of Germany and Japan after World War II. According to the faulty premise of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Germany is still occupied by the United States because U.S. troops have been stationed there since World War II. However, as just explained, occupation is not determined solely by the presence or absence of foreign troops on the territory of a state, but also by who has political authority and control over the state. In the case of Germany, the U.S. military handed over control to democratically elected German government authorities in its zone of occupation as early as 1949.

Returning to Belarus’ situation, none of the above cases is 100% analogous. Belarus was not in an armed conflict with Russia and was not invaded, nor did its government yield control because of an enemy ultimatum. Russian troops are in Belarus with the approval the Belarusian government. However, the legitimacy of the Belarusian authorities — contested by much of the citizenry after the presidential election of 2020 (labeled as neither free nor fair by international observers) and the following protests — when the government arrested opposition leaders and more than 30,000 protesters — is a different matter.

Thus, can Belarus be considered occupied or even annexed as the Belarusian opposition has suggested? As for annexation, definitely not, because this term implies a formal accession to another state. This has not happened, at least not yet. The question of a de facto occupation is more complicated. There is no need for an armed conflict, or even direct military control, to recognize a country as occupied. There simply needs to be effective control of the territory and state authority of Belarus by Russia.

Russia certainly has significant influence on Belarus in the economic, political, military and other spheres. However, it cannot be said that Moscow completely controls Belarus. The country retains its own authorities, including the police and the army. Belarus is still represented in the international arena, including major international organizations. In international relations, the policies of the Belarusian authorities, although often following closely those of Moscow, still differ in a number of areas. For international authorities to recognize Belarus as an occupied country, at this stage, would be a political act rather than an indisputable fact under international humanitarian law.

## Conclusions

The current absence of clear evidence that the Belarusian military has conducted operations on or into the territory of Ukraine and the unclear definition of “complicity” in aggression in international law complicate efforts to define Belarus’ role in Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Perhaps, based on this and also political reasons, many nations are in no hurry to charge Belarus with complicity in Russia’s aggression. Nevertheless, Minsk’s provision of comprehensive support to the Kremlin is objectively interpreted by many authoritative international organizations, as well as Western states, as complicity in Russian aggression against Ukraine. The clear evidence of complicity has already been explicitly documented in U.N. General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1, which was approved by a vast majority of the countries represented in the General Assembly.

Belarus’ role in the war is confirmed by the intention to create a special tribunal to legally prosecute the crime of aggression against Ukraine, which if created, would probably target Belarus in addition to Russia. On January 19 and 26, 2023, resolutions on this issue, in which Russia and Belarus are mentioned, were adopted by the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, respectively.

As for the occupation of Belarus by Russia, there is insufficient legal and factual evidence to make such a determination and, most importantly, there is no practical reason to do so today, as it will deprive Minsk of the remnants of subjectivity and room for maneuver. After all, if a country is occupied, all diplomatic missions should be closed and diplomatic relations conducted only with the occupier, i.e., Russia. In any case, Moscow and Minsk would obviously not recognize such a determination. Moreover, such a determination at this stage may provide Moscow with additional arguments for the practical implementation of the actual occupation and annexation of Belarus.

Recently, Belarus has attracted additional attention because of Russia’s announced deployment of nuclear weapons on its territory. At the same time, it is obvious that Russia will not give control over these weapons to the Belarusian government. Some analysts suggest that Putin plans to extort the West with the possibility of a nuclear strike from Belarus. Nobody wants to believe that such a plan would ever be implemented. However, even the possibility of a nuclear strike from Belarusian territory could intensify discussions about recognizing Belarus as an occupied country.

The situation may change if Russia is shown to have obvious interference in Belarusian affairs, such as deposing Lukashenko and installing a puppet leader who would announce the unification of Belarus and the Russian Federation. Another example might be if the Belarusian army were used in a direct attack on Ukraine while Lukashenko admits that he is not fully in command. In these scenarios, it would be more in accordance with international norms for Belarus to be recognized as an occupied nation and would provide opportunities to address the liberation of the country. □



# RESILIENCE

AFTER RUSSIA'S INVASION



# HOW INTERNATIONAL DONOR PROGRAMS RESPONDED

By **Dr. Kseniya Sotnikova**, political officer, EU Advisory Mission, Ukraine

PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Since 2014, Ukraine has witnessed a massive inflow of international aid, including from donor organizations (DO) encouraging reforms that can help lead the country to NATO and European Union membership. But Russia's brutal invasion in February 2022 presented DOs with multiple challenges, including personal security threats, unprecedented strategic issues and their ability to deliver on their core objectives. Some were unable to proceed and closed their offices in Ukraine, some managed to have an impact remotely through existing networks of Ukrainian associates, and some continued working by amending their procedures and/or priorities. Now, well over a year later, it is possible to assess the resilience of the DOs that continued to deliver on their mandates despite the shocks caused by the full-scale invasion and to identify the factors that ensured their ability to adapt to this "new normal."

February 2022 was a turning point that disrupted the strategic and operational framework of the DOs.

However, each was affected differently, and their responses differed as well. The areas in which the organizations faced the greatest difficulties are indicators of their vulnerabilities. An inability to continue working in a previous mode is an indication of a certain barrier. Some organizations managed to overcome these barriers and adapted to the new circumstances, thus demonstrating a "nurtured resilience." While analyzing this adaptation, the resilience factors should be considered as the conditions and actions that allowed certain DOs to overcome, or find a way around, these barriers. Within this conceptual framework, we can analyze the resilience of the DOs, detect the factors that allowed them to bounce back, and reshape the protocols and policies in order to adapt to the new strategic and operational framework.

This research is based on wide empirical data collected through personal interviews with top managers, project coordinators, program analysts and advisers, procurement specialists, and other incumbent and



Greek soldiers at Athens International Airport load a plane with humanitarian aid after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

former employees of 10 DOs of differing scales that were operating in Ukraine in February 2022. While the data provided by these interlocutors is limited to their experiences, and does not cover the full scope of the donor community, these DOs represent most of the categories of donors working in the country: bilateral and multilateral, local and global, working with either nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or Ukrainian state agencies, and cover a wide range of issues in their project activities (security, anticorruption, legal, educational, gender, humanitarian, etc.) Their cases have multiple similarities. Given the variations in size, scope, funding and presence, this selection can be considered representative, and the trends identified illustrate the larger processes. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, the information obtained from the interviewees is presented without reference to specific experiences.

### REACTIONS TO THE INVASION: EVACUATION, REASSESSMENT, ADAPTATION

On February 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine on multiple fronts, massive evacuations started. Local DO staffs either left Ukraine with most other non-Ukrainians or settled in the western regions of the country (due to financial constraints, family commitments, and also because Ukrainian men from 18 to 60 years old were prohibited from traveling abroad by the newly imposed martial law).

DO managers had to deal with multiple challenges in conditions of extreme uncertainty (security, political, informational and operational). This critical phase had two main stages:

#### 1. Ensuring the physical security/relocation of the staff. The DOs handled this in different ways.

- **Ensured the relocation prior to February 24.** After learning an invasion may occur, staff were moved from Kyiv and other regions with high security risks and teleworking policies were introduced.
- **Had clear evacuation plans implemented on February 24.** These plans differed among DOs and covered the relocation of international and local staff, evacuation routes, and communication channels.
- **Had no clear evacuation plans.** These DOs left it up to staff to deal with their immediate transportation and other needs.

#### 2. Making a strategic political decision.

- Discontinue or suspend work.
- Or continue to support and cooperate with Ukrainian interlocutors, understanding that this would require rapid adaptation and multiple changes.

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Deadly Russian rocket attacks, like this one in Kharkiv, Ukraine, put aid workers at risk.



The DOs that decided to pursue the cooperation scenario faced multiple challenges:

- 1. Preexisting strategic and operational frameworks proved irrelevant.** Some planned projects were impossible to deliver because of the security situation in the regions where the projects were supposed to take place, or because of a change in the priorities of the Ukrainian beneficiaries (many people either joined Ukraine's armed forces or evacuated).
- 2. Lack of long-term strategies.**
- 3. Communication/coordination issues.** Staff relocated chaotically, establishing new working conditions and work redistribution took time. Some local staff moved to regions where the DOs hadn't been engaged before, which opened possibilities for new activities. Communications with the Ukrainian beneficiaries were unstable and some submitted inconsistent requests. In addition, if a project was registered with the Ukrainian government as "international technical aid," substantial changes to the project required its reregistration with the country's Cabinet of Ministers. Previous logistical chains were mostly broken. Some DOs referred requests for humanitarian aid to their international partners.
- 4. Bureaucracy.** Internal bureaucratic procedures at DOs caused delays or blocked certain aid deliverables. For instance, when it came to ordering goods that were in high demand (such as first aid kits, personal protection equipment and generators), the regular procurement procedures could be complex, while other buyers (NGOs and individuals) could ensure fast payments, including in cash, making it impossible for the DOs to compete. Ukrainian legislation had not yet adapted to address issues related to importing aid from abroad, and custom clearance procedures delayed deliveries.
- 5. Capacity limitations.** There were limits in the quantitative aspects (lack of staff), and the qualitative ones. In this new operational environment, the DOs needed additional knowledge and expertise that sometimes could not be provided by the in-house specialists. New projects emerged with specific procurement items and required technical knowledge. The revised priorities and goals of the DOs often caused internal restructuring in accordance with new lines of operations, creating new units and the hiring of subject-matter professionals or the retraining of existing staff.
- 6. Limited finances.** In order to deliver on the projects identified as new priorities, the DOs had to either repurpose money from other projects or use additional funding from partner missions.

By the summer of 2022, the operational environment was relatively stable, and mid- and long-term planning

became possible. The organizations/projects that discontinued their activities had to terminate the contracts with their local staff, many of whom were later hired by the DOs remaining in Ukraine, thus improving their expert capacity. The DOs resumed their regular project activity and by end of 2022 had finalized their internal structural changes and revised project master plans. New projects appeared, including in regions that previously weren't covered. Bureaucratic procedures became routine again (some of the DOs had temporarily introduced more flexible formats for applying for and/or reporting aid, as well as simplified hiring procedures).



Workers with the international GloBee organization distribute aid in Kupiansk, Ukraine.

The DOs had to come up with individual solutions for their staff working abroad. Some kept operating in a fully remote or hybrid format. Others set deadlines for staff to decide whether they would prefer to return to Ukraine or terminate their contracts. Around these deadlines (mostly August to October 2022), the DOs had numerous vacancies because employees from the local and international staffs had security concerns. Thus, the DOs had a one-time significant inflow of new staff, which required some adaptation. As they did during the chaotic period right after the full-scale invasion, most of the DOs offered assistance to their existing networks of Ukrainian beneficiaries and experts. This built a new level of trust and set the tone for further cooperation.

## LESSONS LEARNED: IMPLICATIONS

Based on the trends identified in the previous section, we can assess the DOs in terms of their vulnerability and resilience. Building on existing studies, we adopt the definition of vulnerability as exposure to exogenous shocks, and associate resilience with actions enabling an institution to withstand or recover from the negative

# THE DONOR COMMUNITY THAT MAINTAINED COOPERATION WITH THEIR UKRAINIAN BENEFICIARIES MANAGED TO MAINTAIN WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS, STREAMLINE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COORDINATION AND RESTRUCTURE PROJECT ACTIVITIES.

effects of shock. With regard to the DOs operating in Ukraine since February 2022, it is possible to identify:

## 1. Vulnerability factors

- **Complex decision-making formats.** This applies to both strategic decisions (whether to continue the mandate of the organization), and operational ones (how to redistribute funds, what lines of activity to terminate or launch). This is where it is important to consider the belief system (values) of the organization and its leadership because they directly affected the pace and the subject-matter outcome of decisions made during the most turbulent period after the invasion.

- **Vulnerabilities deriving from the physical location of the DOs' headquarters and regional offices.**
- **Dependance on logistical chains that lacked diversification.**

However, the main factor that caused exposure of the DOs to shocks from the invasion was either a lack of emergency plans, or poor operational preparedness to implement them.

## 2. Resilience factors

- **Morale of the staff.**
- **Relocation options.** An availability of regional offices farther from the fighting and

Volunteers clear rubble from a house destroyed by Russian bombs near Chernihiv, Ukraine, in August 2022. International organizations rushed to help with rebuilding.



organizations' ability to open temporary offices abroad (e.g., in Poland) helped streamline adaptation.

- **Ability to expand capacity** by hiring new staff, creating new positions and outsourcing some tasks.
- **Previously established telework formats** that were mostly set up in 2020-2021 while adapting to the limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Flexibility of internal procedures.** Independence in project managers' decision-making (e.g., to repurpose funds, rearrange project master lists, reassign tasks to the relocated staff) and the ability to temporarily simplify bureaucratic procedures for the beneficiaries (e.g., applications for aid and reporting of its use).
- **Levels of bureaucracy.** The NGOs on the receiving end were more flexible than the Ukrainian public institutions.
- **Access to networks.** It was easier for the DOs that relied on their previously established liaisons in Ukraine (with other donors, Ukrainian partners, experts and vendors), and with partnering DOs if they were a part of a global network.

Apart from the high morale of staff, which was a key driver through the most difficult period, the main factor facilitating adaptations was the availability of previously established protocols and connections to help the DOs bounce back faster.

It is also possible to assess the DOs' work over 2022-2023 in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness. Because efficiency is a productivity metric — looking at the ability to produce the result while investing the most optimal set of resources possible — it focuses on operational means used and/or wasted during the strategy implementation. In the cases studied in this research, the DOs had little possibility to ensure an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs, or to eliminate additional costs to achieve goals. On the contrary, the delivery of strategic and operational results was often delayed and the planning itself was volatile, sometimes changing final project goals during the implementation phase. The DOs also had to outsource some activities when they lacked capacity, which induced additional spending. Also, during the critical initial phase, many DOs chose to keep paying staff and beneficiaries, regardless of their practical input into the program/project activity, to maintain existing capacity and relationships.

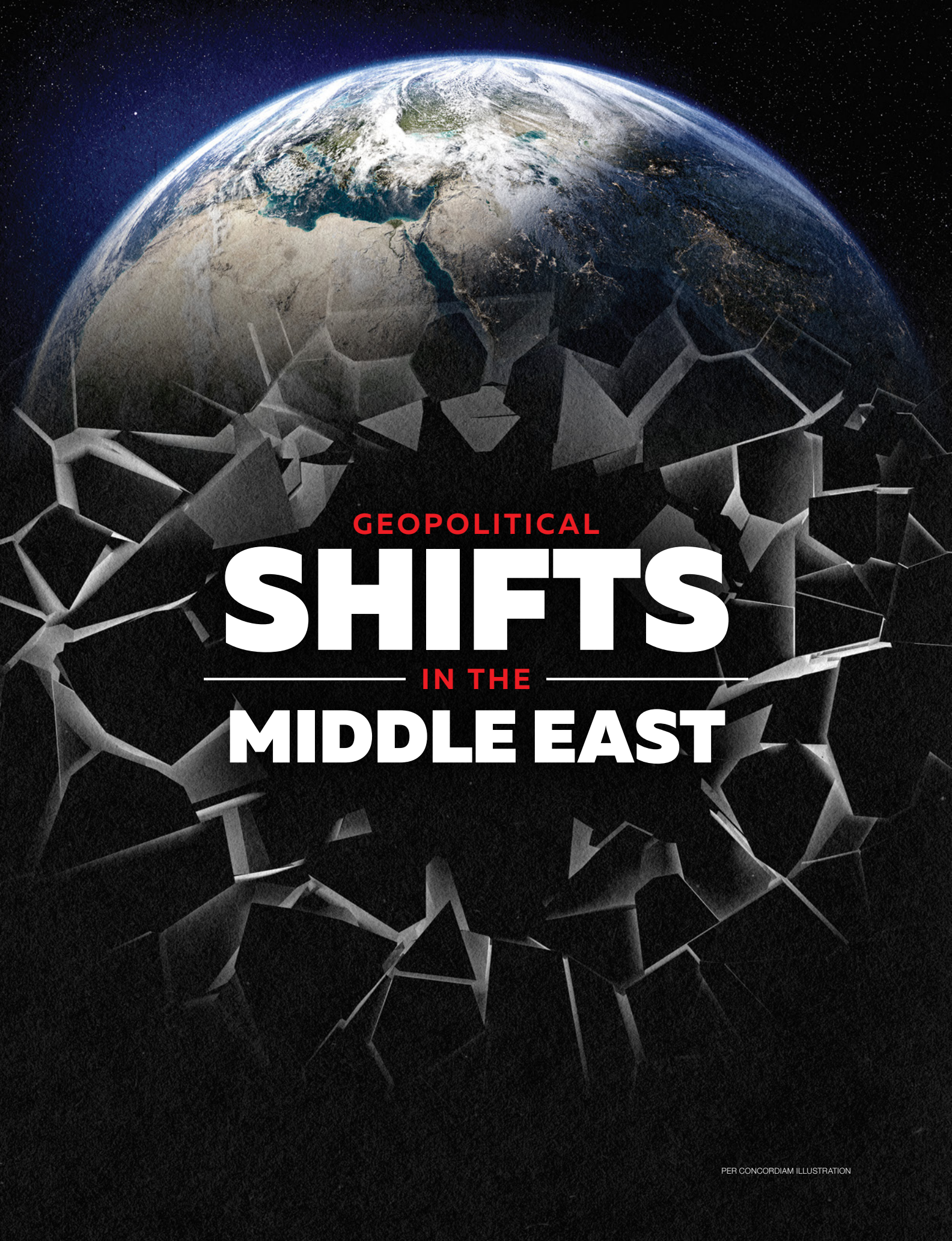
Effectiveness is evaluated against the ability to ensure the final result, and is a metric of quality. It also considers whether an organization's activities have improved its position (including in the reputational aspect). The common goal of the DOs working in

Ukraine is to bring the country closer to the best democratic standards. This supersedes the fact that concrete project-related goals and timelines were changed due to the restructuring of project activities and/or initial delays caused by uncertainties and bureaucracies.

The donor community that maintained cooperation with their Ukrainian beneficiaries managed to maintain working relationships with partners, streamline internal and external coordination, and restructure project activities. The DOs continued helping Ukraine in its resistance to Russia's aggression and in enacting reforms that continued even during 2022.

While most of the DOs had returned to regular project and program activities before the end of 2022, it is important to dwell on the lessons learned from the shock of Russia's invasion, which proved to be a stress test for every DO in the country. This paper's findings have demonstrated that a key factor facilitating the resilience of the DOs was preparation: the availability of previously established formats, protocols and connections. It is highly advantageous for DOs operating in a volatile security context to develop plans, instructions and protocols that can be activated in a critical moment, saving time and effort and thus improving the organizations' resilience:

- **Create security protocols for different threat levels, including preventive relocation and evacuation options** (taking into account different escape possibilities for local and international staff).
- **Plan for how to act after the evacuation** (communication channels, teleworking instructions).
- **Create emergency internal protocols for simplifying bureaucratic procedures** (as a temporary solution only). This includes flexibility for beneficiaries in terms of application for and reporting of aid, as well as for the DO project managers, to give them more freedom in decision-making on repurposing funds and changing project master plans. Human resources should also have options to utilize special contracts and/or other formats to bypass hiring processes. This should come with a clear approval chain in place to prevent abuse of the simplified procedures.
- **Improve coordination among donors to prevent overlapping efforts.**
- **Streamline coordination with local authorities.** The DOs could conduct preliminary negotiations with host countries about simplifying bureaucratic procedures should a crisis erupt. This could refer to the registration of international technical aid projects (and the ability to rapidly change their specifications), and the possibility of modifying custom clearance procedures for certain critical goods (basing the list on risk assessments). Here, as in the previous suggestions for internal DO rules, a system of checks and balances needs to be introduced to prevent the misuse of these options. □



GEOPOLITICAL

# SHIFTS

— IN THE —

# MIDDLE EAST

# How the war in Ukraine impacts Russian influence in the MENA region

By Dr. Tova Norlén, Marshall Center professor

**R**ussia's history in the Arab world goes back to the 1950s, when the Arab-Israel wars drove Arab states into the arms of the Soviet Union. Although there is evidence of shifting threat perceptions and openness to diplomatic relations with the West, it is difficult for many Arab states to fully disengage from that historic partnership and also risky to upset a carefully crafted diplomatic strategy that keeps both Russia and the United States involved as either guarantors or arms suppliers.

Russia still has influence in the Middle East, but its war against Ukraine significantly limits policy choices and/or maneuverability in the region. Russia's diminished clout is in turn impacting the Middle East on three levels: strategically, diplomatically and socioeconomically, creating heightened tensions and interlinked threats to the region's stability. On the strategic level, Russia's preoccupation with Ukraine is contributing to substantial geopolitical shifts and new alliance formations that could further heighten regional tensions. Diplomatically, crosscutting ties, competing loyalties, and conflicting national and sectarian interests have reached new levels of complexity. As a result, most states in the region have opted to stay neutral in a war that pits major global powers on opposite sides. Vulnerabilities created from a variety of economic shocks have led to a steep decline in human security (including the impact of the Black Sea grain crisis), making the region more fragile than ever and arguably at greater risk for political violence.

As the U.S. began to signal a desire for a more indirect leadership role in the Middle East, there was concern among partners and allies in the region that it would lead to a security vacuum that could be exploited by illiberal regional regimes and/or larger hegemonic powers. To preserve the balance of power and deter Iran, the region's major "status quo" powers, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), realized that they share an interest in the creation of a regional security architecture. The Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE were a result of these shared goals. At the same time, drivers of political violence in the region are increasing, even as dynastic and autocratic regimes uphold the macro-level status quo. Russia still exerts influence politically and militarily through direct intervention (Syria and Libya), or through arms sales. This explains the hedging behavior of most Arab states regarding the Ukraine war and their reluctance to apply international sanctions or help balance the oil market. Because of a complex landscape with crosscutting loyalties and dependencies between autocratic rulers, states and proxies, Russia can still leverage the region's vulnerabilities to exert influence. However, as Russia withdraws military material to focus on Ukraine, its clout is diminishing and its tactical strength is weakening, creating a dangerous vacuum



From left to right, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Bahrain Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani stand together during the Abraham Accords signing ceremony at the White House in Washington on September 15, 2020. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

that regional rivals (Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey) and other global actors, such as China, can exploit.

In a speech at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain on November 18, 2022, Colin Kahl, U.S. undersecretary of defense for policy, warned that the Ukraine war could have serious blowback for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region if Arab states continue to support Moscow by cutting oil production. Most importantly, he questioned why some of the larger states — i.e., Saudi Arabia — have continued to work with Russia as it becomes more evident that Iran, Saudi Arabia's arch enemy, is strengthening its defense alliance with Russian President Vladimir Putin through the transfer of attack drones, and potentially missiles, to be used in attacks on Ukrainian cities. Criticizing the hedging behavior seen from many Arab states since the outbreak of the Ukraine war, he stated: "Iranian drones are killing Ukrainian civilians, just as they have struck targets in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, targeted Israeli and U.S. forces, and attacked international shipping." Yet, he noted, Arab states still believe that diplomatic ties with Russia will drive a wedge between Russia and Iran.

Indeed, that Iran is engaging in its first-ever intervention in a war in the European theater represents a seismic shift that few may appreciate, despite the potential consequences it could have for MENA regional stability and strategic balance. It is likely to heighten tensions between the most powerful Arab states and Iran, and threaten to "rebalance" the strategic advantage that the status-quo-seeking, anti-Iran alliance — created by the Abraham Accords — has achieved over the past three years.

It illustrates the complexity of Middle Eastern loyalties and kinship ties, as well as the contradictions between historic partnerships and crosscutting security cooperation arrangements that span the region. A historic powder keg, where loyalties and alliances often conflict, the MENA region will continue to play a significant role in global power relations and — as the U.S. has realized — is too risky to walk away from.

MENA region security challenges have always been multidimensional — local, regional and geostrategic — but always with a high potential for a significant global impact. Geographically, the region lies at the crossroads of continents and stands as the first line of defense for migrant and refugee flows. Religiously, it is the birthplace of three major religions and a center of major sectarian rivalries. Politically, it has become the playground of hegemonic states, autocratic monarchs, totalitarian dictators, sectarian warlords and ruthless terrorist groups, who purchase loyalty and popular support through bribes and rentier policies, often at the expense of the most vulnerable. Militarily, it is the most militarized of all regions, has the most armed conflicts and, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2021 data, is the region with the most military interventions both by international and regional actors.

#### THE RISE AND DECLINE OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

After defeat in the Arab-Israel wars, Arab states turned to the Soviet Union to provide a counterweight against the U.S.-Israel alliance. Russia's current influence stems not only from the postwar stalemate and the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, but also from a natural affinity between likeminded regimes that share the same ideology of authoritarian control and traditional values. The MENA region is one of dictators and regional hegemonic rivals who live up to the Arab saying that “the misfortunes of some people are advantages to others.” Political alliances are largely transactional between states that share an interest in stifling political pluralism and dissent, quashing political Islam, and enshrining autocracy in the form of dynastic rule.

The decade of American primacy in the Middle East

that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union left the U.S. entrenched and militarily overstretched, and also engendered distrust across the region, especially on the “the Arab Street,” an expression coined by scholar Fouad Ajami in his 1998 book “The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey” to describe Arab public opinion. Continued U.S. support for Israel, the toppling of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the propping up of the region's illiberal autocrats, while simultaneously trumpeting the liberal democratic values that inspired the Arab Spring, demonstrated hypocrisy to many Arabs. This fed into anti-Western sentiment in the region and bolstered the narratives and recruitment campaigns of Salafi-jihadi terrorist groups, including ISIS.

Further, the U.S. foreign policy pivot to Asia and the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Syria opened a coveted opportunity for Putin to return to MENA as a strongman and influencer. Capitalizing on a power vacuum and local instability to exploit the insecurities of Arab authoritarian regimes, Putin successfully paired military support with diplomatic overtures, a quest for lucrative energy and infrastructure deals, disinformation and propaganda. Intervening in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces in 2015, Russia quickly turned the tide in the civil war in favor of the Syrian government. The Russian Defense Ministry said it operated two bases and deployed as many as 63,000 troops and S-300 and S-400 missile defense systems across Syria, providing the much-needed support for Assad's forces to defeat the jihadist and rebel groups.

But Putin's support for instability — whether directly in Syria or indirectly through the Wagner Group in Libya — also had ulterior motives. It provided combat training for Russian fighter pilots and testing opportunities for a whole range of new Russian weapons systems that could then be sold to countries in the region. This was confirmed by Putin's main military strategist, Chief of the General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov, who in 2017 justified the Russian operations in Syria by

Russian troops stand in formation before their withdrawal from Hemeimeem air base in Syria in 2016. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS





explaining the benefits it had offered Russian fighter pilots who received superior training through their active engagement in a real-life battlespace. Similarly, in August 2022, Russian news agency TASS quoted Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu saying that more than 200 new Russian weapons had been successfully tested in Syria and then marketed to the Assad regime, as well as to other countries across the region.

According to data from SIPRI, Russian arms sales to the MENA region increased by 125% between 1999-2008 and 2009-2018. From 2014 to 2018, the region accounted for 37% of all Russia's exports. Russian sales to the region were 16% higher in 2009-2013 compared with the 2014-2018 period. While this number is lower than the staggering amounts of weapons that some states in the region receive from the U.S. and other Western countries, arms sales from Russia are often offered without conditions or human-rights vetting and are therefore easier to obtain. They also sometimes come with direct rewards. For instance, Algeria, by far the biggest importer of Russian arms in the Middle East, was rewarded by having its \$4.7 billion Soviet-era debt written off. Egypt, another country that has refused to isolate Moscow, has had its share of arms from Moscow grow dramatically over the past two decades. When the U.S. cut military aid and its planned delivery of military equipment, including F-16 aircraft, after the 2013 military coup that removed the democratically elected Mohamed Morsi government from power, Russia was quick to fill the gap.

However, Russian weapons systems came with no security guarantees, and have a lifespan and reliability much shorter than more attractive systems from the U.S. or other Western states. While previous Russian interventions in Georgia, Crimea and Syria had demonstrated Russian military effectiveness, the Ukraine invasion has proved many Russian systems deficient or flawed in combat (like the exploding turrets of its T-72 tanks). This will make it difficult for Russia to continue to compete as a major arms seller in a market that includes China, France, Germany, Israel, Turkey and the U.S. While Russia has strengthened ties with Iran, many Arab states, especially in the Gulf, have become open to exploring new security frameworks that offer closer ties to the U.S.

### **IMMEDIATE SECURITY IMPACTS**

The impacts from the Ukraine war on Russia's MENA military engagements was almost immediate — as soon as it was clear Russia was not heading to an easy victory. According to a report by The New York Times on October 19, 2022, senior defense officials in the MENA region claimed that Wagner Group mercenaries and thousands of Russian troops had already redeployed from Syria to Ukraine by late spring. Similarly, a Middle East Eye article on November 9, 2022, reported claims from MENA regional intelligence sources that Russia has also leveraged its strategic partnership with Syria by deploying more than 500 “experienced” pro-Syrian regime fighters who had been backed, trained and managed by Russia. Tasked mainly with “safeguarding” facilities in Luhansk and Donetsk, these units include the 25th Special Mission Forces Division, the Fifth Corps and Liwa al-Quds, a

militia made up predominantly of Palestinian Syrians.

More consequentially, Russia has now removed its key air-defense system from Syria for use in Ukraine. The S-300 system has been an important ingredient in the deconfliction agreement between Israel and Russia over Syrian skies, in which Russia has agreed to turn a blind eye to Israel's air attacks against Hezbollah and Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps strongholds. On the one hand, many now argue that the withdrawal of these systems remove limits on Israel's operations in Syria and thus, by extension, lifts Israel's apprehensions about openly supporting Ukraine. On the other hand, Russia's withdrawal of these systems and its waning leadership role in Syrian day-to-day management and operations have also opened a new power vacuum in Syria that will likely be exploited by Iran. Due to Iran's growing role as Russia's main weapons provider, it may now have significant leverage over Russia to expand its influence in Syria in order to prevent Israel's domination of Syrian skies.

A simple analysis of influence theory tells us that Putin's most logical strategic choice to maximize Russia's national interests would be to use his leverage to deter (or punish) Israel while simultaneously rewarding Iran. It is doubtful Putin would have moral compunctions about the possible destabilizing effects of such policies on the MENA region when weighing his own, much more immediate priority of preventing Israel from offering military support to Ukraine.

### **MENA: HEDGING OR DIPLOMATIC BALANCING ACT**

Apart from Syria, all Arab states in the MENA region supported the United Nations Security Council statement that condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. None, however, have joined in the international sanctions regime that aims to prevent funds from flowing into Putin's war machine. On the contrary, some — such as Saudi Arabia — are de facto supporting Russia by refusing to increase oil production to lower prices and thereby decrease Russian oil revenues.

While it would be easy to view their hedging behavior as taking Russia's side, the reality is much more complex and stems from a number of conflicting imperatives. Saudi Arabia is concerned over the impacts that lower gas prices would have on its own economy, but also about potential Russian retaliation if it gives in to Western demands. Russia still holds considerable sway over the country, due to its prominent position as an oil producer and through its strengthening military alliance with Iran. During U.S. President Joe Biden's visit to the region in July 2022, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman clearly communicated his wish to keep Russia at the table when he explained that an agreement with the U.S. to produce more oil would have to be discussed with Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries-Plus members, the most important part of the “plus” being Russia. Continuing Saudi-Russian ties were demonstrated when Prince Al Waleed bin Talal, a Saudi royal family member and head of the Kingdom Holding Company, announced shortly after the Biden visit that Kingdom Holding had invested \$500 billion in Russian firms, including Gazprom, Lukoil and Rosnet, since the beginning of the Ukraine war.

By refusing to collaborate with Western demands, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are not only demonstrating their unwillingness to take sides in what they see as a complex European conflict, but also their displeasure with the U.S.'s reluctance to support their fight against the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen, and with the Biden Administration's efforts to revive the Iranian nuclear deal (JCPOA). The U.S. administration has learned that it has limited leverage to force MENA compliance. The UAE (officially) and Saudi Arabia (unofficially) are both vital to the strengthening regional security framework created by the Abraham Accords and, together with Israel, serve as status-quo powers that can deter aspiring regional hegemony, especially Iran. Both countries are also important partners for U.S. security cooperation and important destinations for many lucrative U.S. arms deals.

Israel, the closest U.S. ally in the MENA region, has also found itself in a difficult position that reflects the relatively active role that Russia has played in the Middle East over the past two decades. While some political analysts may have attributed former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet's early reluctance to supply military aid to Ukraine as a sign of his right-wing views, the reality is more complicated. His efforts to mediate (like those of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) demonstrate Israel's already established diplomatic ties with Moscow (especially with regard to the Syrian deconfliction dialogue), but also a reluctance to be drawn into a complicated European conflict that could spill into the MENA region. Most importantly, however, and similarly to Saudi Arabia, Israel's primary security challenge comes from Iran, both in the form of conventional/unconventional threats, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and missiles, and from Iran's potential development of nuclear capabilities.

Israel's staunch opposition to renegotiating the JCPOA could be partially explained by its insistence that the deal will only partially and temporarily halt Iran's nuclear development. A more compelling argument, expressed by several Israeli foreign policymakers and experts at a September 2022 security conference at Reichman University in Israel, is that the lifting of sanctions on Iran would not only allow Tehran to restart its nuclear program, but also to significantly increase financial and military support to its regional proxies, including supplying them with advanced military capabilities, such as battle-tested UAVs.

Thus, a renegotiated nuclear deal with Iran that addressed some of those concerns was clearly in the interests of the U.S. and Iran during the summer of 2022, but the opportunity was missed due to competing priorities related to the Ukraine war and the challenge of overcoming Saudi and Israeli resistance. With Russia stepping in to fill Iran's coffers in return for Iranian drones and military technology, the West seems to have lost any leverage it had, at least for the foreseeable future. That Iran could use its renewed influence over Russia to expand its footprint in Syria should be a preeminent global concern. Israeli policymakers have clearly communicated their commitment to keep Iranian and Hezbollah forces out of Syria. The lessened influence of Russia in the Middle East could therefore have severe spillover effects on one of the most volatile security equations in the Levant.

Israel's new leadership role in the shifting regional security framework and its focus on deterring Iran have also led to a growing partnership with states on the MENA periphery, including Azerbaijan and Turkey. Since Azerbaijan's independence in 1992, Jerusalem and Baku have become strategic partners — sharing intelligence, developing trade and coordinating policy to protect regional security and counter Iranian expansionist aims. Israel's substantive military support to Baku was decisive for its 2022 victory over Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. Given the military, diplomatic and economic partnership between the two nations, Azerbaijan would likely be significantly affected in the event of Israeli-Iranian escalations. Growing links between Russia and Iran thus reverberate in a number of security relations that are vital for wider regional stability.

The restoration of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel is another development that was likely triggered by Russia's changing MENA influence. After a decade of frozen relations, Israel and Turkey agreed to once again exchange ambassadors and consuls general in October 2022. Israel has always had an interest in building closer regional ties with other strategic powers, but Turkey's religious nationalist politics under Erdoğan and continued push for expanded regional influence, as well as support for the Palestinian cause, made it necessary for Erdoğan to keep Israel at arm's length. However, with the Abraham Accords and the growing normalization between Israel and many MENA states, Turkey could not afford to be left out, especially given Israel's military strength, its close ties with the U.S., and its interest in keeping Russian influence minimal and Iranians deterred.

Turkey is the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, which stretched across Africa, Anatolia, Asia and Europe for nearly 500 years, beginning in the 13th century and ending in its defeat in World War I. The psychological impact of the loss of empire lingers, inspiring revisionist narratives that feed into Turkey's perception of existential threats and strengthening religious-nationalist ideology. While Turkey is unlikely to reconquer its coveted "Turkic" regions in neighboring states, the reappearance of important elements of the country's secular nationalist historical narrative, including Pan-Turkic maps of the MENA region, gives rise to security concerns for the states that contain those territories. As Turkey increasingly seeks opportunities to fill the gap as Moscow's influence declines in key areas, some regional states clearly see Turkey's quest for influence as a way to somewhat reclaim its former empire.

Turkey has viewed its relationship with Ukraine through a similar lens; as an opportunity for influence and economic gains, and as a way to diminish Russian dominance in the Caspian region. While actively supporting the buildup of Ukraine's military and supplying it with advanced drone technology, Ankara has kept open lines of communication and economic ties with Moscow, making it the only NATO country that has refrained from imposing sanctions. According to Gaetano Massara, writing on the Aspen Institute of Italy website *Aspenia Online*, keeping Russia far from the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits has always been a geopolitical imperative for Turkey: "Russia's attacks on Ukraine thus



represented a setback for Ankara, which condemned Russia at the U.N., closed the Straits and blocked its airspace to Russian planes bound for Syria. This explains why Turkey is helping Ukraine to resist, supplying it with drones and corvettes.”

Erdoğan’s embrace of “precious loneliness,” which means advancing Turkey’s interests at all costs, has also led him to cooperate with Russia, China, Iran and other states that oppose the U.S.-led international order. Erdoğan’s decision to purchase S-400 missile defense systems from Russia, and the launch of the Astana peace process in collaboration with Russia and Iran, are examples. Turkey’s double act has also allowed Erdoğan to present himself as the only credible intermediary between the adversaries, potentially bringing diplomatic credibility to Ankara while raising the price the West must pay for Turkish loyalty. Blocking Sweden’s and Finland’s accession to NATO demonstrated that posture.

An entangled web of crosscutting ties, competing loyalties and selfish pursuits of national interests in the Middle East are threatening the precarious status quo in Syria. Erdoğan’s pledge on November 22, 2022, that Turkey will begin an incursion into Syria’s northern Kurdish border regions to crack down on “terrorist groups” showed that the decline of Russian influence has emboldened him to act unilaterally and against Russian policy regarding Syria. During a November 19, 2022, meeting between Russia and Turkey in Tehran, senior Russian negotiator Alexander Lavrentyev tried to convince Turkey to “refrain from conducting full-scale ground operations.” But

Palestinians outside the White House in Washington in 2020 protest the signing of the Abraham Accords normalizing relations between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. GETTY IMAGES

Iran has done more than try to convince. According to a July 19, 2022, brief by Colm Quinn for Foreign Policy magazine, Iranian-backed militias and Syrian government troops are prepared to deter or directly confront Turkish forces in the event of an incursion. The Shiite-dominant settlements of Zahra and Nubl were sent reinforcements to fortify defenses and to prevent nearby government-controlled Aleppo from becoming a Turkish target.

These deliberate steps by Iran in Syria reflect Russia’s diminishing clout. It also shows a wider wariness over Turkish strategy, with Ankara’s closer ties with Israel and Saudi Arabia sparking fears in Tehran of a broader anti-Iranian alliance. Thus, Turkey’s role of filling the Russian vacuum has yet had only moderate success, with Erdoğan’s best effort to date being perhaps his role in negotiating the agreement to manage the Black Sea grain crisis.

## HUMAN INSECURITIES, REGIONAL VULNERABILITIES

With global energy prices soaring, economic shocks from the war are accelerating a number of preexisting downward trends in socioeconomic and political well-being, putting the region at increased risk for political dissent and violent mobilization. The fragile-state index measures fragility through

an aggregate index of socioeconomic, political and security-related variables. Fragile states lack institutional capacity and political legitimacy, leaving them at risk for instability and violent conflict without resilience to disruptive shocks. Several countries in the MENA region top the list of the world's most fragile states, including Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. These states are also most affected by the war-induced global grain crisis. Developing, oil-importing economies, such as Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia, have been hit especially hard by the parallel rise in grain and energy prices, while still struggling with pandemic recovery.

According to this author's research, published in the Middle East Policy Journal, COVID-19 had already significantly exacerbated and accelerated the decline in some of the most important conditions related to quality of life, including expanding the portion of the population living in extreme poverty, increasing already intolerable income inequality and decreasing opportunity, and further restricting access to basic services, such as health care and education for the most vulnerable, including women, children and refugee populations.

While economic recovery from the pandemic has been stronger than most economists expected, growth has been uneven both across and within countries. Inequality is one of the most significant risk factors for political violence, as it often triggers the political grievances that facilitate extremist radicalization and terrorist recruitment. According to the

World Inequality Database, the MENA region tops the list for inequality with 56% of national income accruing to the top 10%, and only 12% going to the bottom 50%. When compounded by unsustainable refugee burdens borne almost exclusively by the region's most fragile and conflict-affected states, as well as large, informal economies, inequality of income and opportunity contribute to an increasing number of citizens living in extreme poverty. Unfortunately, rather than focusing on effective governance solutions to tackle disparities, beleaguered authoritarian leaders often respond with disproportionate violence to crack down on any signs of political dissent from the Arab Street. This elite-driven security posturing to fill the Russian vacuum can lead to increased polarization between the elites and the masses in MENA societies.

A number of the region's developing countries are also suffering severe fiscal impacts from the dual shocks delivered by COVID-19 and rising energy prices. These shocks are compounded by decades of poor policy choices that have incurred unsustainable debt-to-GDP ratios and sent some countries, Lebanon in particular, into or close to fiscal default. According to a report from Reuters, Turkey's economy has been severely impacted as a result of a 212% jump in the cost of its energy imports. The acceleration came after a year in which energy costs had already risen by 75% from 2020. Economists are now predicting a 70% drop in value of the Turkish lira during the first half of 2023.



A Sierra Leone-flagged vessel sails through the Bosphorus Strait near Istanbul enroute to Tripoli, Lebanon, in 2022 after inspection by Russian and Ukrainian officials. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

While Russia's strategic influence may be waning across the region, its influence operations and disinformation remain powerful in the Arab media, and thus provide a fertile environment for its population-focused "new generation warfare." The conditions that cause political dissent and rebellion against inefficient and corrupt authoritarian governments also spark increased regional hostility toward the West in general, and the U.S. in particular. Arab hedging behavior is not always just a necessity to balance self-interested relations with Russia; it may also be a recognition of the power of Arab public opinion.

The renewal of Russia's participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, facilitated by Turkish leadership, showed that Russia does not possess the leverage to fully weaponize wheat and human security. Fully aware that blocking Ukrainian grain shipments from passing through the Black Sea and the Bosphorus would also stop its own shipments, Russia was forced to renegotiate. This shows that Russia, desperate for allies in the regions most affected by rising food prices, may have diminishing leverage to enforce its narrative. Putin has also likely realized that if rising food prices are seen to stem partially from Russia's actions in the Black Sea, it may undermine those governments that Russia supports, including Egypt and Syria. The Initiative, which expired July 17, had yet to be renewed again by mid-September, despite the efforts of Erdoğan and others.

## CONCLUSION: A NEW REGIONAL SECURITY REGIME

The dual threats of strategic volatility and human insecurity in the MENA region are unprecedented and come at a time when the U.S. and other Western states have reduced bandwidth to deal with another serious global conflagration. Given this context, the maintenance of a regional security framework that can preserve the status quo in a sustainable and equitable way is paramount. The Abraham Accords accomplish the "sustainable," but the "equitable" remains underdeveloped.

The Abraham Accords, signed in 2019 by Bahrain, Israel, Morocco, Sudan and the UAE, and with the implicit backing of Saudi Arabia, began much more like an arms deal than a peace agreement. The original signatories of the agreement, Israel and the UAE, are both status-quo powers, interested in maintaining regional stability in order to support their prospering economies. Disappointed with the speed at which Arab leaders were willing to drop their support for the Palestinian cause — for what seemed like personal enrichment — and the extent to which benefits from the agreements failed to trickle down to Arab society, many experts and analysts at the time predicted disaster.

But disaster never materialized and, instead, given the uncertainties that arose in the MENA region resulting from Russian aggression in Ukraine, the Abraham Accords have become the foundation for what is truly a paradigm shift for the Middle East regional security architecture. Normalized relations between Israel and the UAE have already led to strong cooperative relationships between the two countries in a number of commercial sectors, including agriculture, engineering, IT and advanced technology. The Negev Summit in Israel in March 2022 and subsequent dialogue

have expanded cooperation on regional challenges, including problems related to human insecurity, political fragility, ineffective governance and energy security. While the leaders who walked into the first Negev Forum in Bahrain in June 2022 had widely different agendas, their commitment to continued cooperation speaks to the fact that MENA states are beginning to share a sense of collective responsibility for their own region. The combined effects of COVID-19, U.S. strategic reorientation and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have led them to realize that they could no longer rely on future bailouts from the West.



Diplomats meet the press in March 2022 at the landmark Negev Summit in Israel, where Iranian nuclear negotiations, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other issues were discussed. From left, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, Israel's then-Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita and the United Arab Emirates' Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The U.S. has reversed any previous suggestions that it would — or even could — disengage from the MENA region and instead focused on supporting the strengthening security alliance under the Abraham Accords. The agreements were forged between regional powers who share an interest in continued U.S. engagement, but also a concern that they could no longer fully count on U.S. security guarantees because of growing American domestic unwillingness to fund overseas engagements. The new security framework, together with the shift of Israel from the U.S. European Command to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, has had an unanticipated positive effect. With the entire region (friend or foe) under the same regional command area of responsibility, the U.S. military now has the tools to take a much more collaborative, comprehensive approach to the region's security policy and preparedness.

Within this framework, the U.S., together with its Western allies, would be well advised to support the efforts of its regional partners to expand cooperation in the areas of security and economics to a more comprehensive, whole-of-society-centered approach that also addresses looming human security challenges. This comprehensive approach will be necessary to mitigate and manage the risk factors that could spark future political violence in the MENA region. □



# THE DRAGON AND THE BEAR

## The China-Russia Relationship is More Partnership of Convenience than Alliance

By Falk Tettweiler, Marshall Center researcher and analyst

**The February 4, 2022, joint statement from China and Russia has widely been interpreted as a signal of deeper cooperation between the two major challengers to the liberal world order.** Some have gone so far as to assess it as a sign of an institutional axis, or even an alliance. However, the lack of official Chinese support for Russia's illegal attack on Ukraine is sowing some doubts regarding this argument. Deeper scrutiny of existing cooperation between Russia and China, and the declarations in the joint statement, show that there are common interests and the perception of a common opponent — the “liberal West” — but the

uninspiring joint statement also reveals that they do not share a common vision of the future. The two countries might, in fact, be less aligned than it appears at first glance.

Challenging the liberal West and the existing world order requires a safe and secure home base for both China and Russia. Consequently, the common security interests of both countries, presented in the joint statement, lie mainly in ensuring their visions of security and stability in their common adjacent regions, countering interference by outside (Western) forces in what they consider internal affairs, and opposing attempts by their citizens to gain more freedom, which are





China participated in the International Military-Technical Forum outside Moscow in August 2022. The exhibition, organized by the Russian Ministry of Defense, is the country's largest.

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## China-Russia military cooperation has a decadeslong history of remarkable ups and downs. It has never been animus, but always distrustful.

often referred to as “color revolutions.” However, besides these common interests, there are huge differences in their respective visions of a new world order. In comparison to Russia’s negative vision, conceptualizing itself as a victim of the West, the Chinese vision might be seen as a real alternative by some countries. Additionally, the relationship between Russia and China has been marked by decades of deep mistrust. It can be predicted that these differences will prevail in their future relationship, despite increased cooperation in some fields.

China-Russia military cooperation has a decadeslong history of remarkable ups and downs. It has never been animus, but always distrustful. Although the relationship has been asymmetric until relatively recently, with the Soviet Union/Russia as the provider of both technology and know-how, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) never accepted their more powerful partner as a leader or dominator. Instead, the CCP used the Russians as a means to an end. The Soviet Union began supporting the newly formed communist movement in China in the 1920s and played an essential role in building the Red Army during the Chinese civil war. Thus, it helped Mao Zedong, who famously said that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” to defend his power position against rivals inside the CCP and against external enemies, such as local war lords, the Kuomintang and the Japanese Army. The Soviets continued to support the armament of

CCP forces — renamed the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) — after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. This helped cement Mao’s rule over the CCP and the PRC.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, middle right, sits across from Russian President Vladimir Putin during talks in Beijing in February 2022 that led to a joint statement of mutual cooperation.

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With Soviet support, the CCP quickly built a credible communist force in the region and a sustainable armaments industry. For example, applying Soviet know-how, the Chinese armaments industry engineered its first indigenous fighter aircraft (Dongfeng-101, later renamed Shenyang J-5) in 1956 and its first nuclear bomb in 1964. But the validity of another famous Mao quote, that “whoever wants to seize and retain state power must have a strong army,” also proved to be true in the Soviet-Sino relationship a few years later. As the CCP grew in confidence, ideological differences became more obvious. Border disputes between China and Russia became hot in the 1960s and led to an open border conflict in 1969. In 1971, the Soviet-Sino split was complete as the two countries supported opposing sides during the war between India and Pakistan. Despite both being communist regimes, China and the Soviet Union were more opponents than partners in the following almost two decades. During this period, military cooperation came to a halt. It was not until after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, with the CCP’s resulting political isolation and the rapid decline of Soviet economic power, that the two countries restarted military cooperation.

After revitalizing its relationship with Russia in the 1990s, the CCP relied on Russian foreign military sales to modernize the PLA’s outdated military equipment. The United States’ successful military campaign during the 1991 Gulf War was an eye-opener for PLA strategists and led to major military reforms, and also made Russian equipment and know-how more than welcome. Additionally, the PLA started participating in multilateral military exercises within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2003, and in bilateral exercises with the Russian armed forces in 2005.

During the following years, the PLA remained an



Chinese tanks compete during the International Army Games outside Moscow that were held in conjunction with the Army 2022 Military-Technical Forum. GETTY IMAGES



important power instrument for the CCP, but the country's fast economic growth was the paramount objective and the political leadership's main focus. "Getting rich" was the slogan during this period, which ended with the election of Xi Jinping as general secretary of the CCP in 2012. The new slogan of the Xi era is "getting strong" and the PLA has a vital role in the CCP's plans for China's future. The Mao dictum that "whoever has an army has power" has regained its relevance for realizing the "China Dream" and the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" — two central concepts of Xi's agenda.

The importance of the PLA to Xi's plans is reflected in the very ambitious timeline for its reform. The PLA wants to become a world-class force that is a peer to the U.S. military by the middle of the 21st century. The PLA is training and equipping for a new kind of warfare of integrated joint operations in all domains. This refers to the domains of land, sea, air, cyber and space, as well as strongly focusing on the cognitive domain. Some milestones to achieving that goal are mechanization by 2020, which was slightly delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and complete modernization by 2027. The latter includes the first as well as "informatization" and the PLA's ability to conduct "intelligentized" warfare. "Informatization" means that the PLA must be equipped to conduct integrated joint operations in all the above-mentioned domains, first on a local level and later on a global level. Additionally, the aim of "intelligentization" requires the consequent use of science and technology for artificial intelligence, which has been used to monitor Chinese society. CCP leadership has made it clear that the informatization and intelligentization are far more important

than full mechanization because the PLA recognizes that the days of solely mechanized warfare are over. Therefore, the science and technology sectors play an invaluable role in the successful implementation of PLA reforms. Thus, they cannot be seen as separate from the military, as in some Western countries.

Following the intelligent integration and integrated joint operations approach could lead to a real revolution in military affairs. It means that the PLA could abandon Western concepts of warfare and lean more toward a traditional Chinese approach to strategy. The PLA's aim would no longer be to simply accelerate its own observe-orientate-decide-act (OODA) loop and beat the opponent on the battlefield, as in typical Western concepts. The objective would be to manipulate the entire OODA loop of the opponent to "win the war" before a potential violent confrontation. If the PLA shapes the perception and orientation of the opponent, their decisions, actions and the feedback loops can be influenced in a way favorable to the PLA. Implementing this idea — understanding armies as systems and conceptualizing war as a confrontation of these systems — means that a war could be won without fighting or before the fighting starts. This revolutionary change in concepts would mean a return to Sun Tzu's approach to strategy and turning away from the common interpretation of military theorist Carl von Clausewitz regarding the value of decisive battles.

These conceptual deliberations also have implications for the future development of China-Russia military cooperation. The significance of a strong science and technology sector in the PRC was already articulated in 2015 in the "Made in China 2025" initiative and in 2020 with the "dual circulation"





The remains of a Russian tank are scattered along the road between Iziurm and Kharkiv, Ukraine, in October 2022 after Russian forces were driven from the area. The Russian military's poor showing in Ukraine has damaged its prestige with China. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

idea. China's ambition to become the leader in certain technology domains is reflected in its armaments industry, which is closely linked to its technology industry. The aim to domestically produce high-tech products is also applicable to the Chinese armaments industry, which is experiencing rapid modernization and greater self-reliance and autonomy. Consequently, China has become less dependent on Russian foreign military sales. Currently, China mainly imports Russian-built aircraft engines, although China's aeronautics industry is catching up. Additionally, the existing China-Russia relationship and military cooperation is strained by China's practice of copying and reverse-engineering technology and equipment, and by its theft of intellectual property and its industrial espionage; for example, Chinese cyberattacks on Russian arms-producing companies.

As mentioned, since 2003 the second pillar of China-Russia military cooperation has been military exercises. With the latest iteration of the multilateral Vostok exercise in early September 2022, there have been at least 79 bilateral and multilateral training events since this cooperation began. Joint exercises benefit both sides. While Russia alleviates its political isolation and gains the opportunity to advertise its military equipment, the PLA gains operational experience in a variety of geographies and climates, and learns tactics and procedures from the more experienced Russian armed forces. With the shrinking Russian technological lead and the obvious underperformance of Russia's armed forces in its war on Ukraine, the tangible benefits for the Chinese side will decrease in the foreseeable future. During Vostok-2022, the PLA for the first time trained with Chinese-manufactured equipment only. As soon as Chinese-produced

military equipment becomes equal or superior to Russia's, China could use multilateral exercises to promote its own equipment and thereby compete with Russia. This would again have a negative influence on the bilateral relationship because foreign military sales are, next to natural resources, an important source of income for the Russian state. Therefore, it is very likely that the mutual benefits of future bilateral and multilateral exercises will be limited to sending political and strategic signals toward the U.S. and its allies in the region, and to furthering transparency between increasingly competing China and Russia. The latter could reduce tensions in the relationship between the two countries.

All in all, China-Russia military cooperation seems to be at a tipping point and leaning toward decline. The ongoing war in Ukraine proves that Russia is still very much stuck in a more traditional concept of warfare. Although Russia's deception operation prior to the actual invasion matched the direction of Chinese thinking on the future of warfare, Moscow's poor assessment of the real situation on the ground in Ukraine and its lack of preparation of the cognitive battlefield demonstrate that Russia is not yet there. As Russia's armed forces were unable to meet expectations as a role model for future competition with the U.S., and the technological lead of the Russian armament industry is shrinking, the CCP will not invest much in stronger cooperation in these fields. However, this will not lead to an end of military cooperation between Russia and China unless Russia crosses Chinese red lines, such as using nuclear weapons against Ukraine. But the cooperation will merely be symbolic and on a political level to challenge the U.S.-led liberal West — with Russia likely the junior partner in the future relationship. □

# NONSTRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS DETERRENCE

## And Russia's War on Ukraine

By Dr. Pavel K. Baev, nonresident senior fellow, the Brookings Institution, and research professor, Peace Research Institute Oslo

PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Russian nonstrategic nuclear weapons are a major enigma in the constantly evolving war in Ukraine. At the very start of the ill-planned invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened the West with consequences “such as you have never seen in your entire history” if they tried to stand in Russia’s way. He has resorted to similar threats several times during the course of the war, each time producing a spike in speculations by agitated commentators about the possibility of a nuclear strike and raising concerns among policymakers. In February 2023, a year after invading Ukraine, Putin suspended Moscow’s participation in New START, the last remaining U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control treaty. Moscow’s real readiness to cross the nuclear threshold remains, nevertheless, much lower than this irresponsible discourse asserts, and no material preparations for a first strike have been detected. However, the nuclear dimension of this complex and far-from-deadlocked war still requires sustained analytical attention.

### ISSUES WITH THE STRATEGIC TRIAD

The official Russian nuclear discourse, framed by several doctrinal documents and elaborated in many statements and presidential remarks, focuses primarily on the strategic offensive capabilities presented as the ultimate guarantee of Russia’s sovereignty. In a guideline-setting presentation at the Defense Ministry Board on December 21, 2022, Putin again emphasized the commitment to “improving the

combat readiness of the nuclear triad,” which the Kremlin said would guarantee “strategic parity and general balance of forces in the world.” Modernization of the land-, sea- and air-based strategic weapons systems is indeed the priority in the current State Armament Program (GPV-2027, approved in 2018), as it was in the previous one (GPV-2020, approved in 2011). Putin brags about superior strategic arms so often that *analogov nyet* (meaning, “they have nothing comparable”) has become a meme in Russian urban folklore. He found it opportune to point out in the previously mentioned speech the forthcoming combat deployment of the Sarmat (RS-28 or SS-X-30) heavy intercontinental ballistic missile, one of the “wonder weapons” he proudly presented during his 2018 address to the Federal Assembly.

These massive investments pay scant, if any, dividends in the real war as the Borei-class submarines (the most expensive project in the GPV-2027) or the promised Sarmat (tested only once) are unsuitable for delivering a limited strike on Ukraine, and every launch is monitored by the United States’ early warning system. Such a strike doesn’t fit into the set of propositions that shape the strategy of escalation management, vague as it is, according to the Center for Naval Analysis, a nonprofit research group. The Russian high command may assume that these capabilities deter NATO from direct interference in the Ukraine war, but such deterrence could have been achieved with a smaller and much less expensive strategic arsenal within the concept of “reasonable sufficiency.”



Ukrainian soldiers in Kyiv honor a fellow soldier killed in fighting near Iziom, Ukraine.

One component of the strategic triad is nevertheless widely and routinely used in the war: long-range aviation. This is, in fact, Russia's least-modernized strategic capability. The development of the new-generation PAK-DA bomber by the Tupolev design bureau (funded since 2008) is indefinitely delayed, defense technology analyst Alex Hollings reported in 2021. The Tu-95MS and the Tu-160 strategic bombers, and the Tu-22M3 long-range bombers (technically not counted as a strategic platform), have been delivering missile strikes on Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure without entering its airspace. The International Institute for Security Studies (IISS) reports that the precision and effectiveness of the long-range Kh-101 and Kh-22/32 cruise missiles are highly uncertain; many strikes are launched from above the Caspian Sea, which can conceal any misfiring missiles. On several occasions, Kh-55 cruise missiles, designed for carrying nuclear warheads, were used as dummies without explosive payload in order to saturate Ukrainian air defenses.

These persistent attacks make the launch bases legitimate targets for Ukrainian counterstrikes, and on December 5, 2022, the Engels air base (where the regiments of Tu-95MS and Tu-160 are based) and the Dyagilevo air base (where the regiment of Tu-22M3 was based) were hit by Ukrainian drones. Russian "patriotic" commentators were outraged by these first direct Ukrainian strikes on assets of the strategic forces and demanded severe retribution. The Russian high command preferred, however, to conclude that the Ukrainian attacks didn't constitute a violation of any red line. On December 26, the Engels base was hit again.

In general, the unprecedented high-intensity use of

long-distance aviation in the war has resulted in a significantly degraded air component of the strategic triad because the arsenal of cruise missiles is increasingly exhausted and technical resources for the bombers are greatly depleted.

### NONSTRATEGIC NUCLEAR NON-OPTIONS

Moscow remains keen to emphasize the might of its strategic forces, which performed two exercises in 2022 — in February, on the eve of the invasion, and in October — but the sharpest debates among experts and the deepest concerns among policymakers are centered on their nonstrategic capabilities, which are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the official Russian discourse. The rather unusual doctrinal document "Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence," approved in June 2020, contains no definition of nonstrategic/tactical weapons. Hard data on the number and types of nuclear warheads is not available from open sources, so the figure of 1,500-2,000 munitions — accepted by most observers as a reasonable assessment — remains essentially speculative, according to the Royal United Services Institute think tank. Better data is available on possible delivery systems, but it is generally assumed that many tactical aircraft, naval weapons systems (including the Kalibr cruise missiles) and land-based Iskander missiles are dual-use systems that can be used for nonstrategic strikes.

The only established fact is that all nonstrategic nuclear munitions have been stored in 12 centralized storages supervised by the 12th Main Directorate of the Defense Ministry since 1991, when Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. President George H.W. Bush approved the Presidential Nuclear



The Roscosmos space agency says this photo shows the launch of a Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile in Russia's northwest region.

Initiatives (PNI). According to these unilateral and reciprocal commitments, not one nuclear warhead has been attached to a nonstrategic delivery system for more than 30 years, but no verification mechanism has been agreed upon. Evidence on the status of Russian warheads is anecdotal at best. Experts such as Pavel Podvig, a senior researcher at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, tend to believe that if all maintenance protocols are followed, they are ready for combat use should such an order be issued. It is, however, entirely possible that Russia's storage facilities for nuclear warheads are in the same disrepair as those used for its conventional arsenals, and it is certain that not a single officer in Russia's air force or navy has first-hand experience in handling nuclear munitions.

It stands to reason (to the degree reason is applicable to decisions about nuclear weapons use) that preparations for the combat use of nonstrategic nuclear weapons would begin with a test, which would not signify a step over the nuclear threshold but would provide for necessary training — and constitute a strong signal in itself. Russia's Novaya Zemlya test site has seen many extraordinary experiments — from the above-surface detonation of the so-called Tsar-Bomba munition estimated at 50 megatons in 1961 to the failed test of the Burevestnik nuclear-propelled cruise missile in 2018 — but currently there are no signs of preparations for new nuclear tests. Neither are there any detectable signs of preparations for unsealing one or more of the centralized storage facilities holding nonstrategic munitions (of particular concern is the Belgorod-22 site, just 30 kilometers from the border with Ukraine), or the training of personnel for operating dual-use weapons systems with nuclear warheads, writes defense expert Uri Friedman in *The Atlantic* magazine. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka has, on several occasions, expressed readiness to host and train his forces for the use of nuclear weapons, but no physical movements of warheads has been reported.

Experience accumulated in the course of multiple Russian missile attacks provides some data for working assumptions on the means of delivering a nuclear strike on Ukraine, particularly in the hypothetical case of a political decision relating to nuclear escalation. An attack from the sea by Kalibr cruise missiles is quite improbable because Russia's Black Sea Fleet does not have the storage capability for nuclear warheads, and transporting them into Crimea would involve an extremely complicated logistical operation. The easiest technical solution is to attach a nuclear warhead to the Kh-102 cruise missile at the Engels air base and launch it from the Tu-95MS bomber; however, Ukrainian air defenses have reportedly intercepted more than two-thirds of such missiles in the recurrent attacks, so the probability of a successful strike is low. Russian officials claim that the new hypersonic missile Kh-47M2 Kinzhal was used three times with complete success (the MiG-31K tactical aircraft is the usual platform), and the proven impossibility of an intercept makes it a perfect delivery system for a nuclear strike, writes Hollings, the defense technology analyst. The track record of operation is, however, still rather short, and there were reports of at least one misfire that fell onto Russian territory. Additionally, the performance of Russian aerospace forces is deteriorating rather than improving during this

protracted war, and the risk of a human error or a technical accident during the complex operation necessary to make a single nuclear strike has to be factored as very (but perhaps not prohibitively) high in any practical strategic planning by the high command in Moscow.

The crucial question in such planning regards the impact of a single nonstrategic nuclear strike, and it is remarkable that Russian scientists have argued that there could be no sound rationale for crossing the nuclear threshold. These opinions may matter little in military calculations that are focused on the scale of physical damage to enemy forces. Under this rationale, a concentrated grouping of Ukrainian troops preparing for a major offensive could constitute a useful target. In previous successful offensive operations, however, the Ukrainian forces have been quite fluid and dispersed over a large area, and the Russian command typically hasn't had reliable and timely intelligence about their enemy's preparations. A demonstrative strike on an empty space — for instance, in the middle of the Black Sea — might produce plenty of environmental damage and result in international repercussions as well, while a nuclear strike on an urban center may generate a sequence of painfully punishing Western responses, meaning there is no option for Moscow that has a useful cost-benefit balance.

## SHIFTING PARAMETERS OF MUTUAL DETERRENCE

In a kinetic war involving a nuclear and a nonnuclear state, the model of deterrence is generally not applicable. But the Ukraine war is far more complex than this elementary scheme, and both Russia and the U.S.-led Western coalition apply methods and means of deterrence, albeit toward different aims and in dissimilar modes. For the West, the pivotal goal is to deter a nuclear escalation of the war. For Russia, the two interconnected goals are to limit the material scope of Western support for Ukraine and to foster disagreements in the Western coalition. Ukraine is certainly not a passive object in this asymmetric mutual deterrence, and it is not only putting pressure on the West for more support, but also deliberately crossing presumed Russian red lines in order to undercut its deterrence posture. In the most general terms, it is possible to establish that as of the start of 2023, the West's deterrence policy has been far more successful than Russia's.

This is not to say that Russian deterrence of Western support for Ukraine has yielded no fruit. From the very beginning of the war, the risk of nuclear escalation and the assessments of Putin's inclinations to take this risk have shaped considerations — in key European capitals as well as in Washington — that informed decision-making on the specific content of military aid to Ukraine. For that matter, with all the transformative change of Germany's policy toward Russia, captured by the *Zeitenwende* notion (the foreign policy shift announced by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in February 2022), its government hesitated until the last possible moment to approve the delivery of Leopard-2 main battle tanks. What is of crucial importance, however, is the clear trend in providing the Ukrainian army more efficient and longer-range weapons systems, which Western leaders no longer deem “provocative.” The strongest manifestation of this trend

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**The nuclear dimension of the Ukraine war demands sustained attention, and the fact that Putin's nuclear bluff was called repeatedly during its first year doesn't diminish this imperative.**

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Flames rise from the Kerch bridge connecting the Russian mainland and Crimean peninsula after sabotage by Ukrainian forces.

was the U.S. decision to supply four batteries of the M142 HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System), and U.S. President Joe Biden's commitment to deliver the MIM-104 Patriot surface-to-air missiles, which was swiftly approved by the U.S. Congress.

The diminishing effectiveness of Russian deterrence policy can be attributed to two undermining elements, the first of which is the deliberate and determined Ukrainian rejection of attempts to constrain its military options. The missile strike on the Saki air base in Crimea in early August 2022 was followed by the penetrating drone attack (aerial and maritime) on the Sevastopol naval base in late October and by the previously mentioned strikes on strategic air bases in early December, creating a pattern of legitimate targeting of Russian military assets far from the immediate combat area. The explosion on the Kerch bridge on October 8, 2022, and a more recent strike on August 12, 2023, stand out in this pattern as acts of sabotage, rather than military strikes, but they can be put in the same category with the explosion on the Veretye air base in the Pskov region of Russia, which destroyed two Ka-52 helicopters. Ukrainian forces — defying U.S. warnings — made a high-precision strike on the Russian command center near Izium in eastern Ukraine where Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the General Staff, was holding a conference in early May 2022, and followed up with a strike that wounded Dmitry Rogozin, former deputy prime minister of Russia, in Donetsk in eastern Ukraine in December 2022.

The second deterrence-undermining element is Russia's reluctance, or perhaps inability, to support aggressive rhetoric with action involving nuclear munitions. No unusual activity around the nuclear storage sites (including Belgorod-22) has been detected, and no special training of personnel has been reported, while the ground troops are entirely unprepared for fighting on a nuclear battlefield, according to an October 2022 report by the IISS. No military exercises involving a simulated nuclear detonation have been staged, and the Vostok-2022 exercise was reduced in scale (compared with the Vostok-2018 and the Zapad-2021 exercises) and entirely conventional. Moscow could have announced cancellation of the PNI from 1991, restricting the deployment of nonstrategic nuclear warheads, or withdrawal from the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which has never entered into force because the U.S. and China didn't ratify it, but neither *démarche* has occurred. The annexation of four Ukrainian regions announced by Putin in September 2022 and accomplished in great haste was supposed to alter the context of the "special operation" so that every Ukrainian advance could be qualified as a breach of Russia's territorial integrity, but the retreat from Kherson signified the essential irrelevance of that supposed redrawing of borders. Instead of extending nuclear deterrence, Putin has effectively annulled the commitment of protecting Russia's sovereignty by nuclear means.

## IMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS

The nuclear dimension of the Ukraine war demands sustained attention, and the fact that Putin's nuclear bluff was called repeatedly during its first year doesn't diminish

this imperative. The decision to launch the invasion was ill-considered and the invasion itself poorly prepared and amounted to a strategic blunder of such astounding proportions that a mind-boggling decision on crossing the nuclear threshold cannot be ruled out as a mistake too far. Some reassurance can be found in the notable reduction of nuclear rhetoric in Moscow by the end of 2022 and into the beginning of 2023. Western practitioners of deterrence can perhaps attribute this sobering to their firm stance and confidential messaging of the inevitable consequences for Russia of a nuclear escalation. The exact content of the signals delivered — for instance, by U.S. CIA Director Bill Burns to Sergey Naryshkin, head of Russia's SVR spy agency — remains secret, but the outburst of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov against the alleged U.S. threats of a "decapitation strike" directed personally at Putin may provide some insight into this diplomatic dissuasion. Putin's bitter invectives against the West in his 2023 New Year's address may implicitly confirm that the direct U.S. warnings have registered.

China has made one important contribution to the combination of deterrence and dissuasion designed to prevent nuclear escalation, and Western politicians, including Biden, have put much effort into encouraging this contribution. China's ambivalent stance on Putin's decision to start the war in Ukraine and on bringing it to an end generates much anxiety in Moscow, and the opinion unambiguously expressed by Chinese President Xi Jinping regarding the unacceptability of nuclear threats certainly carries much weight. Chinese experts and commentators have avoided elaborations on this opinion of Xi's and have preferred to express confidence that this stance would not damage the friendship between the two leaders. What is essential, nevertheless, is that the understanding between China and the U.S.-led Western coalition on the need to impress upon Putin the unacceptability of nuclear blackmail can be cultivated and strengthened, even if the economic disconnect progresses and tensions in the Indo-Pacific region rise.


Overall, the experience of managing the confrontation with Russia, in the course of the evolving war in Ukraine, informs Western policy planners that a carefully constructed and constantly updated combination of material means and political communications can effectively deter Russian leadership from resorting to nuclear weapons. Each of Putin's supposed red lines, drawn to constrain Western support for Ukraine, has proved to be false, so this metaphor can be discarded as a misleading analytical construct. Every new Ukrainian success on the road to victory, to which the Western coalition remains committed, will trigger a new surge of desire in the Kremlin to change the unfavorable course of the war by applying nuclear instruments. But a measured and determined Western response, preferably backed by corresponding signaling from Beijing, can prevent this urge from materializing in a nuclear attack. Internalizing the defeat is certain to be a painful process for Russia, but deterrence remains the only reliable strategy for checking crises that could culminate in nuclear disaster. □

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a snow-covered or ice-covered surface. The texture is uneven, with various ridges, grooves, and shadows, creating a sense of depth and movement. The color palette is a range of blues, from light, airy whites and pale blues to deeper, more saturated blues in the shadows and crevices. The overall mood is cold, serene, and dynamic.

# ARCTIC *dynamics*

IN AN EVOLVING WORLD





By **Cmdr. Rachael Gosnell**, U.S. Navy, and **Dr. Katrin Bastian**, Marshall Center professor  
PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

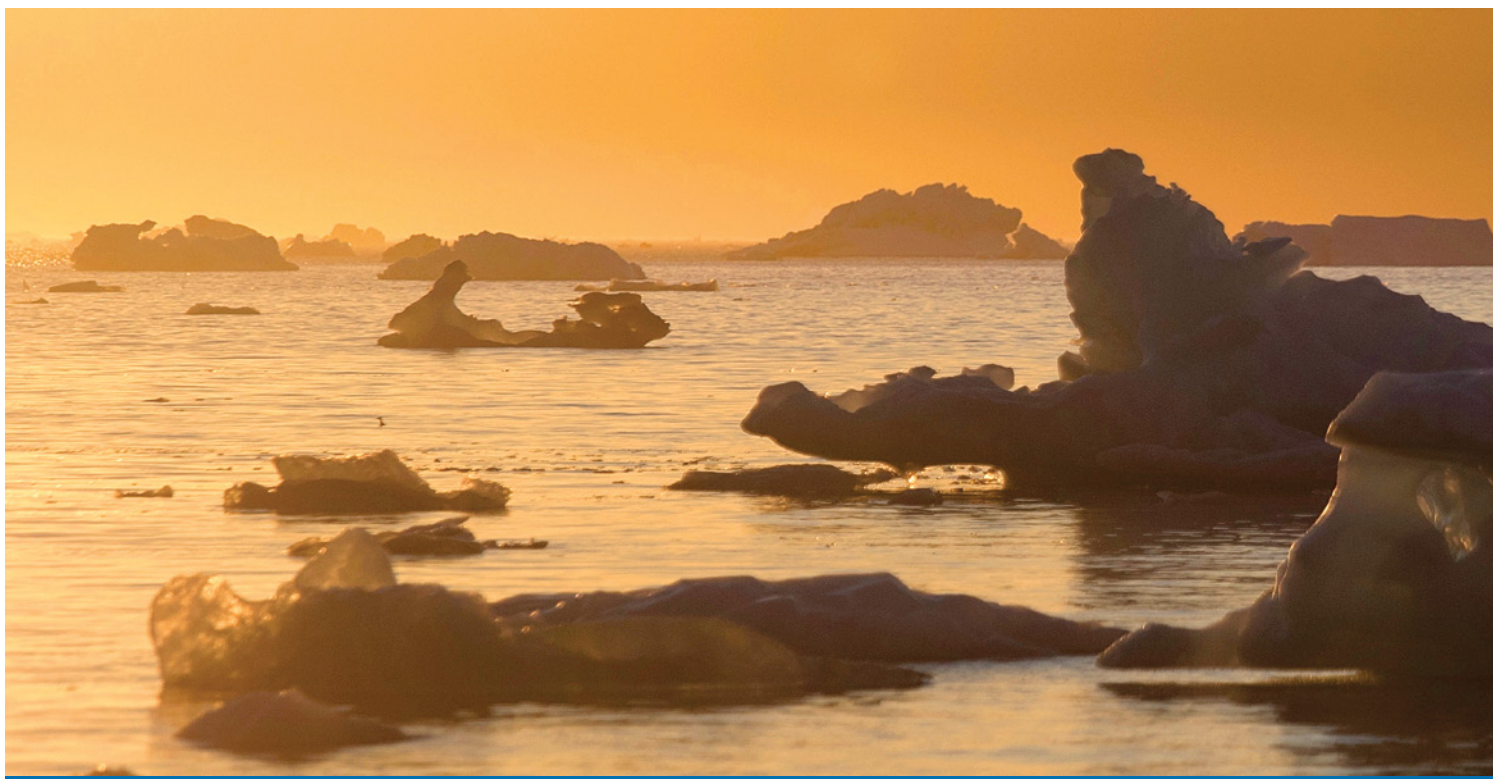
**T**he European High North is poised to become an increasingly strategic region that has the potential to alter future global geopolitical dynamics. The region, commonly considered to be north of the Arctic Circle (approximately 66 degrees 33 minutes north), was becoming a global hot spot long before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Over the past decade, interest in the economically rich and environmentally fragile region has grown significantly as a warming climate opens new maritime corridors. The region's geopolitical, technological, economic and environmental developments are attracting interest from not only the eight Arctic nations — Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States — but from other actors such as China, India and Japan. Indeed, the Arctic Council includes 13 European and Asian non-Arctic observer states. Many nations — particularly Germany — have developed robust research programs in the Arctic to better understand the impact of climate change, but other nations — namely China — have pursued aggressive Arctic programs in the name of national interests.

During the fall of 2022, the Marshall Center hosted two important events that brought together international experts on the European High North and broader Arctic region to discuss emerging security trends. The first, the European Security Seminar-North, was co-hosted by the Marshall Center and the newest U.S. Department of Defense Regional

Center, the Ted C. Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies. It included more than 50 senior policymakers, security practitioners and academics from 15 nations. The event focused on the implications of the Ukraine conflict on the European High North and Baltic Sea regions, where increased securitization and rising tensions have negatively impacted regional stability. The second event, the Marshall Center's Strategic Competition Seminar Series, explored the nature of the functional axis that exists between Russia and China, while also considering Russia's evolving risk calculus. The event brought together more than 40 experts who sought to enhance the understanding of strategic competition while advancing strategic relations. In particular, the event focused on the China-Russia relationship extending into the High North. This included the significant implications of the strengthening Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY**

The Arctic is a complex region at the crossroads of evolving geopolitical, economic, climate and security trends. The High North has a disproportionate impact on global security because of its economic potential and strategic location connecting North America, Europe and Asia. Though the Arctic has emerged as a region of exceptional cooperation in recent decades — giving rise to the term “Arctic exceptionalism” — it must be remembered that the region has experienced periods of conflict throughout its history. That history



is long and rich; Indigenous peoples have inhabited the region for close to 20,000 years, and the first European Arctic exploration dates to the Greek explorer Pytheas, who may have reached Iceland as early as 325 B.C.

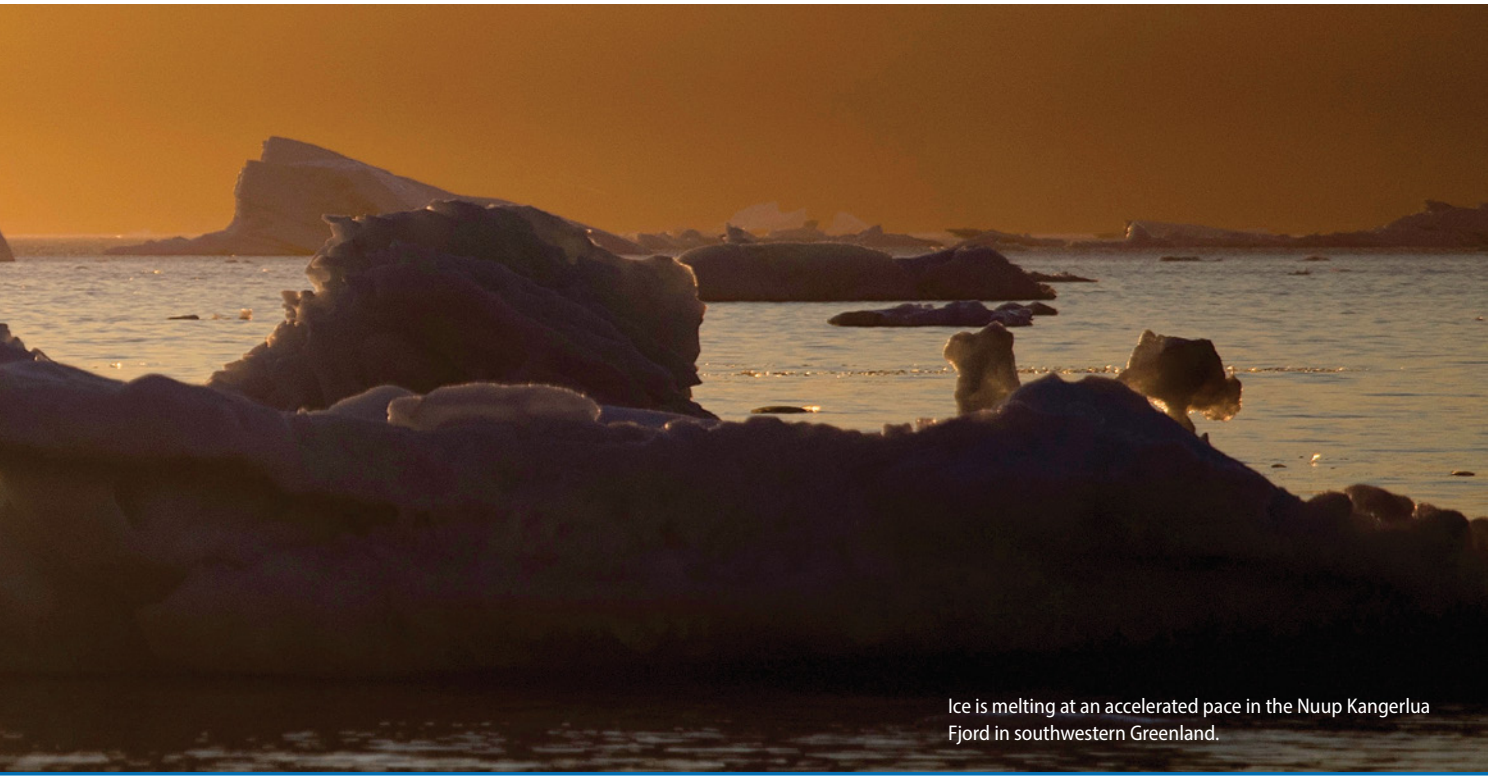
Maritime corridors have long been sought to connect global trading centers, and as early as 1525, Russian diplomat Dmitry Gerasimov suggested a northern passage existed with the potential to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Peter the Great later sponsored numerous expeditions to find that route. Indeed, economic interests led to the signing of the Spitsbergen Treaty (later known as the Svalbard Treaty) in the 1920s and later guided the opening of the Northern Sea Route to Soviet vessels in the 1930s. The ability to connect and resupply the northern communities of the Soviet Union was a driving factor in the initial establishment of the Northern Sea Route, though military bases would soon be established throughout the region to protect the Soviet Union's northern border.

The Arctic was obviously of great geostrategic importance during the Cold War. The region played an important role in nuclear deterrence and nuclear strike capabilities, though the superpowers were predominantly concerned with the air and underwater domains. The threat of nuclear strikes gave rise to the Cold War race for Arctic air and maritime superiority. Yet the region sustained some cooperation on scientific matters — such as polar bear studies — even during the height of the Cold War.

The long-standing cooperation in the Arctic that emerged during the post-Soviet peace-dividend years can be traced to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his 1987 “zone of peace” speech in Murmansk. Although Gorbachev’s goal of eliminating nuclear weapons in the Arctic was never realized,

some of his other proposals — such as opening the Northern Sea Route to international vessels and increasing scientific cooperation — became reality and initiated years of peaceful cooperation that gave rise to the adage “High North, low tension.” The multilateral Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy was signed in 1991 and established a cooperative framework that led to the 1996 Ottawa Declaration, founding the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council has been the premier regional governance mechanism, bringing together the Arctic states and representatives of Indigenous communities to discuss regional matters. The inclusion of 13 non-Arctic observer states lends an international perspective, though the privilege to vote on Arctic matters is not included with observer status. Under the Arctic Council and other important regional organizations, the Arctic has experienced significant cooperation. The Council has predominantly focused on the region’s unique challenges, such as the fragile ecosystem, rapidly evolving climate, sustainable economic development and the challenges unique to native communities. With its mandate specifically prohibiting the discussion of security matters, the council achieved enhanced dialogue and cooperation despite geopolitical trends elsewhere.

The Arctic reflected, to a certain degree, the exceptionalism that kept it somewhat immune to other regional challenges. But that cooperation began to fray with the planting of the Russian flag beneath the North Pole in 2007. By 2011, Russian President Vladimir Putin was advocating that the Northern Sea Route would rival the Suez Canal, and by 2013 Russia had developed a robust Arctic zone strategy, which was updated in 2020. For Russia, the strategy reflects both domestic and international policies. It must be noted that Russia has more than 24,000 kilometers of coastline in



Ice is melting at an accelerated pace in the Nuup Kangerlua Fjord in southwestern Greenland.

the Arctic — just about half of the entire Arctic coastline — and about 2.5 million inhabitants in the region, according to the Arctic Council. The Arctic is of critical importance to Russia’s economic and security interests. Russia’s Arctic zone accounts for 12%-15% of its GDP and 20% of its exports. About 75% of Russia’s oil and 95% of its natural gas reserves are in the North, making the region of immense significance, particularly as climate change makes it increasingly accessible (though climate change will present challenges associated with coastal erosion, permafrost thaw and damaged infrastructure). Russia has invested heavily in its Northern Fleet and regional infrastructure as its northern border becomes increasingly accessible.

Indeed, Russia’s 2022 Maritime Doctrine emphasized the importance of the Arctic zone to the nation’s military, economic, political and environmental security. It also considers the region notable for its contributions to Russian history and culture. This was confirmed by the Maritime Doctrine, which warns against “efforts by a number of states to weaken Russian Federation control over the Northern Sea Route, a buildup of foreign naval presence in the Arctic, and an increase in conflict potential in this region.” Its expansive Arctic policy highlights the growing importance of the region to the Russian Federation, yet it is unlikely that Russia has the economic or technological capabilities to fully develop this critical area. Russia relied heavily on Western economic investment for oil and gas ventures before its 2014 annexation of Crimea. Now, it is increasingly turning to non-Western states to fill the void.

As Russia has embarked on a more aggressive foreign policy, cooperation in the Arctic has experienced a chilling pause. The illegal annexation of Crimea brought significant

Western economic cooperation and military dialogue to a halt. However, scientific cooperation and work within the Arctic Council framework continued. Russian contributions to scientific research into climate change and the fragile Arctic ecosystem were vital to international efforts. From September 2019 to October 2020, the MOSAiC polar expedition, led by the Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research, brought together more than 500 scientists from 20 nations (representing 37 nationalities) to study the effects of climate change in the central Arctic Ocean. The research relied on seven icebreakers and research vessels — including four Russian icebreakers — and would not have been realized without Russian collaboration.

A Russian submersible is lifted onto a research vessel after exploring the North Pole ice in 2017.



Yet with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the international community — predominantly the West — has been forced to freeze Russia out of regional cooperation. This will be a long-term challenge because Russia cannot be completely frozen out of Arctic governance due to the size of its Arctic territory, and its scientific research and economic interests.

### UKRAINE AND THE ARCTIC

The world is now at an inflection point. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has altered global dynamics and this will continue to be felt acutely in the Arctic region. The world remains rightly focused on the ongoing war in Ukraine and the geopolitical implications of one of the most significant kinetic conflicts since World War II. But the changing dynamics of the Arctic should continue to demand attention to ensure that regional stability and security endure.

The war in Ukraine has had a profoundly negative impact on the Arctic's governance, scientific collaboration, indigenous challenges, economic activity, scientific research and maritime transport. Shipping numbers along the Northern Sea Route are greatly diminished, with no international companies willing to risk sending valuable cargo along the route in 2022. The only non-Russian flagged vessels on the route were liquefied natural-gas carriers transporting the valuable resource for the Russia-based company Novatek. Even China's COSCO shipping company, which has consistently sent ships through for the past decade — including 26 voyages in 2021 — has stayed away, according to High North News. Russia's unpredictability is simply bad for business — and Western sanctions have made the consequences of cooperating with Russian companies even more acute.

Unquestionably, the Arctic region is witnessing a rise in



A polar bear with a GPS videocamera collar lies on a chunk of ice in the Beaufort Sea.

tensions. Perhaps the most notable strategic implication of Putin's war was the near-immediate request for membership into NATO from two Arctic states that have long maintained neutrality: Finland and Sweden. Although NATO partners for years, the inclusion of these nations as full members will significantly alter the region's dynamics. With seven of the eight Arctic nations aligned under the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty and, as the treaty states, "determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law," there is an emergence of like-minded democratic states committed to collective defense. This new "Arctic 7" will have a unique ability to shape regional dynamics in the military, environmental and economic spheres.

Notably, the addition of Finland and Sweden into the Alliance will shift NATO's center of gravity northward. Russia's risk calculus will be altered significantly as the Baltic Sea transforms into a NATO lake — with significant improvement in the Alliance's ability to deter and defend against Russian aggression. A new NATO land and air bridge will link the Baltic Sea to the North Atlantic and Arctic, merging what was previously considered separate theaters into a single strategic space.

## NATO IN THE ARCTIC

NATO and Russia will need to adapt to the new realities created by an expanded Alliance. Finland's accession creates a 1,340-kilometer NATO-Russia border, which will affect military planning. Russia will be particularly concerned about the proximity of Alliance territory to its strategic bases in the Kola Peninsula, home to Russia's most advanced fleet. The Northern Fleet is viewed as a critical enabler to Russia's national security, nuclear deterrence, power projection and Arctic dominance capabilities. In January 2020, Putin elevated the status of the Northern Fleet to that of a military district — the only Russian fleet to attain such a status — in recognition of its important strategic role.

Indeed, the "High North, low tension" adage is rapidly transitioning to "High North, high tension." Russia will seek to compensate for the overall degradation of its conventional military power stemming from its devastating military losses in Ukraine. This will result in an increased likelihood of tensions and suspicions from the emerging security dilemma dynamics, which could lead to an inadvertent conflict in the short term. However, in the longer term a strong, coherent NATO in the High North is likely to enhance the overall deterrence effect and reduce the risk of escalation. Indeed, a mitigation of the security dilemma dynamics can be achieved if aggression is perceived to have less of an advantage. Such dynamics may set a course for eventual collaboration with Russia on areas deemed to be mutually beneficial. NATO's strategic thinking must consider these factors when balancing the need for enhanced security cooperation and development in the region with the mechanisms to reduce tensions and deconflict with Russia.

## EU IN THE ARCTIC

During Finland's presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2019, Prime Minister Antti Rinne called for "more EU in the Arctic and more Arctic in the EU." The Council requested the EU Commission update the 2016 Joint Communication on the EU's policy toward the Arctic. The resulting strategy was adopted in October 2021 and reiterates the original three pillars of the EU's 2016 agenda for the High North: (1) climate change mitigation and safeguarding the Arctic environment; (2) sustainable development in and around the Arctic; and (3) international cooperation on Arctic issues. The new strategy adds two important elements: the push for a multilateral agreement banning the development of new oil and gas reserves in the Arctic; and the establishment of a permanent EU office in Nuuk, Greenland.

Given that three of the eight Arctic Council states are EU member states (Denmark, Finland and Sweden), and that two others (Iceland and Norway) are members of the European Economic Area, which adheres to the majority of the rules and regulations of the EU's internal market, the EU's profile in the region is bolder than often thought. The EU's presence can be summarized in four aspects:

- The EU is a legislator in the Arctic. For example, all five European Arctic states are subject to the EU's internal policies on climate change and environmental protection.
- The EU is a financial contributor, especially in polar research. Over 200 million euros have been spent on the EU's Horizon 2020 research and innovation funding program. A central plank of the EU's Arctic research efforts is the EU-PolarNet initiative, which supports an EU-wide consortium of expertise and infrastructure for polar research. At least 22 research institutions across the EU are working under this umbrella.
- The EU is a central actor in international climate change policies; it has committed to reducing its total greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, and to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.
- The EU is the Arctic region's most important trading and economic partner. Among the major industrialized regions of the world, the EU is closest to the Arctic.

Taking all four aspects together, it is very likely that EU policies will have a significant impact on the Arctic region over time by combining the global shift toward green technology with financial resources and scientific know-how. One such example is the European Green Deal. If confrontation with Russia persists, the divide in the Arctic will increase, not only politically, but also socially and economically.

## SINO-RUSSIAN COOPERATION

China has long maintained an interest in the Arctic region. In 1925, the Republic of China took its first significant step in the Arctic by signing the Spitsbergen Treaty. China's scientific expeditions in the Arctic began in 1999 and include the founding of the Yellow River research station on Svalbard in 2004 and the completion of its 12th Arctic scientific expedition in 2021,

with the successful deployment of its indigenously constructed icebreaker, the Xuelong 2. China released the country's first Arctic Policy in January 2018, underscoring its interests and goals and calling itself a "near-Arctic" state. Meanwhile, Russia has increasingly relied on Chinese technology and economic investment to further its own ambitions in the Arctic. For example, China has made a significant investment in a joint gas project with Novatek known as Yamal LNG, which was completed in 2017. Encouraged by this cooperation, China decided to partner with Novatek again for a more ambitious project called Arctic LNG 2. In this endeavor, Chinese companies are doing more than just investing money. They are also involved in the prefabrication of components at Chinese yards, including BOMESC Offshore Engineering, COSCO Shipping Heavy Industry, Penglai Jutal Offshore Engineering, Wison and Qingdao McDermott Wuchuan. The components are shipped to a yard outside Murmansk for assembly. The completed modules are then towed to the Arctic LNG 2 site on the Gydan Peninsula for installation.

China is in a potentially unique position to capitalize on Western sanctions against Russia by filling technological and economic investment gaps to increase its influence in the Arctic. However, in the aftermath of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, followed by the EU's adoption of serious sanctions,

China's leadership has been cautious not to circumvent the EU's measures and decided in May 2022 to halt the fabrication of LNG 2 components. In September 2022, many of the Chinese manufactured parts were sitting on Chinese docks, thereby risking considerable delay of the project. By mid-December that year, a Novatek project director expressed confidence that Arctic LNG 2 would meet the planned timeline of a 2026 completion. Further, there remains an opportunity to strengthen the development of China's Polar Silk Road project, though sanctions and the inaccessibility of Western insurance on Russian cargoes will complicate the expansion of maritime traffic in the region, as will the perceived unpredictability of the Russian regime.

In return for economic investment, China will likely seek to receive significant quantities of natural resources and look for ways to improve its scientific research in the area. China will continue to propel its "global commons" approach to the Arctic, though this is contrary to Russia's approach. Indeed, China is likely using its current relationship with Russia to establish itself in the region and to build sufficient knowledge and infrastructure to enable the use of the Transpolar Sea Route, across the international waters of the Arctic Ocean, when it opens, possibly around the middle of this century. China will further seek to exploit Russia's natural resources as it strives to provide energy and protein

Russian naval officers stand aboard the Northern Fleet's flagship missile cruiser, Peter the Great, at its Arctic base in Severomorsk, Russia.



to its population. However, China's cooperation with Russia will be mindful of any perceived damage to its own global economic interests, as China will prioritize its economic well-being over that of Russia's.

In an effort to counterbalance its growing dependency on China, a wary Russia is likely to continue attempts to court other non-Western nations to the region. It must be remembered that in 2007, Russia adamantly opposed China's accession to observer status on the Arctic Council (although it removed those objections in 2013) and there likely remains a persistent wariness over China's intentions. In particular, Russia has welcomed interest from India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates. States that are hesitant to adhere to the sanctions will be particularly sought after by Russian companies in order to fund development projects. Western nations must be mindful of the creation of two Arctics — one a unified region with collaboration and governance mechanisms of the like-minded Arctic 7 states, and the other developed by Russia and non-Western partners that seek to exploit the region's economic potential.

### AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The Arctic is a unique region, with significant governance and cooperative mechanisms to address the numerous challenges of a rapidly evolving region. Climate change and economic development are affecting the Arctic at an unprecedented pace, and the Arctic will continue to emerge as a geopolitical hot spot. Without a doubt, Russia's actions are damaging short-term Arctic stability and security. Mutually beneficial cooperation has halted in areas such as climate change, economic development, crisis response and military deconfliction, enabling China and other nations to gain leverage in the Arctic in a manner that may negatively affect the fragile environment, Indigenous communities and regional security.

In the long term, Russia will continue to be an essential Arctic stakeholder, with the largest Arctic territory and population. The West should be mindful of the regional impact given worsening relations with Russia in the Arctic. While it was essential to halt cooperation given the gravity of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it remains necessary to understand the implications on the fragile Arctic region and to proceed thoughtfully. Increased regional activity in the Arctic — particularly NATO activity — and the melting of ice that protects Russia's northern border will further fuel its paranoia toward regional security. Yet, at a time when tensions are rising, the West lacks some of the mitigation and tension-easing measures previously available.

Collaboration should continue to occur within the framework of the Arctic Council, though experts must be realistic that far less can be achieved given Russia's hostile actions. Until talks can resume freely among all Arctic nations — dependent upon an eventual Russian withdrawal in Ukraine — the Arctic 7 should continue extensive dialogue and cooperation in the region.

Finally, the presence of a strong, unified NATO in the region can enhance regional stability through deterrence. Yet, it is critical that actions are clearly communicated and understood by all sides, with exercises and operations



Ukrainian soldiers fire a Finnish 120 mm mortar toward Russian positions in the Donetsk region of Ukraine in 2023.

carefully planned to avoid Russian misunderstanding, particularly given the longer border with Finland's accession and the proximity of NATO forces to the strategically vital Kola Peninsula. Western policymakers and militaries must seek to understand regional tensions and sensitivities and work to avoid climbing the escalation ladder through inadvertent actions or misperceptions. The long-term vision for the Arctic should be maintaining a stable, inclusive and peaceful region, but it will require significant effort by all Arctic states to achieve this. □

The authors wish to thank the Marshall Center, the Ted Stevens Center and the participants in their events for the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the High North.

The views expressed are the authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of the Navy or U.S. Department of Defense, or of the Marshall Center or the Ted Stevens Center.

— THE —  
**STRATEGIC**  
**TRIANGLE**  
— POST-UKRAINE —



PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION



# HOW WILL THE RUSSIA-CHINA-INDIA RELATIONSHIP CHANGE?

By **Dr. Marcin Kaczmarek**, University of Glasgow lecturer, and **Dr. Vinay Kaura**, Marshall Center adjunct professor

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In spite of their close relationship, Russia and China differ significantly in their approaches to India and their perceptions of what role New Delhi should play in international global and regional orders. As a consequence, Moscow and Beijing do not agree on the relevance of the Russia-China-India triangle and have ascribed different aims to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since India's accession in 2017.

China seems to be facing a trilemma. First, Beijing has a number of disputes with New Delhi and the two sides have been engaged in bilateral rivalry for several decades. The border clashes in summer 2020 were the most recent and most bloody example of the potential for conflict. This was amplified in 2021, when China called its soldiers who died during the clashes “martyrs” and promoted them across social media. Second, Beijing remains concerned by India's tilt toward the United States and its participation in such U.S.-led initiatives as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (also known as the Quad and composed of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.), the Summit of Democracy, and even the very concept of an “Indo-Pacific” region. Finally, China has to take into consideration Russia's good relations with India, including political support exchanged between the two sides, strong military and defense ties, and growing energy ties.

Russia's approach seems to be driven by a desire to maintain the Russia-China-India triangle, which is an old geopolitical figure that can be traced back to the ideas of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, and which finally took shape in the 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, who was Russia's prime minister in 1998-1999. It is difficult to pinpoint any tangible results of this policy. However, in a broader context, Moscow considers it of utmost importance to keep India from fully aligning with the West. Lastly, the Russian elite continues to recognize cooperation with India as a way of balancing the country's growing dependence on China.

Over the past decade, Russia and China took several steps to narrow the differences in their approaches to India so that they do not evolve into obstacles to their relationship. After years of resistance, China agreed to enlarging the SCO, something Moscow had long supported. This change in Chinese policy — the sources of which we know little about — seems to have been the decision of Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping and

intended to limit further potential competition between China and Russia. Chinese, Russian and Indian troops have taken part in several joint SCO military exercises, even though India skipped the 2021 edition, citing the COVID-19 pandemic. Russia, for its part, changed its arms sales patterns. Prior to 2014, Moscow had always provided India with slightly more advanced weaponry than it sold to China. Since then, Russia has provided the same type of equipment to both customers, especially S-400 anti-missile systems and Su-35 fighter jets. Finally, Russia claims that its diplomacy played a role in easing tensions between China and India over their border clashes.

The main fault line in this triangular relationship continues to be the tensions between Beijing and New Delhi. India has often behaved in a very idealistic manner vis-à-vis China. This was illustrated when newly independent India announced its ideal to build an “Asian Century” in partnership with China. To institutionalize this idealism, India and China signed an agreement in 1954 committing to mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual noninterference and peaceful coexistence. In the 1950s and 1960s, when China was largely isolated internationally, India strongly advocated in favor of greater international engagement with China. When the U.S. proposed in the early 1950s that India be given a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council as its sixth member — in an attempt to draw the nonaligned country closer to the West — Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru refused the offer because he wanted to avoid conflict with China. Surprisingly, India insisted that communist China was the rightful owner of a permanent seat on the Security Council. However, India and China became locked in a border dispute that culminated in India's humiliating defeat in the 1962 war. Now, Beijing's attempts to enhance its influence in Bangladesh, the Maldives, Myanmar and Nepal, its territorial claims on parts of India such as Arunachal Pradesh, and its lack of support for India's membership on the Security Council and Nuclear Suppliers Group all point toward a systematic project by China to prevent India's rise as a regional and global player. Even with the U.S.'s accommodation of India as a nuclear power and of its ambitions to become a permanent member of the Security Council, the status quo within global institutions has usually favored China's position.



Special forces soldiers of Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states participate in joint exercises in Kyrgyzstan's Shamshi Gorge. India has taken part in exercises that included rival China. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

An Indian Army photo shows tanks pulling back from the India-China border during a military standoff between the two countries in February 2021.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



India has long pursued an incoherent China strategy despite clear indications that its problems with China are structural. This incoherence may, however, be partly explained in terms of New Delhi's deficit in relevant indicators of power. New Delhi's approach toward the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has been accommodationist, as India is one of its founding members. At the same time, India has treated China's flagship One Belt, One Road project (later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative), with utter contempt. Informal summits between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Xi in 2018 and 2019 could not

offset structural factors, such as territorial disputes, that make adversaries of the two Asian giants. India's reluctance to come to terms with a recalcitrant China may have led to Beijing's disregard for three decades of agreements meant to ensure peace at the disputed border and eventually to the clash in the Galwan river valley in 2020 in which 20 Indian soldiers died.

India's elevation as a U.S. partner and the pivot of Washington's strategic focus to the Indo-Pacific region signal the U.S. desire to raise India's geopolitical standing, though China disapproves. Despite the steady growth of bilateral security ties between India and the U.S., New Delhi's response to the idea of joining a formal military alliance has so far been circumspect. India's membership in the Quad fits its own strategic priorities, as it signals to China that New Delhi has established partnerships with key Western countries without being entangled in any formal security commitment that may be threatening to Beijing.

China's ambitions in the Indian Ocean do not seem diminished by its growing problems in the Western Pacific. On the contrary, China has the political will and economic strength to pursue a "two-ocean strategy" aimed at

reconfiguring the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region in Beijing's favor by expanding its naval operations from the South China Sea and Western Pacific into the Indian Ocean. Indeed, few in India would believe that a China locked in geopolitical conflict with the U.S. might be more accommodative of India's strategic concerns. India's problems with China are rooted in intractable bilateral disputes, rather than U.S. policies in Asia. Therefore, India's search for suitable options to respond to an assertive China may create new sources of friction in the Sino-Indian rivalry in the years ahead.

China's opposition to India's close ties with the U.S. and its characterization of the Quad as an "Asian NATO" is understandable. The most important factor in Beijing's aggressive stance against U.S.-India ties is India's potential to shape China's strategic periphery. Although China does not view India as a peer competitor, it is not oblivious to the reality that India has the potential to generate significant tension for China if aligned with the Western bloc. Preventing India from aligning with the U.S. is an important strategic objective for China, just as it is for Russia.

During the most recent SCO summit in Uzbekistan, China's Xi did not hold a bilateral meeting with his Indian counterpart Modi. Neither was there a triangular meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin, Xi and Modi. Several incidents suggest that Russia is trying to distance itself a bit from China and move closer to India. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Putin traveled to India and met Modi before he saw Xi. In December 2021, during Russia's military buildup along its border with Ukraine, Modi met Putin at the India-Russia Summit in New Delhi. But a few days later, Modi addressed U.S. President Joe Biden's Summit for Democracy. Because the Western powers are keen to sustain the rules-based global order and India has also shown an interest in doing so, Modi emphasized at the summit that the "democratic spirit" is integral to India's "ethos of civilization." And it should not be forgotten that Modi did not travel to Russia in December 2021 for his annual summit with Putin.

Although India is a U.S. partner within the Quad, it has been mild and indirect in its criticism of Russia's war in Ukraine. There is also some equivocation in the Indian position. New Delhi has called for an end to hostilities and a return to diplomacy, while reiterating its belief in the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states. However, rather than sanctioning Moscow, New Delhi has increased its imports of Russian oil since the Ukraine war began. But India is not alone in this equivocation, as almost half of the world is not willing to punish Russia for its aggression. New Delhi's need for Russian-made defense materiel has increased as the security challenge presented by China has intensified. Following the 2020 border clashes, India's defense minister, Rajnath Singh, asked Russia to accelerate the delivery of the S-400s, while emphasizing the timely procurement of 21 MiG-29 Fulcrum and 12 Su-30MKI Flanker combat aircraft. India has so far received two squadrons of the S-400s; the delivery of the second squadron was delayed for a few months because of the ongoing war in Ukraine. The Indian Air Force also received simulators and other equipment for its S-400 training squadron in May 2022.

There were rumors of Russia withholding S-400 missile deliveries to China because of India; however, no arms deals with either country were sufficient to indicate a changing pattern. On the other hand, Russia and China conducted joint naval exercises off the Japanese coast while the Quad summit was going on in Tokyo. Russia and China also conduct regular joint exercises with the Iranian navy, but not with India's navy.

India has strengthened defense cooperation with the U.S., which supports a democratic India's aspirations to be a Security Council permanent member. India's closer relations with the U.S. are in part a response to the closer Russia-China realignment and also its own alignment with U.S. interests in Afghanistan. Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the Western sanctions in response have upset global oil markets and disrupted food supply chains. India had been trying to recover from the devastating economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the war in Ukraine has created unforeseen difficulties. Reflecting India's frustration with Russia's war in Ukraine, Modi directly told Putin in Samarkand in September 2022 that "democracy, diplomacy and dialogue" were needed, not war. Putin, however, praised Modi for pursuing an independent foreign policy despite "attempts to stop him," apparently referring to U.S. pressure. Hailing Modi as a "true patriot," Putin asserted that the "future belongs to India." He also called Indian citizens talented and driven. Moscow is aware that India is key to ensuring that Putin is not a global pariah after the conflict in Ukraine ends.

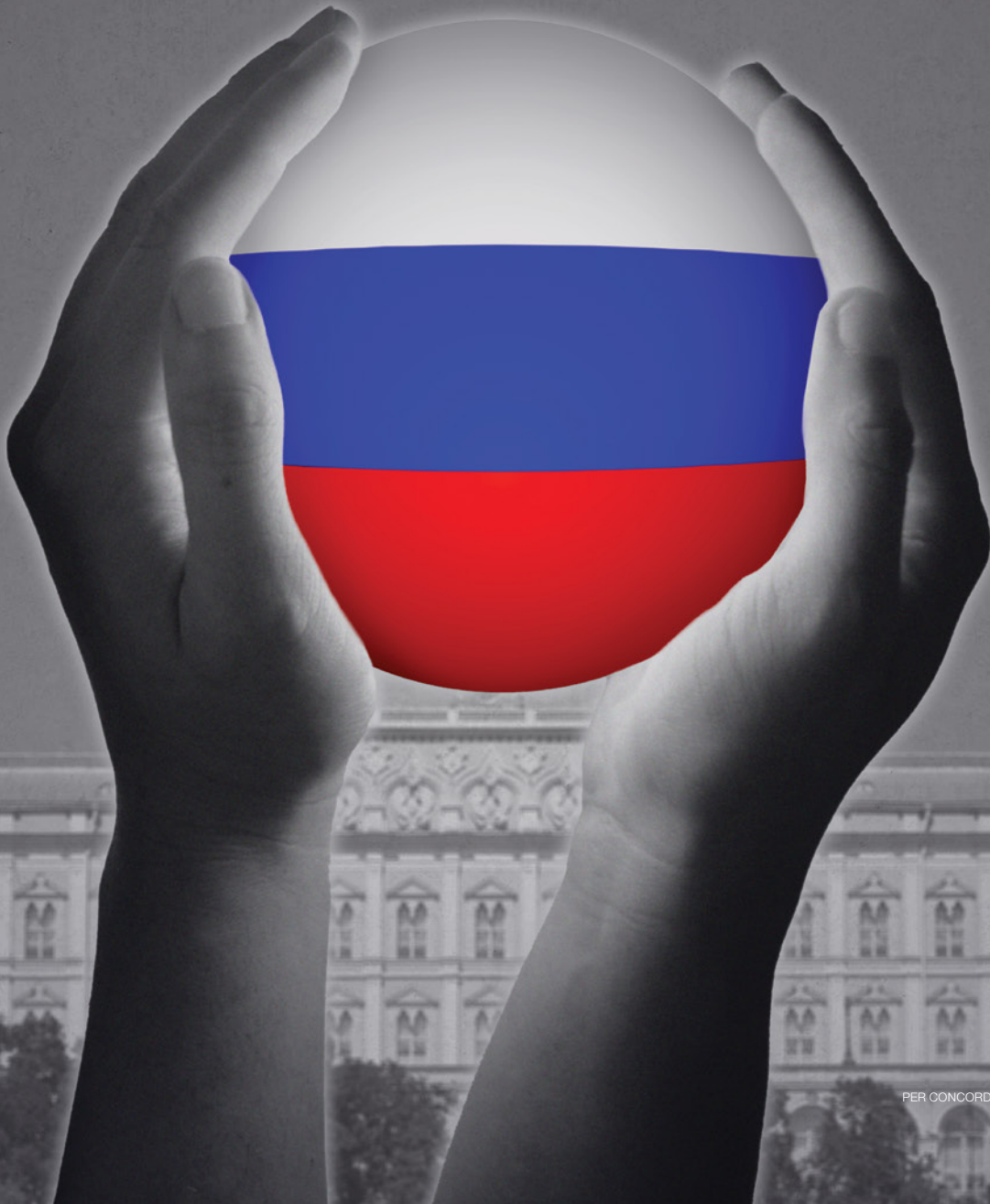
Due to power asymmetries between the two, a too-close Russo-Chinese alignment becomes a red line for India, which suggests that India maintains its arms procurement from Russia to lessen Russia's dependence on China. Though both India and China would prefer that Russia's military not be crushed in Ukraine, their reasons are different. India views Russia as an important balancer against China, and Russia's defeat would end this leverage. However, India's tilt to the West is slow but steady, marked by a diversification of arms procurement away from Russia and toward France, Israel, the United Kingdom and the U.S. Russia's attractiveness as a military supplier to India has been on a downward curve, and this shift will only accelerate in the future.

Whereas during most of the Cold War, the alignment among the U.S., China and Pakistan was juxtaposed with the partnership between New Delhi and Moscow, in today's circumstances, India and the U.S. are aligning against China. As opposed to its relationship with the U.S., India has neither common foes nor common allies with Russia. Thus, for the West it is important to realize that an "if you are not with us, you are against us" rhetoric is not helpful. Respect for the strategic considerations of nonaligned states such as India is of paramount importance to not "lose" them in the context of strategic competition with authoritarian regimes. In the long term, the tension between China and India will not disappear, but Russia will continue its efforts to keep both on its side. Nevertheless, Russia is India's past, not its future. India will not partner in an initiative to create a post-Western global order that is characterized by authoritarianism. □

# RESHAPING **RUSSIA** AFTER UKRAINE

By Lt. Cmdr. Travis Bean, U.S. Navy

PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

# Putin's War of Choice and What Comes Next

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**U.S.** President Dwight D. Eisenhower once quipped: “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” To this end, the United States and its allies must start planning for the possibility that Russia’s continued losses in Ukraine put the Kremlin’s stability in question.

In mid-November 2022, the Russian army retreated from Kherson, the only major city taken after the beginning of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s “special military operation” in Ukraine. This retreat occurred after Russia’s numerous battlefield defeats in the east. Moscow’s army once stood at the gates of Kyiv; now they are losing ground nearer to their home turf and have resorted to long-range missile attacks against innocent people and civilian infrastructure. Things are not going well for Putin. Though the war’s eventual result is far from certain, the U.S. and NATO must be prepared for a governmental collapse in Russia. A Kremlin regime failure may be rapid and could open a narrow window for the West to reshape the global security environment after Putin. That window of opportunity to mitigate the damage caused by a weakening Kremlin may be small, so planning to guide the deteriorating authoritarian state toward democratic values is essential.

## PLANNING PITFALLS

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* magazine about Russia’s apparent declining power, authors Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Michael Kofman invoked an old adage: “Russia is never as strong as she looks; Russia is never as weak as she looks.” Planners should therefore be wary of the pitfalls and unknowns when approaching an ostensibly weak Kremlin. While Putin may reign for decades more, he may well soon be retired to his dacha.

Despite reports that Putin’s health is declining, such rumors have yet to be confirmed by any reliable source. However, biology catches up to us all — even long-reigning autocrats. Putin turned 70 years old in October 2022 and has already eclipsed the male life expectancy in his country, according to the World Bank’s calculations. His time left as president, and his time left on Earth, may be short. Though he has carefully crafted his regime to be “coup proof,” the possibility exists that declining health may affect his ability to play a role in managing his successor. Further, if he is unable to select a replacement, that may bring a quicker end to his military adventure in Ukraine.

The successor question is an important one, as the answer will greatly affect the character of post-Putin Russia and its desire to be belligerent toward its neighbors and NATO. Robyn Dixon, *The Washington Post* newspaper’s

Moscow bureau chief, highlights that some Russia-followers think that Putin’s successor “would have to be a centrist acceptable to the elite, who could end the war and build bridges to the West.” To this end, Dixon specifically mentions Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, a technocrat who led his city through the COVID-19 crisis and hosted the 2018 World Cup. The relevance of the combined factors of Putin’s age and the cost of the war in Ukraine increases daily, gradually granting Moscow’s oligarchs more agency in the selection of the country’s next leader. Considering their choice will have an immeasurable effect on their bank accounts, it is likely they would choose someone more centrist than Putin. However, if Russian history demonstrates anything with respect to regime change, it is that disorder is the rule and predictions can be difficult.

Though it appears from the outside that Putin and his oligarchs maintain tight control over governmental affairs, this structure may not be as strong as it seems. One must recognize the role of the restricted media in Russia and the affect it has on the country’s citizens. In particular, the use of Russian television outlets as a mouthpiece for the government has maintained Putin’s popularity and left the public in a fog about their country’s losses in Ukraine. The Kremlin has also quashed dissenting media outlets such as the independent *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper. Yet the media restrictions give credence to the notion that at its core, the Russian government is, to some degree, accountable to the public. If it were not, this authoritarian control of the media would not be necessary. Anatol Lieven, a senior fellow at the Quincy Institute, says, “If you get a public split in the regime and the losing faction appealing to the streets, that is the moment when revolution, I mean mass popular unrest, really does become possible.” Media censorship affects what people think, and Russian popular opinion provides a foundation for government action. If the Kremlin were to lose its ability to control the narrative, the very foundation of the authoritarian state would be in jeopardy.

Should the assault on Ukraine strategically fail, one major complication will be the control of Russia’s multi-armed and decentralized military. Given that the offensive operations in Ukraine are being fought by a number of mercenaries, national guard units, regional militias and the regular army, a deteriorating defensive situation for Russia implies that peace agreements will necessarily be more difficult. Similarly, should the Russian government collapse before completing military operations in Ukraine, command and control of these disparate units also becomes problematic.

Perhaps the greatest caution to take would be preventing the humiliation of the Russian people. An example of how to do this can be found in the Marshall Plan and the overall reconstructive strategy in West Germany after World War II. In it, those most responsible for the heinous crimes of the Holocaust were held to account, while simultaneously the victors helped rebuild the defeated state's economy. Similarly, should Russia be defeated in Ukraine, NATO must not pursue punitive economic measures against Moscow.

### **SUPPORTING RUSSIA POST-CONFLICT**

Some Russia observers have already documented the current decline of the Kremlin. Former Russian diplomat Boris Bondarev has written about the possibility of the war in Ukraine causing Putin's downfall, suggesting that the "best thing the West can do isn't to inflict humiliation. Instead, it's the opposite: provide support." As someone with a breadth of experience in the Russian government, Bondarev's outlook is both insightful and backed by institutional knowledge. A recent Foreign Affairs magazine article uses more measured language, encouraging the U.S. to approach a declining Russia with caution. The author states that the country "goes through cycles of resurgence, stagnation, and decline [and that the] threat may evolve, but it will persist." Russia observers and academics continue to have a negative outlook for the future of the Kremlin in its current form. This view is supported both by current facts and observations, as well as historical patterns.

The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s was one of many factors that led to its downfall. There are some important parallels to note between the Afghanistan and Ukraine invasions: the combined effects of equipment losses, geopolitical embarrassment and immense numbers of war dead again create historical conditions for regime change in Moscow. Yet, history demonstrates that such conditions are brought on quickly and may be short-lived.

With today's belligerent Russia as a frame of reference, it is difficult to imagine how close to total peace NATO and the Kremlin were in the early 1990s. Early in Boris Yeltsin's term as president, for instance, his government even considered applying for membership in NATO. The peace dividend of the Cold War also included a massive reduction in Russia's nuclear arms. History tends to repeat itself, and the situation after the final Russian troops leave Ukraine may prove to be no exception. It is possible that the next person to fill Putin's role may be pragmatic and West-leaning like Yeltsin. NATO should be prepared for the possibility of a future partner in Moscow, so that an opportunity for peace is not lost.

Another example of authoritarian retrenchment in early 1990s Russia was in the country's transition to a market economy. As Fiona Hill, a former official with the U.S. National Security Council, describes in her book "There is Nothing for You Here," Russia's oligarchs quickly and deeply imbedded corruption in Russia's evolving economic infrastructure. This in turn set the tone for what would become a Russia corruptly controlled by a rich few. In hindsight, one



A rusting Soviet tank, destroyed during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan decades ago, remains abandoned north of Kabul in 2022.

may reasonably argue that this was a missed opportunity for the NATO bloc to reshape Russian economic norms before they were derailed. However, the evolution was fast-paced and somewhat unprecedented. What NATO can do now, armed with the knowledge of history, is be ready for a future scenario where conditions are favorable for the creation of a rules-based and equitable Russian economy.

Should Putin be defeated in Ukraine, the U.S. should consider economic assistance for Russia akin to the Marshall Plan. The reasons are twofold: First, even after a bitterly fought World War II, the U.S. invested a great deal of time and effort into rebuilding Europe. This provides a historical precedent for how rebuilding a former adversary nation may be done.

And second, the period directly after the fall of the Soviet Union can be seen as a missed opportunity for rebuilding a stronger, more democratic Russia. There is a potential for such a governmental failure to happen again, and NATO should not miss another opportunity to convert an adversary into a partner.

### THE OBJECTIVE END

In the unlikely scenario that the Russian government collapses in the wake of the war in Ukraine, and if the environment is sufficient for external influence, the question remains: What would be the end objective? The answer is, in short, a less aggressive and more stable Russia. In a hypothetical post-Ukraine conflict era, NATO countries have a chance to reduce the likelihood of a future conflict started by Moscow. To do so, they need to apply the lessons learned from the assistance given to Europe and Japan after World War II, and those learned by Russia in the period immediately after the Cold War.

What should be done then? In order to work toward a peaceful future, Western democracies should keep in mind George C. Marshall's own words in his Marshall Plan speech: "Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist." Clearly, the first step in the process would be to provide life support to the Russian economy. By doing so, NATO could hope to further bolster free institutions by undertaking the following:

1. Support democratic values in a new government. The framework for a democratic Russia exists already considering the country has a parliament, constitution, regular elections and even dissidents. However, these things exist as a Potemkin village. NATO and the European Union should send experts to coordinate with their democratic counterparts in Russia to buttress standard democratic norms.
2. Support a rules-based and equitable market economy and fortify it against cronyism and kleptocracy. Hill identified Moscow's rocky transition from communism to a market economy as a precursor to the current authoritarian regime. Assisting a post-Putin Russia with transition to a rules-based market economy will have a manifold effect on Russians' quality of life and economic health.
3. Support nuclear arms reduction and security cooperation

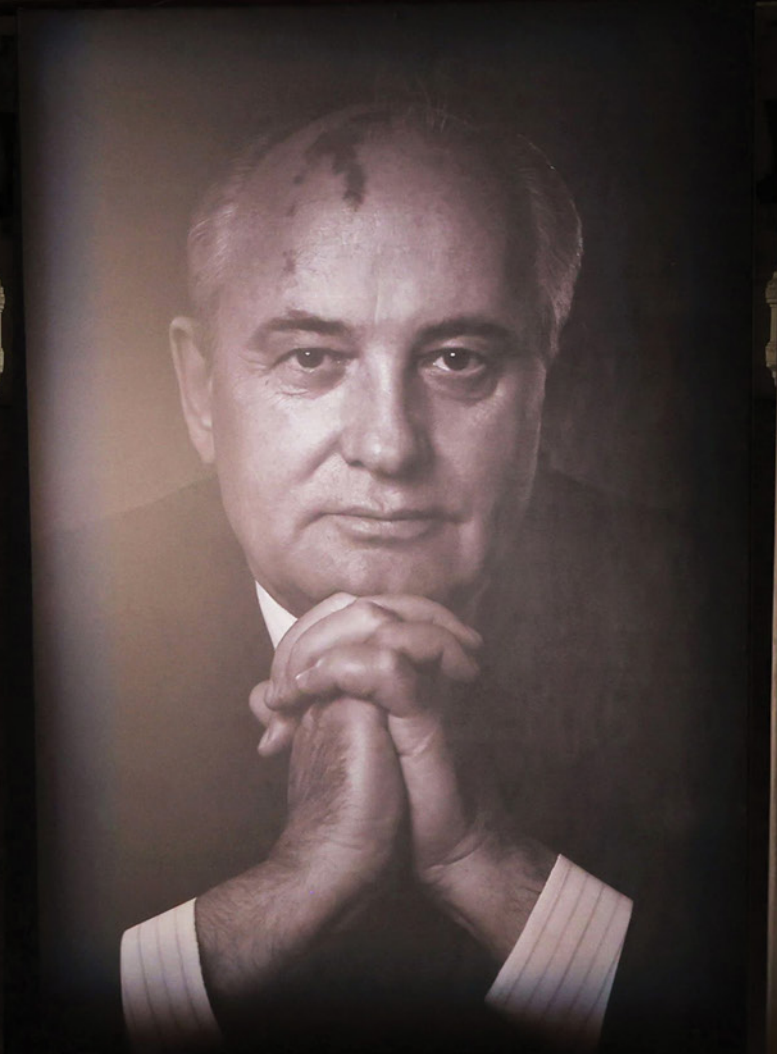


U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall addresses the United Nations General Assembly in New York City in 1947.

with Russia. Efforts to assist in rebuilding the country may pay dividends in the form of a new and strong ally for the West, should such efforts succeed. At the same time, there should be consideration of denuclearizing Russia. This should not be the first item on a rebuilding agenda, but it is a goal worth pursuing. Notably, Russia, among other nuclear powers, is treaty bound to pursue elimination of its nuclear weapons arsenal.

The U.S. poured large sums of money and a good deal of expertise into Europe and Japan after World War II. The results of these investments contributed to the foundation of peace, stability and security still seen today. The Marshall Plan in Europe provides a template for how the U.S. and NATO may effect similar change in Russia. Similarly, the Yeltsin era and the associated failure of democratic and economic norms to flourish provide a reason for NATO to get involved early in Russian reconstruction. There may be a brief period after the war in Ukraine for the U.S. and its allies to sow the seeds of a more peaceful future — and planners should be thinking about how to do so. □

PUTIN'S ABUSE  
OF  
GORBACHEV'S  
LEGACY  
IN  
STRATEGIC CONFLICT





## Introduction: Ending the Cold War

Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, the last general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' (USSR's) first and last president, died on August 30, 2022. He has become our contemporary Rorschach test: appreciations and assessments reveal biases, subjectivity and underlying agendas. Immediate appraisals of Gorbachev's life encapsulate a wide, almost schizophrenic spectrum of opinion: Gorbachev was labeled, variously, a hero, saint, tragic figure, traitor and fool. Adam Michnik, editor of the Polish daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, noted that whatever Gorbachev's intentions, his actions changed the course of history. Pope John Paul II stated that Gorbachev, the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize winner, "was sent by God," though for many in Russia, his choices were treasonous.

Assessments of Gorbachev's foreign policy legacy differ markedly outside and inside the borders of the former Soviet Union. Outside, Gorbachevian reforms are viewed as necessary, and criticism is focused on their ineffectiveness. For the nearest neighbors, all but Belarus celebrate Gorbachev's unintended role in their restorations of independence. More generally, assessments focus on the gap between Gorbachev's intent and the actual outcome, the extent to which Russian President Vladimir Putin dismantles Gorbachev's legacy, and the role of the individual in history.

Gorbachev died six months and six days after Russia had launched a full-scale, multi-axis attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The invasion transformed contemporary strategic competition into conflict and crisis, triggering unprecedented Western cooperation to support Ukraine's right to self-defense and statehood. What do appreciations of Gorbachev's legacy tell us about the nature of current strategic competition and what do they signal about the direction of Russia's politico-strategic journey over the past 30 years? While Gorbachev experienced the USSR's strategic collapse, does late-Putinism face similar factional infighting with the potential for triggering regime change, or even the disintegration of the Russian Federation?

## Funeral Respects

Putin offered a short official statement by way of response to Gorbachev's death: "Mikhail Gorbachev was a politician and statesman who had a huge impact on the course of world history. He led our country during a period of complex,

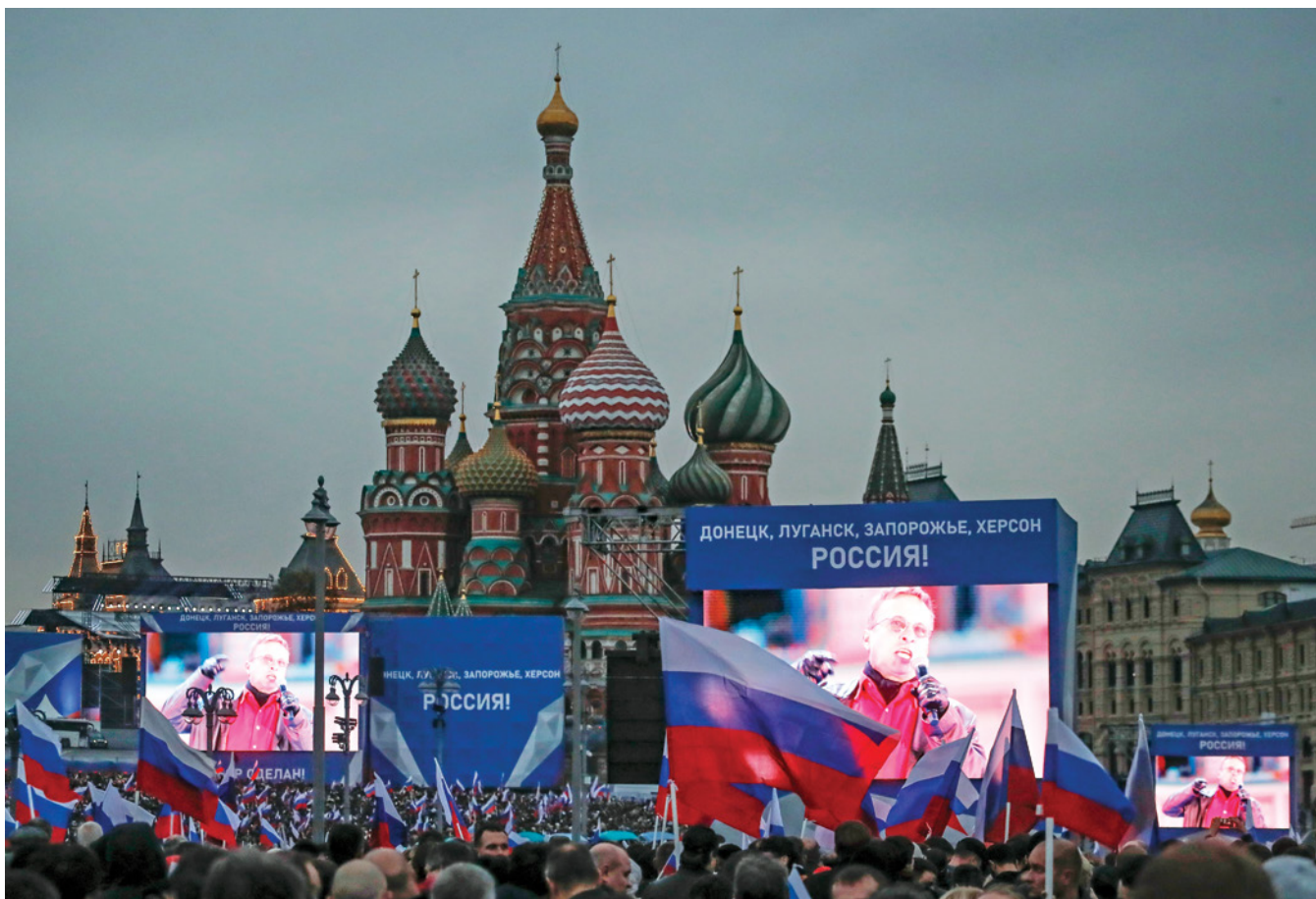


Mikhail Gorbachev waves to the crowd during a Victory Day parade in Red Square in 1985, the year he became Soviet leader. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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dramatic changes, major foreign policy, economic and social challenges. He deeply understood that reforms were necessary and strove to offer his own solutions to urgent problems." Gorbachev was afforded respectful but limited coverage on Russian television. The state did not provide a full state funeral — Putin was said to be too busy to attend — though it contained some elements, such as honor guards under the Russian flag in the historic Hall of Columns, and was organized by the presidential protocol service. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov credited Gorbachev with "sincerely wanting to believe that the Cold War would end and an eternal romantic period between a new Soviet Union and the world, the collective West, as we call it, would commence." However, Peskov went on to claim, it was then that the "bloodthirstiness of our opponents manifested itself. It is good that we [Russia under Putin] realized and understood that in good time."

Other Russian commentators were not so circumspect. Leonid Slutsky, a senior member of the state Duma and head of a so-called systemic opposition party, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, stated: "I feel sorry for the great country, whose disintegration began in the era of 'perestroika' and 'new thinking' and played into the hands of those who sought to erase the USSR from the political map of the world." Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, went further, amalgamating Gorbachev with former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and attacking both: "If I were Putin, I would have shut down the Yeltsin Center and the



Russian actor Ivan Okhlobystin addresses a crowd in Moscow in 2022 during celebrations related to Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gorbachev Foundation a long time ago. I would have used it as a center for patriotic training to bring up worthy people. All those problems have already become overripe.”

Russian journalist Vladimir Vorsobin proved vitriolic in his condemnation of Gorbachev: “And when the Empire started to concentrate again, when the Empire started to absorb its lost territories, exactly in this year (2022) ... the ‘grave-diggers of the USSR’ started to go away. Ex-President of Ukraine [Leonid] Kravchuk, ex-head of Belarus [Stanislau] Shushkevich, ex-State Secretary of the Russian Federation [Gennady] Burbulis. And like a captain, the last to leave his ship, Gorbachev went away. ... They will try to bury his ‘temple of the sun’ — of Perestroika, Glasnost, Democracy, openness to the world — in oblivion as soon as possible. From all sides.”

By contrast, music journalist and Kremlin critic Artemy Troitsky noted that Gorbachev was “by and large the only normal ruler” Russia had had since the tsar Alexander II. Gorbachev was “not a sadist, not a thief, not an idiot, not a power seeker.” Grigory Yavlinsky, a Russian liberal politician and economist who drafted Gorbachev’s 500-day economic plan, stated: “Mikhail Gorbachev freed us — his contemporaries. ... He liberated us. And he did this of his own volition. We didn’t even ask him. At the time, only a miniscule number of people were fighting for freedom, while even fewer believed that this was actually possible. Gorbachev gave us all freedom. He is not to blame for what we did with this freedom.”

In many former Soviet republics (the “inner empire”), Gorbachev is praised, albeit faintly, because his attempts to reform a stagnating system unleashed unintended but welcome consequences: the accelerated collapse of the USSR and communism, subsequent independence and the initiation of democratic change in Russia itself. As such, he is a symbol of freedom, empire and destruction. As Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs tweeted: the “collapse of the USSR was the best moment of the 20th century. The end of the Cold War was great but the killing of people in Tbilisi, Vilnius, Riga is also part of his [Gorbachev’s] legacy. It is up to the History to judge him.” Lithuania’s Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis condemned Gorbachev’s use of state violence to suppress dissent in Vilnius on January 13, 1991, when 14 civilians were killed and 140 injured as Soviet troops stormed the TV Tower and the Radio and Television Committee building in Vilnius: “Lithuanians will not glorify Gorbachev. We will never forget the simple fact that his army murdered civilians to prolong his regime’s occupation of our country. His soldiers fired on our unarmed protestors and crushed them under his tanks. That is how we will remember him.”

Sultan Akimbekov, director of the Institute of Asian Studies, noted that no one is indifferent to Gorbachev’s passing, and that emotions are mixed in Kazakhstan. Gorbachev is hated for the “collapse of the huge country, for the loss of its social policies and for depriving them of clarity in terms

of the future of their private lives, for which during the times of the USSR the state bore full responsibility. Others thanked him for the opportunities that were given — for glasnost, political and economic liberalism, and for making the national republics free.” In Belarus, Vital Tsyhankow, columnist for the pro-opposition website *Salidarnasts*, observed: “People wonder sometimes why Gorbachev is so loved in the West and so hated in Russia. It is simple. Gorbachev stood for freedom of choice, universal values and pluralism. All the things that are so valued in the West and so hated in Russia.”

In Central and Eastern Europe (the Soviet “outer empire”), Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika take a back seat to his refusal to apply military force to prevent the collapse of the Iron Curtain and communism in 1989. In 1989, Gorbachev adopted a “Sinatra/My Way” doctrine (satellites were free to develop their own foreign and security policies), a clear reversal of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev’s doctrine of limited sovereignty, a doctrine Putin rhetorically revived in his Munich Security Conference speech of 2007. There were no repeats of the Warsaw Pact invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 on Gorbachev’s watch; Putin invaded Georgia in 2008, and Ukraine in 2014 and again in 2022. Gorbachev did not use mass-scale state violence to achieve Soviet objectives; Putin targets Ukrainian civilian centers and its energy grid with Iranian-made swarm drones and Russian missiles. Gorbachev offered greater political freedom, while Putin ruthlessly represses.

Gorbachev is also understood to have been an enlightened communist, the anti-Putin. As one commentator put it: “Be grateful to Gorbachev. What if the USSR was ruled in the 1980s by someone like Putin?” Romanian journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu underscores this sentiment: “In the gallery of monsters who ruled the USSR from 1917 until today, Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev was the only human being. The only one who tried to stop the Great Killing Machine. I never could understand, no matter how much political analysis I read, how it was possible for Gorbachev to take the place of Stalin and Putin. It was almost like a fairy tale.” Putin dismantles Gorbachev’s legacy and ruins his life’s work, according to Bulgarian professor Rumen Kynchev: “The policies conducted by Putin now differ from Gorbachev’s, who wanted to transform Russia into a modern state, embracing the Western model of democracy. Putin’s stance is radically different. What he has been doing for the last 10 years is returning Russia to its imperial past.”

Chinese responses to Gorbachev’s passing were mixed. Gorbachev is held responsible for the collapse of the USSR, but also for normalizing Sino-Soviet relations, reducing the Soviet threat to China and enabling three decades of globalization, and with it, China’s economic rise. The nationalist state-run Chinese tabloid *Global Times* argued that Gorbachev “blindly worshipping the Western system made the USSR lose independence and the Russian people suffer from political instability and severe economic pressure.” The “moral” or “lessons” of Gorbachev’s regime propagated by the Chinese media are clear: overly radical, excessive reform leads to decentralization, democratization, and then instability and

disintegration. China’s state-run news magazine *Global People* referenced an interview with Gorbachev in 2006, quoting him as warning: “Chinese friends: Don’t do anything about democratization, that won’t bring good results! Don’t allow chaos; stability comes first.” The collapse of the USSR is presented as a cautionary tale for China — economic progress must be prioritized over political reform — a “Reverse Gorbachev” belief Chinese President Xi Jinping has taken to heart.



Protesters block a tank near the TV Tower broadcasting facility in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1991, as Soviet troops stormed the facility, killing 14 people.

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Western media reporting on Gorbachev’s death almost unanimously praised the catalytic role and legacy of the last Soviet leader. French President Emmanuel Macron noted that Gorbachev was: “a man of peace whose choices opened up a path of liberty for Russians.” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen praised him as a “trusted and respected leader” who “opened the way for a free Europe.” Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that Gorbachev was “one of the leading statesmen of the 20th [century] who left an indelible mark on the course of history,” and that, “We recall and value his contribution to strengthening of relations with India.” In Nigeria, editorials lamented the lack of a courageous leader to make hard choices and initiate a reform effort to address decay and stagnation while avoiding state collapse.

Left of center, the independent Israeli broadsheet *Haaretz* acknowledged Gorbachev’s role in shaping modern Israel by allowing the exodus of 3 million Soviet Jews, 1 million of whom boosted Israel’s “hi-tech industry, the health system, music and sport.” In 2022, 100,000 Russian information technology specialists similarly emigrated, this time to Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan and beyond. Ariel Bulshtein, writing in the right-leaning *Yisrael Hayom*, and echoing the “exodus” theme, noted that Gorbachev’s personality — the “last Pharaoh of the USSR” — was critical: “Unlike the original Pharaoh of Egypt, Gorbachev took the decision to free the Jews and let them leave. Unlike Egypt’s original Pharaoh, he did not regret [the decision], and did not pursue those leaving and did not try to destroy them. ... Some redeem their world with one decision.” Pinchas Goldschmidt, who resigned his

post as chief rabbi of Moscow in July 2022, advised Jews to leave Russia to avoid being made a scapegoat for hardships caused by Putin's war of choice in Ukraine: "We saw this in tsarist times and at the end of the Stalinist regime."

### Gorbachev's Legacy: Putin's Inheritance

Gorbachev's reforms were opposed by party and state officials whose survival depended on the status quo. Gorbachev sought to revive Marxism, free the USSR and rehabilitate Soviet society. Gorbachev faced an existential dilemma: how to be both Martin Luther and the pope? How to both preserve the Soviet system and reform it? Gorbachev's unscripted "solution" was to weaken the CPSU by dismantling the political and constitutional structure that upheld the monopoly of power enjoyed by the party and mobilize society without recourse to large-scale coercion and bloodshed.

But this resulted in the erosion of his own power: perestroika could not deliver quickly enough the promises of glasnost. Glasnost allowed society to complain vigorously, publicly and continuously about the gap between promise and performance, and it undercut Soviet citizens' belief in the cornerstones of the Soviet system, namely fear of coercion, CPSU omnipotence and censorship. As a sincere Marxist-Leninist who believed in the dialectic, Gorbachev was unable to generate a sustainable synthesis. Gorbachev failed to save the USSR by reforming it.

Assessments also raise counterfactual and "what if?" questions. Might the outcome have been even more bloody without Gorbachev as decision-maker? Alternatively, might Gorbachev have chosen other paths? What of the Chinese economic liberalization and political control model? What was to stop Gorbachev extending the life of the Soviet Union another decade or two, enjoying power as a "Brezhnev-2" or, more contemporaneously, as a Soviet Deng Xiaoping? Could there have been economic acceleration without restructuring?

In answer, we can only surmise that there could have been, but not with Gorbachev; the human factor (personality) matters in history. Jonathan Steele, an old hand in the 1980s Moscow journalistic fraternity, notes that Gorbachev "was the most democratic leader that Russia (the USSR's de facto center) had over the last century, if not ever." Russian-American professor Nina L. Khrushcheva concludes that: "What made Gorbachev different from other Russian leaders was that he accepted responsibility for the consequences of his rule" and that, "He was the first leader since Vladimir Lenin to graduate from a university. He was intelligent." Gorbachev remained grounded.

For dictatorial Belarus, China and contemporary Russia, however, the clear "Gorbachev lesson" is that pro-Western policies, democratization, reform and restructuring lead to chaos, corruption, dislocation and disintegration. As "slippery slopes" unleash "Frankenstein's monster," the phrase "never loosen the screws unless you want collapse" becomes Gorbachev's fabricated legacy. This "strategic insight" becomes the foundational myth of the Putin era: from disorder under Gorbachev and then Yeltsin comes order under Putin. In this reading of reality, Gorbachev is Adam,

the Soviet Union is the Garden of Eden, and the original sin is in the eating of the forbidden fruit of reform. Gorbachev is scapegoated for the mistakes, failures and shortcomings of the Gorbachev-Yeltsin era, from the collapse of the empire to economic dislocation. Gorbachev became the corrupted avatar into which the current elite and its state bureaucracy could pour its collective sense of humiliation, shame and anti-Western grievance for its bloodless defeat ("the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century," in Putin's words). His death provides catharsis and atonement of sorts, but only of sorts, for only through aggression in Ukraine can Putin enact a revenge for the past, for 1989 and 1991.

Contemporary Russian propaganda hammers home a constant message: as transformation cannot occur without upheaval, a stable status quo every time beats disruptive reform. In reality, though, such an understanding fails to acknowledge the legacy that Gorbachev himself inherited in 1985: a discredited leadership, a corrupt state-directed economy, a war in Afghanistan going nowhere, and unrest in Poland. Gorbachev's role as the George Washington of post-Soviet Russia, enabling a peaceful transfer of power, is discounted. Such propaganda fails to question whether Putin's blend of Russian national imperialism, partial mobilization and Soviet-style propaganda will sustain his regime, though it does, implicitly, invite comparisons between the legacy Gorbachev inherited and the legacy that Putin will leave his own successor.

In the 1996 presidential election, Gorbachev received 0.5% of the popular vote, and his Social Democratic Party never achieved more than 1.5% of the popular vote. Gorbachev emerged as a critic of Putin, and he was particularly vocal about the rigged Duma elections in 2011. On his 80th birthday celebration that year, Gorbachev stated that Putin had built a sham democracy: "We have everything — a parliament, courts, a president, prime minister and so on. But it's more of an imitation." By 2013, Gorbachev claimed Putin's inner circle was full of "thieves and corrupt officials."

However, as Putin's manufactured popularity grew, Gorbachev's fell. A 2021 poll reported that 70% of respondents believed Russia deteriorated with him at the helm. In a film produced that year for his 90th birthday ("President of the USSR: First and Last"), Gorbachev lamented that his phone calls to the Kremlin were not returned. Gorbachev never publicly condemned the annexation of Crimea or the invasion of Ukraine, but on February 26, 2022, the Gorbachev Foundation stated: "We affirm the need for an early cessation of hostilities and immediate start of peace negotiations. There is nothing more precious in the world than human lives."

As the war in Ukraine progressed through 2022, Germany's *Russland-Politik* has been among its first conceptual casualties. Other echoes of the late Soviet period abound. The December 2022 Viktor Bout-Brittney Griner prisoner exchange between Russia and the United States reminds us of Cold War spy exchanges between the Soviet Union and the U.S., with Abu Dhabi as the stand-in for the Glienicke Bridge connecting Berlin with Potsdam. The appointment of



Russian troops march in Hungary in 1959, three years after suppressing an anti-Soviet revolt in the country. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gen. Sergei Surovikin as commander of Moscow's combat operations in Ukraine, a role in which he served from October 2022 to January 2023, drew attention to his role as a captain in August 1991, when as a commander of a battalion of BMP infantry fighting vehicles, he attempted to break through a barricade set up by anti-coup protestors and pro-Yeltsin supporters in Moscow, killing three demonstrators. Surovikin was imprisoned but the charges were dropped. Indeed, on August 20, 1991, Putin, then a lieutenant colonel, claimed to have resigned from the KGB.

References in 2022 to Russian vertical nuclear escalation and changes to military nuclear doctrine to allow a first strike against a non-nuclear state contrast starkly to the late 1980s and the raft of arms control agreements — most notably the December 8, 1987, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty — negotiated between Gorbachev and U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

Gorbachev is castigated by Putin for the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his speech declaring the initiation of the “special military operation” on February 24, 2022, Putin labeled Gorbachev the most effective destroyer of the Soviet system. By contrast, and without shame, Putin projects himself as the restorer of “historical Russian lands” and “Slavic unity” and as the “liberator of Ukraine.” On December 30, 2022, Russian state television broadcast a documentary devoted to

the centenary of the USSR that presented the Soviet Union as a strong and successful state (“an empire of kindness”) and Gorbachev as “the gravedigger of the Communist Party and the USSR,” whose “naive” foreign policy helped the U.S. implement its 1982 plan to destroy the USSR.

The deterioration of the Putin-Gorbachev relationship over the past two decades reflected their different philosophical beliefs: Putin's mobilization, invasion, annexation and martial law contrast starkly with Gorbachev's negotiated reductions, diplomatic compromises, internationalism and commitment to peace. Gorbachev traded military surplus for political gains. Gorbachev's promise of liberation, hope and the anticipation of a bright future was a step forward. Putin's forever war and characterization of Russia as a besieged fortress supposedly rising from its knees, whose only future is in its history, is a step back.

### **From Collapse of the USSR to Culmination in Russia?**

Does Putin's aggression in Ukraine create the prospect of Russia's culmination or exhaustion and eventual defeat? In December 2022, Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, predicted regime collapse in Russia, pointing to the seeming stability on May 1, 1991, in Red Square. He noted that the usual events were taking place: “the parade, the banners, the leaders standing

on the Mausoleum, and so on. Nonetheless, four months later, that which was called the USSR and was believed to live forever, ceased to exist. ... It only took Gorbachev to go to the Ukrainian Crimea, to immediately set everything off and then finish it, too. Therefore, let us wait for certain events that are bound to happen there. They will certainly happen.”

Almost from the very beginning of the invasion, observers have predicted a split between Russian elites, who support a more aggressive military engagement, and proponents of a more peaceful resolution of the conflict — between conservative militaristic hardliners (“party of war” or hawks) and reformist technocratic “soft-liners” (“economic-technocratic bloc” or doves). Such splits would help put an end to the hostilities. What the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz describes as a culmination or exhaustion point would be reached and result in revolt or revolution by society from below, a palace coup within the elite, and/or military mutiny.



Anti-coup protesters confront Soviet soldiers in Moscow in 1991 during the failed attempt to remove Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

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But culmination has not occurred, despite Russia’s need to mobilize and Ukrainian military advances in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. Rather, an intra-elite consensus and even consolidation and convergence demonstrate that there is no fundamental internal disagreement over Russia’s strategic ends. Furthermore, there is no reason to expect a split among the Russian elites in the foreseeable future. Indeed, Russian political scientist Vladimir Gelman argues that in authoritarian regimes “a split within elites into two or more relatively stable competing factions is possible only when these regimes are governed through collective leadership.” This was certainly the Soviet experience. Splits occurred when collective leadership was exercised after Stalin’s death, when the Presidium/Politburo of the Central Committee was the main decision-making body, and in 1957, 1964 and between 1987-1990 when Gorbachev battled critics who opposed liberalization within the Politburo and the Central Committee.

Collective decision-making is not in evidence in Putin’s Russia. The Security Council is at best a sounding board and

mechanism to secure complicity, as the February 21, 2022, emergency session amply illustrated. Putin rules through an elite network whose representatives he personally co-opts. Structural factors also impede the military’s ability to launch an effective challenge to the Kremlin — such as a Russian equivalent of the German Operation Valkyrie in July 1944. There is no such tradition of military revolt. Russia’s armed forces remained nonaligned in the August coup of 1991 and the October events of 1993, when President Yeltsin confronted the Supreme Soviet. The FSB’s military counterintelligence department, the largest in the FSB, has wide latitude to monitor dissent within the military. The FSB itself, under Aleksandr Bortnikov since 2007, exudes a pervasive culture of mistrust. It is structured so that individuals are loyal to their rank not to their subordinates or managers. The elevated status of those in their 30s and 40s who have only known Putin as the nation’s leader makes them more, not less, loyal to the regime.

However, if in the early 2020s there are no evident polarizing splits between Putin supporters and opponents, as was the case with Gorbachev in the late 1980s, elite infighting over the reallocation of resources and appointments to influential positions are currently very much in evidence. Institutional actors and subinstitutional factions do not aim to remove Putin but rather to secure their competitive goals at the expense of their domestic rivals. Shifting opportunistic alliances are driven by perceptions of weaknesses and ruthless self-interest. Russian military failure fuels a power struggle over the position of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. Igor Strelkov, a spokesman for the FSB leadership and nationalist army officers, Igor Zolotov, head of Russia’s National Guard, and Yvgeny Prigozhin, deceased head of the private military company the Wagner Group, have been chess pieces on this “competitive goals” board. Prigozhin had openly criticized St. Petersburg Gov. Alexander Beglov, Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov before leading Wagner Group forces in a short-lived mutiny in June 2023 aimed at forcing concessions from — or even the dismissal of — the military’s high command. On August 23, the Pentagon said that Prigozhin was “likely” killed in a suspicious crash of a private jet whose passengers included other Wagner officials.

Current intra-elite rhetorical scapegoating may turn to more preemptive defensive reactive purging all in the name of loyalty to Putin and with the aim of defending and protecting the commander-in-chief/president — the *vozhhd*. Putin could fire Shoigu and Gerasimov, but he could only do so once without placing himself directly in the firing line if further military reversals unfold. This would be unacceptable as it, in effect, makes Putin’s position dependent on the speed, scale, direction and timing of future Ukrainian military action on the ground in Ukraine. A Ukrainian strategic surprise could lead to a dethroning “emperor has no clothes” moment. However, if in the face of further military reversals Putin does not remove Shoigu and Gerasimov, he will then be criticized for such inaction. It’s a “lose-lose” proposition for Putin.

A shift and fracturing of Russia’s manufactured majority consensus is underway. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine transforms the social contract (stability for personal freedom) as troop

mobilizations and censorship, propaganda, internal repression and external isolation increase. Kirill Rogov argues that there are three factions in society: the faction of “total war,” with propagandists Olga Skabeyeva and Vladimir Solovyov as cheerleaders; a “just war” faction, which thinks that this war is a matter of justice and invokes Russia’s responsibility to protect “Russians” in Ukraine as fig-leaf justification, a position supported by ordinary news programs; and “conformists” who support the present because they cannot change the past, but are unwilling to die on the altar of Putinism.

Putin believes mobilization will expand the total war faction (culpability embraces all) and reduce the just war and conformist factions. Shoigu, speaking at the December 21, 2022, Russian Defense Ministry board meeting, announced that Russia will raise the conscription age from 18 to 21 and the maximum age of conscription from 27 to 30 years, and increase to 1.5 million military personnel from a current paper-strength of 1.151 million, as well as create two new military districts centered in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Might such announcements change the calculus in the minds of the mobilized between the costs of conformity and resistance, making resistance the more attractive option? The more the patriotic loyal opposition in favor of escalation gets its way, the more the majority of apolitical society is politicized against Putin’s leadership as the war reaches out to integrate them into the grip of its life-threatening logic: “Everything to the front!”

Real power in Russia is not centered on the military but rather the civilian bureaucracy (state apparatus), the security services (siloviki) and state corporations, especially the ministries for gas, oil and nonferrous metals. At what point does a consensus build that Putin is no longer the protector of the system, the guarantor of stability and wealth, and that there is now greater risk to individual persons, families, property and consumption habits with Putin than without him? Break point occurs when uncertainty in the future outweighs stability in the present. At this point, power structures look for a successor, and when that particularly destructive and chaotic genie is out of the bottle, it can only be forced back in through massive purging to prevent a dissolution of the system, regime collapse and potentially even the disintegration of the Russian Federation.

## Conclusions

Collective leadership will temporarily return to Russia after Putin’s death or a power transition — managed by Putin (a process Russians would dub “operation successor”) — or through forced removal from office (a palace coup). Until then, Putin has no intention of standing aside, having disabled any functional mechanisms (and, of course, candidates) that would allow for a transfer of power. Personalistic regimes don’t do peaceful transfers. Forging intra-elite consensus around a post-Putin successor after military defeat is the very definition of “mission impossible.” If there is an unraveling of the Putinite system, current rubber stamp and moribund power structures may act with much greater autonomy, and seemingly irrelevant constitutional clauses will have a greater significance, as was the case in the late Gorbachev period.



Removing Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, left, and Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov could be perilous for President Vladimir Putin.

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At the same time, because personality matters, the more marginalized Putin becomes the more threatened he will feel and the more unpredictable his resultant behavior: Russian stability will be then traded by Putin for the illusion of his international strategic relevance and domestic political control. This was a choice Gorbachev eschewed in favor of jointly negotiating the construction of guardrails to prevent escalation and aggression in the international system. In response to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Ukraine and the West have united to constrict and constrain Russia today, as illustrated by the White House press conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. President Joe Biden on December 22, 2022.

In August 1991, U.S. President George H.W. Bush’s “Chicken Kiev” speech underscored the dangers of the sudden collapse of Soviet authority. As if recognizing such parallels, Putin’s televised address on December 21, 2022, reassured the Defense Ministry and army leadership that Soviet-style over-militarization would be avoided, even as Shoigu announced an increase in the size of the armed forces. Other consistent themes that parallel the experiences of 1989-1991 and 2022-2023 are becoming clearer. First, in both cases Russia did not and will not lie in ruins with a foreign army occupying Moscow. Second, any disintegrative dynamics were and will be the result of second-order, unintended effects. Third, Russia’s nearest neighbors continue to fear Russia’s strength more than its weakness and the consequences of a Russian victory more than Moscow’s defeat.

Paradoxically, although Putin strives to avoid Gorbachev’s legacy, his war of choice suffers multiple failures: an independent Ukrainian nation and, ultimately, state, grows stronger, the West becomes more cohesive and less fragmented, and the hoped-for external respect and admiration for Russian military prowess and power diminishes markedly. Succeeding only in failing, Putin will ultimately be judged to be a more tragic figure than Gorbachev. Putin’s reliance on unwarranted violence will prove to be his and his regime’s undoing, just as Gorbachev’s avoidance of the same was his making. □

# FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

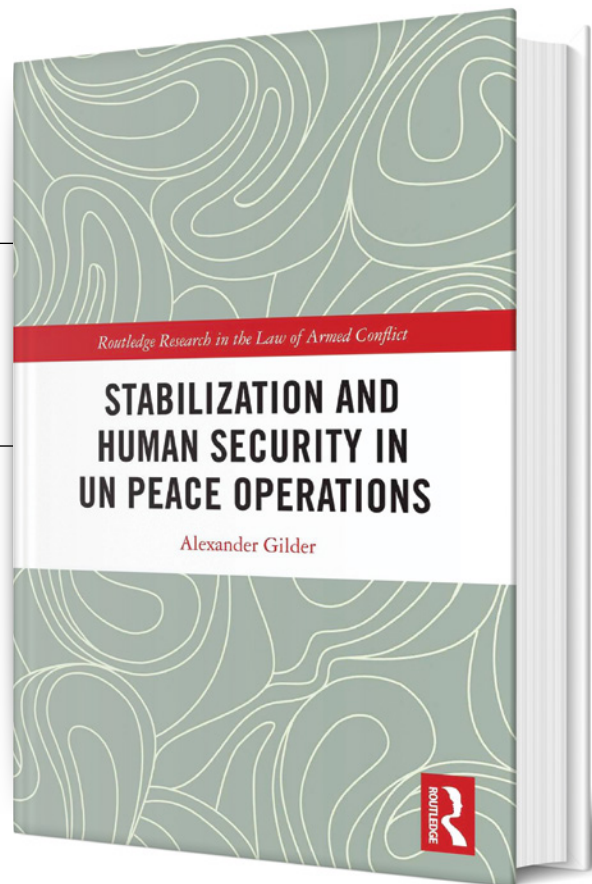
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In “Stabilization and Human Security in UN Peace Operations,” Dr. Alexander Gilder investigates stabilization operations mandated by the United Nations Security Council and how such resolutions promote human security. Gilder, an international lawyer and lecturer at the University of Reading in England, is critical of aspects of the mandated tasks in some missions, such as robust use of force and cooperation with host states that are focused on state security and arguably make the U.N. a party to the conflict. These missions are contrasted with other development-focused missions that emphasize individual security. His book serves as a primer on U.N. peacekeeping operations and what makes a mission a stabilization mission, and on the concept of human security and how it continues to change over time. His findings can help defense planners move beyond a focus on physical protection and civilian harm mitigation to a broader understanding of bottom-up and localized approaches that shift “the objective of security from the state to the individual.” Gilder understands the strategic implications of force and cooperation with bad actors, and how such approaches delegitimize military intervention and fail to protect individuals or achieve long-term peace.

The book’s eight chapters are divided into three parts. Part I, an overview of the concepts and problems, is worth a read on its own for those with little time. It broadens one’s thinking of these issues, moving away



from collective security imposed by the state to individual security built from the bottom up. In Chapter 1, Gilder discusses the challenges peacekeepers face and provides an overview of concepts he later discusses in detail.

Chapter 2 describes the flavors of U.N. peace operations and what makes one a stabilization mission. He gives an overview of the generations of U.N. missions, from the first generation of traditional peacekeeping missions between 1948 and 1988, to the Cold War-era missions that operated under the principles of peacekeeping (consent of host state, impartiality and the minimal use of force), and how the rules of engagement changed over time to allow U.N. troops to use force in certain situations. Even when force was limited



to self-defense, U.N. troops were protecting people in U.N.-designated areas — a practice that continues today. The U.N. Operation in the Congo (ONUC), from 1960 to 1964, was a first-generation mission highlighted in the Netflix movie “Siege of Jadotville.”

The second generation of missions added activities that included “peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, state-building, local peacemaking and some peace enforcement.” However, there were notable failures, particularly in protecting civilians, which led to integrated missions (sometimes called third generation), focused on protection of civilians (POC) as a core task. Gilder notes that these POC mandates are becoming the “bread and butter” of U.N. missions. He then discusses what stabilization means and how robust and offensive force, as well as counterterrorism, have become embedded into stabilization missions. The U.N. does not have a formal definition of these missions, though NATO, the United Kingdom and the United States, seem to have a common understanding. Gilder observes that the inclusion of stabilization tasks in mandates, which are essentially counterinsurgency tasks, is not surprising given that France, the U.K. and the U.S. have become penholders on most resolutions and all have experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Chapter 3 describes the development of human security and how it has been applied to U.N. operations. Part of this chapter is a cogent and pithy overview of the classical development of security, sovereignty and the realist, state-centered concept of security and state. Gilder discusses the early documents that mention “freedom from fear and want” and how this concept became foundational to the understanding of human security as well as to the linkage between security and violence. As he observes, focusing only on violence misses the reality of other preventable deaths caused by environmental disaster, famine, etc., that do not require a militaristic, use-of-force approach. Therefore, he develops a framework used in the case studies that recognizes that threats are interrelated, human security must protect fundamental freedoms, and the hierarchy of threats is unique to individuals and communities.

Part II includes case studies in which Gilder identifies activities required under the mandate. Specifically, he looks at those required activities that are rights- and norms-based, use protection and empowerment methods (local engagement,

building capacity, etc.) and are considered vulnerable. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 analyze these activities to determine if a human security approach has been used. Though two of the U.N. missions he analyzes self-identify as stabilization missions — the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, initiated in 2013, and the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, started in 2014 — he states through an analysis of activities that the U.N. Mission in South Sudan, begun in 2011, also conducted stabilization activities, such as robust force and direct support to the state, though it is less robust than those identified as stabilization missions.

Part III addresses the (in)compatibility of stabilization and human security. In Chapter 7, Gilder describes how a robust militarized stabilization approach competes with local human security needs and can undermine human security and international law. Gilder identifies several areas of incongruity when analyzing stabilization, human security and international law. There is a lengthy discussion about the implications of militarization on the objectives of human security. The push by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council to build military capacity to counter terrorism has detracted from efforts to build good governance — the latter is more likely to support human security in the long run, and these efforts risk marginalizing the individual. Chapter 8 concludes that a human security approach is needed to meet individual needs, to empower local communities and to keep the peace over time. When U.N. missions promote legitimate rule-of-law institutions, they move beyond physical protection to broader security issues. Nonetheless, physical protection measures are necessary and provide security for the actors supporting broader human security efforts.

Gilder’s book highlights that we need a better balance. Human security is not “pie in the sky,” but rather the recognition that individuals have intrinsic value, that their interests are of higher value than those of the state and that violence is not the only cause of insecurity. Marginalizing individuals may well be a model for fueling violence, not mitigating it. □

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# Resident Courses

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## Admission

The George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies cannot accept direct nominations. Nominations for all programs must reach the center through the appropriate ministry and the U.S. or German embassy in the nominee's country. However, the registrar can help applicants start the process. For help, email requests to: [registrar@marshallcenter.org](mailto:registrar@marshallcenter.org)

## Check the Marshall Center Website for Updates on Course Schedules

### PROGRAM ON APPLIED SECURITY STUDIES (PASS)

The Marshall Center's flagship resident program provides graduate-level education in security policy, defense affairs, international relations and related topics such as international law and counterterrorism. A theme addressed throughout the program is the need for international, interagency and interdisciplinary cooperation.

### PROGRAM ON COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME (CTOC)

This resident program focuses on the national security threats posed by illicit trafficking and other criminal activities. The course is designed for government and state officials and practitioners who are engaged in policy development, law enforcement, intelligence and interdiction activities.

### PROGRAM ON TERRORISM AND SECURITY STUDIES (PTSS)

This program is designed for government officials and military officers employed in midlevel and upper-level management of counterterrorism organizations and will provide instruction on both the nature and magnitude of today's terrorism threat. The program improves participants' ability to counter terrorism's regional implications by providing a common framework of knowledge and understanding that will enable national security officials to cooperate at an international level.

### SENIOR EXECUTIVE SEMINAR (SES)

This intensive seminar focuses on new topics of key global interest that will generate new perspectives, ideas and cooperative discussions and possible solutions. Participants include general officers, senior diplomats, ambassadors, ministers, deputy ministers and parliamentarians. The SES includes formal presentations by senior officials and recognized experts followed by in-depth discussions in seminar groups.

### PROGRAM ON CYBER SECURITY STUDIES (PCSS)

The PCSS focuses on ways to address challenges in the cyber environment while adhering to fundamental values of democratic society. This nontechnical program helps participants appreciate the nature of today's threats.

### SEMINAR ON REGIONAL SECURITY (SRS)

The seminar aims at systematically analyzing the character of the selected crises, the impact of regional actors, as well as the effects of international assistance measures.



In the next issue of *per Concordiam*:

# CHINA'S EUROPEAN STRATEGY

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