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UNDERSTANDING AND DETERRING RUSSIA:
U.S. POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

SCENESETTER

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The Russian Security Challenge

Russia today poses a greater foreign policy and security challenge to the United States and its Western allies than at any time since the mid-1980s, when it was incarnated as the Soviet Union and the U.S. and the USSR were engaged in a nuclear arms race that seemed set to bring the world to the point of a nuclear conflagration. Russia's military seizure and annexation of Crimea, and its war in Ukraine's Donbas region, have sparked Europe's worst security crisis since the 1990s Yugoslav wars. Russia's military intervention in Syria has upended Western calculations in the Middle East. Russian actions now endanger Euro-Atlantic aspirations for stability across a region stretching from Belarus to the Eastern Mediterranean. Russia's challenge has occurred during a period when the U.S.-led post-Cold War security order has weakened and fragmented, along with the norms that have sustained Western institutions like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). The legitimacy and credibility of these institutions has been undermined in spite of the fact that the enlargement of NATO and the EU, along with the creation of the framework for an institutionalized partnership with Russia through the Charter of Paris, the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the NATO-Russia Founding Act, were all seen to have led to a new era of more cooperative U.S.-Russian relations and the stabilization of Eastern Europe in the 1990s and 2000s.

In an August 2014 speech in Yalta, in Crimea, only a few months after annexing the peninsula, Russian President Vladimir Putin openly rejected the U.S. and Western vision of the post-Cold War order in Europe. He essentially proposed jettisoning it to return to an earlier frame for managing relations that emerged 70 years ago, in the closing phases of the Second World War, during the Potsdam and Yalta conferences—where the big allied powers of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union decided the fate of Europe and agreed to rearrange borders over the heads of the defeated powers and smaller countries. Putin made a pitch for the United States and Russia to come together again, in a "new Yalta," to thrash out adjustments to the current order that would recognize Russia's special status in regions of Europe and Eurasia that once constituted part of the Russian and Soviet empires. Here, Moscow would have a veto over any development that impinged on Russia's sovereignty and interests. In many respects, this would be the same arrangement that Russia has at the United Nations (UN) through its permanent membership of the

UN Security Council. Russia would have the acknowledged right to block steps by other lesser powers that it did not like, such as Georgia's and Ukraine's efforts to associate with NATO and the EU. Russia's decision to go to war with Georgia in August 2008, to seize Crimea in March 2014, and to embark on a covert war in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region have all been forceful assertions of this demand for a veto.

The Role of Vladimir Putin

In looking at Russia and Russia's actions since the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in the Donbas region, external observers have spent a great deal of time looking at President Putin and trying to understand his motivations and worldview. There is good reason to do so. Although there is a collective leadership around Putin, and there are people in that collective with different conceptions of what Russian policy at home and abroad should be, Russia's leadership system has been hyper-personalized since Putin's return to the presidency in 2012. Between 2008-2012, during Putin's political tandem with Dmitry Medvedev, when Putin was prime minister and Medvedev was president, the system was much more pluralized. Since the two switched places, the decision-making circle in Moscow has been pared down. With wars on two fronts in Ukraine and Syria, Putin has transformed his current presidency into a wartime presidency.

A centralized military and political command center—the *Stavka*, the high command in Russian—has been created in Moscow. All information on critical security and political issues is fed in to a small group of people around Putin, and key decisions seem to be taken within that group. Although we have some idea of *who* is in the central group, we should assume that the membership of this central group is fluid and may change composition, shrinking and expanding, depending on the issue at hand. The *Stavka* comprises the "hard men" of Russian politics—people like Sergey Ivanov, the Presidential Chief of Staff, and Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the Security Council; and also to varying degrees Sergey Shoigu, the Minister of Defense, Gennady Gerasimov, the Military Chief of Staff, Alexander Bortnikov, head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), and Mikhail Fradkov the head of the foreign intelligence agency, the SVR. From the evidence available in the Russian press, group members seem to be there because of their individual relationships with Vladimir Putin, not just because they represent a specific institution. This makes penetrating the membrane of deliberations inside the *Stavka* exceedingly difficult, even for supposed Russian insiders. We also do not really know *what* happens within the group. How is information passed to Putin? Who deliberates on what with him? How does Putin decide on a course of action?

From the outside, Putin appears as a "unipolar leader." There are no significant checks and balances on Putin's presidential power. As Russian president, he has no larger institutional arrangements or political party beneath or behind him like Soviet-era leaders did with the politburo and the Communist Party. Putin has availed himself of the centrality of the Russian presidency in the Russian constitution to concentrate power around himself. The presidency and the constitution are essentially fused together, with each guaranteeing the other. Other state institutions, from the cabinet of ministers to the Russian Duma (parliament), have been systematically downgraded. The Duma has become little more than a rubber stamp for presidential proposals.

Power—meaning the ability to exert traction inside the system, or to transmit ideas and lobby for benefits or changes in course—is essentially informal in Russia. Broader social connections to Putin and his inner circle create degrees of power. Everyone in the inner circle is part of a tight

group from the same general age cohort, whose relationships with President Putin (and among themselves) extend back decades in St. Petersburg, where Putin grew up, studied, first joined the KGB, and became deputy mayor; in Moscow, where Putin moved in 1996 and began his ascent toward the presidency; and in Dresden, in East Germany, where he was posted by the KGB in the 1980s. The informal networks that intersect with the inner circle make power in Russia very complex and difficult to manage as well as to navigate.

The Russian people appear to have very little direct power or traction in the system given the fact that the Russian Duma and political parties have limited roles. And yet the people do have considerable traction collectively. As in other countries, economic interests—like workers from huge manufacturing companies (especially in the defense sector), railway workers, miners—and those with important skills and functions that the state relies upon—like the intelligence operatives in the security services, or the members of the uniformed military—can bring some weight to the bargaining table. The aggregate opinion of these groups, and the population at large, as expressed in polls and through elections, is the essential element in affirming the legitimacy of the current Russia political system. Putin's popularity—his record as a leader and the public's ratings of his political performance over time—are critical to keep power in balance.

Everything in contemporary Russian politics depends on the maintenance of Putin's charismatic authority. This means that Putin's ability to continue to juggle competing interests, and his own fitness to rule, his health and mental capacities, are key. If things go badly wrong, if too many domestic crises crowd the agenda that Putin cannot solve, if outside events (like plummeting oil prices, or international sanctions, or the outbreak of war) throw up unexpected obstacles and constraints or change the system's operating contexts, if Putin is seen by the population at large to be ineffective or weak, or if he is literally incapacitated in some way, then his ratings will fall. If the Russian people lose their faith in Putin as president then the whole political system risks becoming destabilized.

As a result, the group around Putin in the Kremlin is fixated on messaging the population and branding and rebranding President Putin. So far, they have succeeded in keeping Putin's ratings up (a couple of percentage points short of 90% in the most recent polls) because of the siege mentality that has progressively taken hold of both the elite and the population in Russia. Russian public opinion surveys show a broad-based conviction among Russians that the United States and the West are "out to get them." The prominence of the demand for national security in the context of the Ukraine crisis and the war in Syria has given Putin a clear, but temporary, advantage. It has deflected public attention away from concrete demands for higher living standards that were creeping up in public opinion polls in 2010-2012, as well as for more abstract demands of political rights and freedoms that were a feature of the large political protests in the same period. Although the Russian economy and the state budget have taken a beating since 2013 as a result of low global energy prices and a strong degree of fiscal mismanagement, Putin and his team have been able to blame all of Russia's financial woes on the United States and Western sanctions. Russians, for now, are rallying around their man and their country, and tightening their belts. The key question, of course, is for how long?

Putin and the Kremlin have to turn the temporary advantage into something more permanent if they are to keep the population unified and mobilized behind Putin's presidency. Every major defense and security decision, and every one of Putin's public appearances and pronouncements

(at home and abroad), is filtered through this requirement. Homeland defense and the current political system's defense—are one and the same. Putin's presidential term extends until 2018. Under the present constitution he could serve until 2024. In Moscow as well as outside Russia, everyone is wondering how likely it is that Putin can last that long, what changes he might undertake to stay in power, and what kind of Russia we can expect in these next eight or nine years, and beyond, if the economy continues to decline.

The Power of Personalized Politics

In contemplating these questions, we first need to recognize that with or without Putin, Russia will continue to pose a significant security challenge to the United States and its Western allies. "Waiting Putin out" is not a long-term strategy for dealing with Russia. Even if Putin were to "disappear" tomorrow, he is most likely to be replaced by someone from his inner circle. We should assume that a succession plan is in place in Moscow to maintain the coherence of the current system; and, if this is the case, then Putin's successor is more likely to resemble him in leadership style than any of his immediate predecessors since the mid-1980s—Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and also Dmitry Medvedev. Nonetheless, it is extremely important to understand how Putin operates, personally, as a leader. Irrespective of the larger trends in Russia, while he is still in office we need to figure out how to engage with Putin as Russia's president.

At all turns, Putin has shown he is willing to pay a high economic and diplomatic price as he seeks to tip regional balances of power in Europe and the Middle East in Moscow's favor. This has included upsetting the "reset" of relations with the United States, the loss of "modernization partnerships" with Germany and the European Union, the rupture of relations with NATO, and now a major rift with Turkey over Syria. As my colleague Clifford Gaddy and I outline in the second edition of our book, *Mr. Putin Operative in the Kremlin* (Brookings Press, 2015), we in the United States have consistently underestimated Vladimir Putin and his capacity for action. The Coda for this book, summarizing the key findings, is attached in the appendices to this written statement.

Putin has several important features that distinguish him from other world leaders. First, he is a professional secret service operative. One of his main skills is to dissemble—to lie. He is a master at this—at, as he puts it, "working with people" and "working with information." This is not some character flaw. It is part of a skill set that Putin has consciously developed over the course of his career in the intelligence services and which he now uses in his political career. The operative must conceal his true identity and intentions at all times. As the Russian head of state, this gives Putin a great tactical advantage—if no-one knows what he wants or how he is going to react, he can stay one step ahead of his political opponents (domestic and foreign).

Since he came into office, Putin's Kremlin team has worked very hard to increase this tactical advantage by making the Russian President—and thus the Russian decision-making system—as inscrutable and unpredictable as possible. Access to Putin is strictly limited. The Kremlin maintains an almost complete unity of silence and message. When messages seem to be transmitted without approval they are accompanied by equal measure of dis/mis-information. No-one outside the inner circle is supposed to know what is going on. Everyone spends a huge amount of time trying to figure out what Putin thinks. They are thus deflected away from trying to figure out what *they* should actually do in response to his various moves or to get ahead of the situation.

Another aspect of "working with people," is that Putin personalizes all presidential interactions with other Russian officials on domestic issues and with other world leaders on foreign policy—as he would have done as a KGB case officer recruiting, handling, and dealing with an intelligence target or asset. As president, Putin is closely involved in outreach to world leaders—delivering messages directly, cajoling, and coercing where necessary, to push Russia's positions on the full range of issues. Putin's approach is individually tailored to each leader, and combined with other official Russian contacts targeted at top-level elites alongside more routine lower-level exchanges.

Further adapting the approach of the operative, Putin tends to make agreements on the state-to-state level painfully personal. He prefers to make significant foreign policy deals on the basis of leader-to-leader commitments in one-on-one meetings. When there is a diplomatic rupture—as Russia's prior disagreements with Georgia under President Mikheil Saakashvili, and currently with Turkey under President Recip Tayyip Erdogan underscore—Putin publicly refers to individual leaders having broken their behind-the-scenes undertakings. He frequently stresses in commentaries that the problem in the bilateral relationship is tied to the individual leader, and not to the ongoing relations between the states, and peoples—even when punitive sanctions are imposed or military action is taken (as in the case of Georgia in 2008). The punishment is meted out against the leader or leaders, reminding them of their broken commitments, and airing their dirty laundry in public—just as the operative would remind his targets of the consequences of crossing their handler.

An additional distinguishing feature is that Putin is a master at adapting and changing his tactics. We often mistake his tactical shifts as inconsistency or "lack of strategy." But Putin is strategic in the sense that he follows a few firm principles—and is very clear about them in his speeches and public pronouncements. He subordinates everything else to his main goals. He tries to remain flexible and to keep his options open so that he can adapt to changing circumstances. He approaches everything on a case-by-case, almost game-by-game basis. In each instance, he prepares stratagems in advance, and then plays his cards carefully to try to win on a particular issue and move forward onto the next stage of achieving his goals.

With or Without Putin

Vladimir Putin is somewhat unique in his style of leadership and in the methods he uses, but he is by no means an anomaly in his views within Russia—nor is the current personalized nature of Russian governance something out of the ordinary. A small inner circle around a strong leader is a central element in Russian political culture dating back to the tsarist era and extending through the Soviet period. Contrary to what might be the popular belief, given all the focus on Putin, the Russian president is not personally charismatic. His popularity and appeal stem from his style of leadership—his perceived inscrutableness, his calm under stress and duress, his ability to adapt, and his promotion of Russia and its people first.

Putin is not selling anything to Russians, nor is he especially interested in proselytizing abroad. Putin is not a Marxist-Leninist or Bolshevik or Communist like some of his predecessors. His primary focus is on the home front, even if his actions frequently take him far beyond Russia's borders. Like many other contemporary leaders internationally, he is a populist. Ideology, or what passes as ideology in Russia today, is closely tied to Putin's image. Putin and his team have worked hard to manipulate and maintain a set of ideas that bolster and legitimize his policy positions.

Ideology is branding—branding both Putin and Russia. "Putinism" is not especially coherent and is not intended to be. Putin and his political team have retro-fitted a wide range of broadly accepted "Russian ideas" to establish and maintain legitimacy for his presidency. Indeed, Putin's predecessor, Boris Yeltsin tried to do the same thing in the mid-1990s—even setting up a task force to come up with some new ideas during the period of acute ideological collapse after the passing of Communism.

Putin presents himself as defending and securing what Russians care about. Since the war in Ukraine, as Russians, fed a steady stream of Kremlin messaging through the state media, have seen their national security threatened by the crisis, Putin has taken charge of forging a common (albeit artificial) sense of Russianness. In some respects this is a conscious reprise of Soviet leader Josef Stalin's role during the "Great Fatherland War" or World War II, and Putin often refers to Stalin and this period in his speeches. Over time, Putin's presidential image has shifted from an "action figure" fixing things and putting Russia back on its feet in the 2000s, to more of a "patriarch" with the anniversaries of the Second World War, to a president at war, defending his people on multiple fronts with the intervention in Syria. As the president at war, Putin has to ensure unity—no fissures, no divisions, no fragmentation, no schisms (Putin uses all these words constantly in his speeches) can be permitted in society that might facilitate an outside attack. In this regard, President Putin is a traditional conservative Russian politician. His domestic *and* foreign policy agendas are carefully crafted to reflect Russian mores and norms. All of the perspectives Putin presents in his speeches are ingrained in Russian elites and society. *Any successor to Putin will be—and will have to be—as staunch a defender of Russian interests as Putin is.*

There is a general consensus in Russia, deeply rooted in the political elite since the collapse of the USSR, that the current world order, and especially the European political and security order, disadvantage Russia. Putin's August 2014 speech in Yalta, openly rejecting the U.S.-led order, was merely another iteration of points he and others have made dating back over more than a decade. From Moscow's perspective, while European states (including large states like Germany) consider that European integration projects and collective institutions like NATO make them stronger, the same projects and institutions weaken Russia. As the European order is currently configured, if Russia wants to associate with the existing European and transatlantic institutions, then Moscow is expected to give up some of Russia's sovereignty. As Russian president, Putin seeks to enhance the country's sovereignty, not reduce it. He wants to ensure that Moscow has maximum freedom of maneuver, politically, economically, and militarily. This is why Putin and other Russian officials constantly say that Russia should not be part of any formal alliances, as alliances usually come with obligations and constraints.

Russians core beliefs, views, and principles influence Putin's decisions on foreign and defense policy. Russians see their state as one of only a tiny number of "world civilizational powers" with a unique history, culture, and language, like China, and to some degree the United States. Because of its status as a world civilizational power, Russia, in the view of many in the Russian elite, has special privileged interests in Europe, and also internationally. With the other great civilizational world powers like China and the United States, Putin and Russia are prepared to negotiate where interests collide—but always on Russia's terms. With institutions like the EU, NATO, and with lesser powers, Moscow wants everyone to acknowledge that Russia has the right to block steps that it does not like. All of Putin's decisions are geared toward advancing Russians' and Russia's

preferred arrangement. We can be sure that this is also the case when we look at the wars in Ukraine and Syria.

For Putin, the inner circle, and many Russians, the idea that Russia should become "just another European state" or be viewed as a regional power is antithetical to their core beliefs about Russia's status and position in the world. Russians are not unique in this respect—elites in the United Kingdom/England, as the successor state to a formerly great empire, have similar qualms about their position in the European Union, even having become a full member of the EU decades ago. And there is a populist backlash against the EU and a strong resurgence in nationalist sentiment in many other European countries in the wake of the Eurozone economic crisis and in response to the unprecedented surge of refugees into Europe from Syria and other neighboring countries.

The preferred scenario for Russia in Europe, as Putin has repeatedly made clear, would be one without NATO and without any other strategic alliances that are embedded in the European Union's security concepts. Putin has repeatedly described NATO enlargement as driven by the United States and aimed at bring U.S. military bases and forces up to Russian borders to contain Russia. Although this narrative is flawed, much of the Russian elite accept it as ground truth—and many, including Putin, have done so since the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999, and especially since the expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe in 2004. Putin has thus consistently pushed for a renegotiation of European security structures to downgrade the conventional military and nuclear role of the United States and NATO, and give Russia military and security parity with European forces.

The war in Ukraine, and Russia's stepped up aviation and maritime military incursions into European air and sea space are all designed to intimidate the United States' European allies and to rupture the integrity of NATO and EU collective defense. These actions are also intended to signal that Russia wants to break *out* of the old system of security—which Putin depicts as encircling Russia—and literally break *in* to a new system that would accommodate Moscow's perspective. Russia prefers flexible and low cost (to Moscow) bilateral security arrangements, with individual countries or with small sets of countries, in key regions along its borders (like its pacts with Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, and others). Russia seeks to avoid treaties with mutual responsibilities, or situations where it has to contend and negotiate with a major political bloc of countries. Dealing with smaller sets of European states, broken away from NATO or the EU in various regional theaters like the Arctic, the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean, would be much easier for Russia to digest strategically, and would give Moscow the clear military advantage in any configuration of opposing forces.

The Long Path Toward a Collision in Syria

Given the Russian fixation with demanding and securing a new security arrangement in Europe, it seems a stretch to explain Putin's decision to intervene in Syria, especially against the backdrop of war in Ukraine, which appears much more important for Russian state interests. But both wars are linked with Russian threat perceptions and views of the United States; and both have their roots in Russia's 2008 war with Georgia. We have been on a collision course with Russia for a very long time, and have failed to acknowledge it until Putin forced us to do so in 2014 when Moscow annexed Crimea.

As Clifford Gaddy and I outline in *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, since the 2003 U.S. intervention in Iraq, Putin and his security team have convinced themselves that the United States has been seeking pretexts to overthrow regimes inimical to Washington's interests. Russian intelligence services knew that Saddam Hussein was bluffing about having weapons of mass destruction to deter the United States, Iran, and any other potential enemies from contemplating military action against him. They made their views clear to American interlocutors before the U.S. invasion. President Putin and his team did not believe that "faulty intelligence" on the part of U.S. agencies drove the George W. Bush Administration's decision to get rid of Hussein. Instead, they saw a blatant determination on the part of the U.S. President and his team to complete the unfinished business of the first Gulf war. The so-called "color revolutions" in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004, combined with the enlargement of NATO into Russia's immediate neighborhood in 2004, simply confirmed this view and darkened their perceptions of the United States even further. The Kremlin regarded these actions as encouraged—if not launched by the CIA and other Western intelligence services—rather than as spontaneous manifestations of popular discontent. Through the prism of his time in the KGB, Putin, in particular, considered U.S. democracy-promotion efforts in the 1990s and 2000s to be continuations of the CIA's so-called "active measures" from the Cold War.

After the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia, Moscow saw Washington's close embrace of Georgia and the new government of Mikheil Saakashvili, and discussions of Georgian membership in NATO, as policies aimed directly against Russia. In February 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, President Putin accused NATO of expanding at Russia's expense and moving its "frontline forces" to Russia's borders. Putin made almost the same remarks after the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, where both Georgia and Ukraine were promised eventual entry into NATO even though they were not granted a formal Membership Action Plan (MAP). Putin emphasized that any indication of Georgian and Ukrainian membership in the NATO alliance was a red line for Russia, but his threats were repeatedly dismissed in Western capitals. Putin got the opportunity to enforce Moscow's line with a full-scale military invasion of Georgia, when Saakashvili launched his own military operation against Georgia's secessionist republic of South Ossetia.

The August 2008 war in Georgia failed as a clear warning to the United States and NATO of Russian intentions, in part because of the role Saakashvili had played in triggering it. But the war was a decisive turning point in Russia's relations with the West. It demonstrated that Putin was now likely to resort to military force in other circumstances when Moscow deemed that its position was not considered on an issue critical to Russian security. The war was also a significant turning point for the Russian military. Operational setbacks during the conflict were analyzed and assessed and used to guide the further modernization of the armed forces. In addition, Putin and his security team closely observed the reactions and political responses of the U.S., NATO, the EU, UN, and individual European countries during the war. They took the lack of U.S. and NATO military support for Georgia, and all the disagreements about how the conflict had unfolded and what the appropriate Western countermeasures should be, as clear indicators of fissures in the Western alliance that Moscow could exploit in similar future circumstances.

Over the next several years, Putin and Russian leaders repeatedly telegraphed their interpretation of world events as efforts by the United States to "push Russia into a corner," or to remove regimes that were generally friendly to Moscow but not to Washington's liking. When the revolts of the "Arab Spring" erupted in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, Putin and the "hard men" of

the Russian security establishment were certain that the United States had deliberately set these uprisings in motion. Putin and his inner circle believed that the United States had deliberately created disorder in the Middle East, to bolster its own position and to detract from Washington's waning economic, diplomatic, and military power internationally.

Putin was personally angered by events in Libya and the death of President Muammar Qaddafi at the hands of rebels as Qaddafi tried to flee Tripoli after NATO's intervention in the civil war there. In Putin's view (again expressed openly in his public addresses and in interviews), the United States was now responsible for a long sequence of revolutions close to Russia's borders and in countries with close ties to Moscow. When street protests erupted in Russia itself in 2011-2012, after flawed elections to the Russian parliament and in response to Putin's decision to regain the presidency, Putin laid the blame for these too on Washington, DC. The Kremlin claimed that the United States was trying to stage a color revolution in Russia—the U.S. and its foreign policy had become a threat to the Putin regime for the foreseeable future.

This was the backdrop to Putin's clampdown on opposition political activity at home, and his intent to seize and then annex Crimea after political protests toppled the Ukrainian government in Kiev in 2013-2014. This view also shaped Putin's decision to launch a military operation to prop up the regime of Bashar Assad in Syria in 2015. In Russia's view, the Middle East order that the United States dominated after the 1956 Suez crisis was upended with the "Arab Spring." For Russia, the toppling of the incumbent authoritarian leaders, the strongmen, in Iraq, then Egypt, and then in Libya, and the resulting disorder in all these countries were a call to action. Russia had long-standing interests in the Middle East in general, and Syria in particular, dating back to the tsarist and Soviet eras. These interests, along with a series of political and security arrangements with individual leaders, were imperiled by the "Arab Spring." In Syria, the regime was directly dependent on Bashar Assad and his immediate associates. If Assad was brought down by the Syrian opposition, or was pushed out by the United States, there would be no responsible party to step in and maintain the coherence of the Syrian state. From Moscow's perspective, the collapse of Assad in Syria with no alternative strongman on the scene would create a political and military vacuum and more chaos. Assad would have to stay in place until someone could be identified to keep some semblance of the Syrian state together.

Russian Interests in Syria

From now on, Moscow wants to be an agenda setter and order creator in the Middle East. In the same way that Putin wants Russia to have a veto in Europe, he now seeks one for Russia in the Middle East, where the complete collapse of Syria, and the emergence of alternative regional orders imposed by any of the religiously-based extremist groups, would create disorder at home for Putin. Indeed, Syria is as much a domestic dilemma for Russia as a foreign policy problem. Russia has the largest, *indigenous* Muslim population of any European state. Islam is the older religion in Russian territory—establishing itself in Kazan among the Tatars of the Volga region shortly before Christianity took hold among the Slavic population in the 10th Century. Russia's Muslim groups have a very different heritage, history, and experience from those in the Middle East and the Gulf, although they are predominantly Sunni not Shi'a (neighboring Azerbaijan's Muslim population is traditionally Shi'a rather than Sunni, and Russia also has a sizeable Azeri population). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's strains of Islam have come under pressure from proselytizing Salafi and Wahhabi groups emanating from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, which Putin sees as a serious threat to Russia's cultural and religious integrity. When he ascended

to the Russian presidency in 2000, Putin and his team set out to harness or curb *all* religions at home, including Russian Orthodoxy, to avert ideological competition. To maintain control of Russian politics, Putin and the Kremlin cannot afford the rise of *any* group that fuses religion and politics in opposition to the Russian state and has outside allegiances.

The religious wars in the Middle East pose the same threat to Russia as the rest of Europe and the United States. Thousands of foreign fighters have flocked to Syria from Russia, as well as from neighboring Central Asia and the Caucasus, all attracted by the extreme messages of ISIS and other groups. The numbers are disputed, although the most recent announcement from the Russian government indicated that they were tracking 2,800 Russian citizens currently in Syria. Extremist groups have been active in Russia since the Chechen wars of the 1990s and 2000s. Putin has expended a great deal of political energy, and literal blood and treasure to pacify Chechnya since 2000—including through the creation and installation of another "indigenous" variant of Islam propagated by Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, who swears fealty to Putin personally. Putin has no desire to see any of the new crop of fighters return to radicalize and enflame the domestic situation any further. In this regard, Putin does not discriminate between one terrorist group and another. An extremist is an extremist in his view—especially if they seek to topple governments, overthrow the acknowledged head of the state, and seize territory. The actual nature or underlying theories of their persuasion is a mere nuance, a detail.

As the war in Syria unfolded over the last several years, Putin became increasingly convinced of the need to bolster Assad to stem the tide of state collapse in the Middle East. Putin and his security team have applied lessons from past operational failures (including Moscow's inability to intervene in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s), and have drawn experience from the intervention in Crimea and the covert war in Ukraine, which Putin has often explicitly referred to as a training exercise for the Russian military. As we see now, the Russian military has been engaged in pre-planning and pre-positioning forces, equipment, and materiel for a considerable period—including securing supplies for the Russian airbase in Latakia in addition to the naval facility in Tartus. Russia's goal is to consolidate the Assad regime's position on the ground to make sure that Assad stays in place until some better arrangement is devised through international negotiations, with Moscow in a lead position (as Putin has insisted from the start of the Syrian war).

Strategies for Dealing with Russia

Devising strategies for dealing with Russia in Syria, and more broadly, is by no means easy. Managing the U.S.-Russia relationship will require a good deal of attention inside and outside government, and close coordination with our allies. Putin's overriding goal is security for Russia and his system. We are talking today about deterring Russia, but Putin and his security team firmly believe they are deterring us—the United States and NATO—to protect themselves and Russian interests. Russia's military modernization and posture has been geared toward this end. I have attached in the appendices to this written statement two very thoughtful pieces by my Brookings colleagues, Clifford Gaddy and Michael O'Hanlon, and Steven Pifer, which look at various aspects of Russia military doctrine and strategy, including shifts in Russia's nuclear doctrine.

Putin assumes that the negotiation about Russia's place in the European order, the resolution of the dispute over the geopolitical future of Ukraine, and the current questions about Russia's role in the future of Syria and the Middle East, should all be hashed out directly with the United States.

Putin wants Washington to agree that the U.S. and its allies will first consider how Russia might be negatively affected before they make any decision on security or economic issues where Moscow has a stake or has asserted an interest. We do not accept this premise, but are unsure how to respond. Can Russia be part of our order or not? Is that what we should be working for? Should we, therefore, try to shape Russian behavior in some way so that it can become acceptable as a partner again? Or, should we recognize that Russia, Russia under Putin at least, is an implacable foe and work to constrain Moscow's ability to repeat what it has done in Ukraine and Syria or to take other similar actions? Can we shore up agreement in NATO, the EU, and in transatlantic relationships more broadly to create mechanisms to deal with Russia over the long-term that ensure we can respond to Russian actions and yet be ready to change course if necessary?

Ultimately, in pursuing Russia's goals, Putin is a pragmatist, and we should be too. In figuring out how to deter the United States and NATO, Russia does not have the military or economic resources for the 20th century mass-army, total mobilization approach to defending its interests. As Clifford Gaddy and I outlined in the Coda of our book (in the appendices), Putin has to combine conventional, nuclear, and non-conventional, non-military—so-called "hybrid" methods—to secure an advantage. Putin and his security team aim to intimidate us. They have to demonstrate that Russia has the capacity to act, and is willing to escalate on all fronts to deter the United States and NATO from considering taking *any* military action against Russia—in Ukraine, Syria, or elsewhere.

Nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent. Russia's unclassified national security strategy states that Russia will use nuclear weapons only in response to an attack with weapons of mass destruction on Russia or on a Russian ally, or in the event of an attack on Russia with conventional forces in which the existence of the Russian state is at stake. But Moscow has now put the nuclear option on the table for lesser circumstances, and Putin seeks to make us believe that he *will* use nuclear weapons if any of the current conflicts seem likely to draw in the United States or NATO against Russian forces. It is no good for Putin to just suggest that he *might* use nuclear weapons. This is the "escalate to de-escalate" contingency that so many observers are currently concerned about at the non-strategic level (See Steven Pifer's piece in *The National Interest* in the appendices). Putin is clearly drawing up a contingency for deploying nuclear weapons if he feels he needs to—but his goal is to push the United States and Europe away from Russia and out of its neighborhood, not to actually engage in a nuclear exchange. Nonetheless, we are now back in a similar frame to the nuclear war scare of the 1980s, which only ended with the Reagan and Gorbachev summitry that led to the conclusion of the 1987 INF Treaty.

This might suggest that past precedents for dealing with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and re-focusing on arms control will be the key to dealing with Russia today, along with beefing up the U.S. and NATO's military deterrent capability. We certainly need to engage with Moscow to make it clear that considering the limited use of a nuclear weapon is unacceptable under any scenario and could trigger the direst consequences; but Russia is not the Soviet Union of the Cold War with a politburo, the Communist Party, and central planning. Russia is also not the Russia of the 1990s and early 2000s with limited capacity for military action. It is now a very different kind of actor. Given all the factors at work in Russia and the international arena, including the informal nature of power and the role of personalized politics in Moscow, the security response to the Russian challenge will have to encompass the arc of a long game. Strategic patience must accompany the judicious balance of the elements of deterrence, defense, and constraint, along with clear

incentives, and direct engagement with Putin and his inner circle. We will have to do our homework if we are to succeed in identifying workable policy solutions. Engagement with Russia is not likely to be fruitful unless we are very clear on where the United States and its allies stand in terms of principles and values (while recognizing that there are some concessions Russia will never make). Washington will also have to engage in constant communication with its European allies to tackle sources of tension or misunderstanding head on. The United States will have to be willing to compromise on some positions to persuade, not force, its allies to go along with decisions they are not ready for. Moscow is looking for any fissures to exploit to play Washington off against its European and other allies, and its allies against themselves.

In line with this approach, at the Brookings Institution we are engaged in a series of research projects examining the core social, economic, and political stresses contributing to the breakdown of the European security order. We are reviewing the state of the post-Cold War European institutional architecture and its three primary pillars—NATO, the EU, and the OSCE—to determine whether these institutions can still serve to re-engage with Russia at this time of acute tension and conflict. We are also looking at other relationships outside Europe to determine how these might affect Russia's longer-term positions. In addition, we are analyzing the prospects for the Russian economy and for regime stability, including possible changes in the nature of the current regime ranging from reform and renewal to collapse. Forecasts of the Russian economy's performance and its political responses have been notoriously poor, particularly since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009, just as assessments of Russia's capacity for military action have often missed the mark. Most analyses of Russia fail to account for the specific features of Russian behavioral and political responses to internal and external shocks, and the nature of Russian threat perceptions.

In this larger context, the stakes for rigorous, objective, and accurate analysis on all the economic, political, and military aspects of the Russian challenge and the contours of Russia's future are high. Preconceived or agenda-driven studies or policies (based either on wishful thinking about Russia's impending collapse or on exaggerations of its strength) are typically misguided and incorrect. Correctly predicting, for example, what policies Putin will pursue to cope with the current economic crisis—shaped by low oil and gas prices and the effects of Western sanctions—depends, for example, on understanding Russian priorities and preferences. The success criteria for Putin are very different from criteria in the United States and Europe. National security imperatives always have primacy over economic priorities in Russia. This means there is great potential for radical and unexpected transformations of the Russian economy and Russian politics.

As the developments of the last decade have demonstrated since the 2008 war in Georgia, both under- or overestimating Russia's and Putin's personal capabilities can lead to dangerous miscalculations and surprises. If we are not to be continually surprised, we will have to put more resources behind understanding what is happening inside Russia as well as analyzing the complex of Russia's interactions internationally. Russia's intervention in Syria is a stark reminder that Russia is a multi-regional power as much by intent as by geography. Russia's vast landmass and interests extend from Europe and Eurasia to the Middle East, Central and South Asia, to the Asia-Pacific and the Arctic. We will thus need a more holistic approach.