



Russia's Strategic Objectives in the Middle East and North Africa

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Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, Honorable Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Russia's strategic objectives in the Middle East and North Africa. I will focus on President Vladimir Putin's efforts to return Russia to the Middle East and especially highlight Iran, Syria, and Libya, and describe how these efforts sow instability and thus hurt U.S. interests. I will also address Moscow's overall strategic aims, and what the United States could do to limit Moscow's influence, including working with our regional partners to that end.

History matters. Russian efforts to influence the Middle East and counter U.S. interests in the region predate Russia's deployment of forces to Syria in September 2015. Imperial Russia began asserting its interests in the region in the nineteenth century. Its successor the Soviet Union worked for at least half a century to bolster its influence in the region and stymie that of the United States and its allies. It was only during Boris Yeltsin's presidency in the 1990s that Russia briefly retreated from the Middle East.

Vladimir Putin chartered Russia's return to the Middle East immediately upon assuming the presidency in May 2000. He did so in the context of zero-sum anti-Westernism -- for Russia to win, the United States had to lose. Putin's policies have roots in the vision of Yevgeny Primakov, foreign minister in 1996-1998 and subsequently prime minister in 1998-1999. Primakov was a skilled Arabist who sought a tougher, more anti-Western posture than Yeltsin was willing to embrace. Russian officials echo Primakov when they talk of a "multipolar world."¹

Putin himself wanted to restore Russia's superpower status. He wanted the United States to recognize Russia as an equal without which Washington could make no major international decision. In the Middle East, he did so by regaining political, diplomatic, and economic influence, using increased cooperation and diplomatic exchanges, arms and energy sales, and provision of high-technology goods such as nuclear reactors. Indeed, Russia's January 2000 Foreign Policy Concept defined Moscow's priorities in the Middle East as "to restore and strengthen [Russia's] positions, particularly economic ones," and highlighted the importance of continuing to develop ties with Iran. The document highlights "attempts to

¹ Jonathan Steele, "Yevgeny Primakov, Obituary," *Guardian*, June 28, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/28/yevgeny-primakov>

create an international relations structure based on domination by developed Western countries in the international community, under U.S. leadership," while asserting that NATO expansionism was among the major threats facing Russia.² Putin's intervention in Syria may have taken the world by surprise, but it was years in the making, and the seeds of what was to come were there from the very beginning.

Putin sought to improve ties with every regional leader, whether traditional Kremlin friend or foe. Thus, in October 2000, he publicly repealed the 1995 Gore-Chernomyrdin pact which limited Russia's sale of conventional arms to Iran. Press reports indicated that in practice the agreement gave Russia "a free pass to sell conventional weapons to Iran"³ until 1999, but the public cancellation of the deal sent a message that Putin wanted closer cooperation with the Islamic Republic. By 2001, Iran had become the third largest buyer of Russian weaponry.⁴

Putin became the first Kremlin head of state in years to visit several Middle Eastern countries. He also received high-level Middle East officials with full honors in Moscow. For example, he visited Egypt in April 2005 -- the first such visit in forty years. In February 2007, Putin travelled to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, something no Russian -- or Soviet -- head of state had ever done.⁵ Yet just as Putin offered Iran nuclear technology, he also sought business for Russia's nuclear industry in Jordan, Egypt, and the Persian Gulf, who sought to keep pace with Iran. Other high-level official exchanges between Russian and Middle Eastern officials also increased. Russia's economic ties with Turkey and Egypt grew. Putin also improved Russia's relations with Israel, even as senior Kremlin officials hosted Hamas in Moscow.⁶

By 2010, Russia had succeeded in restoring much of its Middle East influence -- including "good relations with every government and most major opposition movements," according to George Mason University Professor Mark Katz.⁷ The Arab Spring came soon afterward. Moscow saw the hand of the West in these uprisings (just as it did in the color revolutions in the post-Soviet space and the largest anti-Putin protests since the end of the Cold war in late 2011-early 2012).⁸ These years saw an increasingly

² Концепция национальной безопасности Российской Федерации, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 10, 2000, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6B6Z29/content/id/589768?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_CptlCk6B6Z29&_101_INSTANCE_CptlCk6B6Z29_languageId=ru_RU

³ "Gore's Secret Pact," *Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2000, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB971819748452949326>

⁴ Ariel Cohen and James A. Phillips, "Countering Russian-Iranian Military Cooperation," Backgrounder 1425 on Russia (Heritage Foundation, April 5, 2001), <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2001/04/counteringrussian-iranian-military-cooperation>

⁵ Donna Abu-Nasr, "Putin 1st Russian Leader to Visit Saudis," *Washington Post*, February 11, 2007 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/11/AR2007021100048;> Hassan M. Fattah, "Putin Visits Qatar for Talks on Natural Gas and Trade," *New York Times*, February 13, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/13/world/middleeast/13putin.html>

⁶ Steven Lee Myers and Greg Myer, "Hamas Delegation Visits Moscow for a Crash Course in Diplomacy," *New York Times*, March 4, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/04/world/04hamas.html>

⁷ Mark Katz, "Moscow and the Middle East: Repeat Performance?" *Russia in Global Affairs*, October 7, 2012, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Moscow-and-the-Middle-East-Repeat-Performance-15690>

⁸ Jonathan Steele, "Putin Still Bitter over Orange Revolution," *Guardian*, September 5, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/06/russia.jonathansteele;> Roland Oliphant, "Vladimir Putin: We Must Stop a Ukraine-Style 'Coloured Revolution' in Russia," *Telegraph*, November 20, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/11243521/Vladimir-Putin->

aggressive Putin emerge as he grew insecure of his grip on power. Indeed, more recently, in December 2016, one major Kremlin-controlled publication directly described the Arab Spring as a "series of government coups in the countries of North Africa in 2011, initiated by the American special services."⁹

Russia briefly lost some influence in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, but the Kremlin successfully worked to regain much of it. For example, Putin reached out to Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Morsi in Egypt, even though the Russian Supreme Court had designated the Brotherhood as a domestic terrorist organization since February 2003. Putin's outreach revealed that although he might prefer to work with secularists in Egypt, he would work with Islamists to secure Russia's influence amid the vacuum created by Western absence, even if this meant supporting an organization that in the Kremlin's own view encouraged terrorism and instability in Russia.

IRAN AND SYRIA

Over the years, the Kremlin consistently worked to dilute sanctions against Iran. Top officials frequently claimed there was no evidence that Tehran was conducting nuclear weapons research. Indeed, when the International Atomic Energy Agency announced in November 2011 that Tehran had apparently been working for years on a weapon, the Kremlin accused the agency of bias. The Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry described the report as "a compilation of well-known facts that have intentionally been given a politicized intonation."¹⁰ Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has argued that Iran deserves to be an equal partner in resolving Middle East issues, and that sanctions hurt Russian-Iranian trade.¹¹ Moscow also at the very least looked the other way as Russian weaponry made its way into Hezbollah's hands. The Kremlin's actions show that they care more about their own interests than international or regional security.

Russia and Iran share a complicated history, but what unites them the most is their joint interest in reducing American influence, and because of this interest they have been able to put their differences aside and cooperate. Indeed, in August 2016, Moscow took the world -- and many in Iran -- by surprise when it reportedly used Iran's Hamadan airbase to bomb targets in Syria. The last time a foreign power had based itself in Iran was during World War II. In the context of public outrage in Iran, Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan accused Moscow of "ungentlemanly" behavior for publicizing its use of the base.¹² Nonetheless, Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani said only days afterward that "The flights [of Russian warplanes] haven't been suspended. Iran and Russia are allies in the fight against terrorism," though the

[we-must-stop-a-Ukraine-style-coloured-revolution-in-Russia.html](#); "Shoigu: Scenario Based on Arab Spring Was Used in Ukraine," *RIA Novosti*, April 1, 2014, http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20140401/1002052340.html; Thomas Grove, "Russia's Putin Says the West Is on the Decline," Reuters, July 9, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-west-idUSBRE86818020120709>

⁹ "Путин: Примаков предупреждал о негативных последствиях «арабской весны,»" REGNUM, December 4, 2016, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2213257.html>

¹⁰ Ellen Barry, "Russia Dismisses Calls for New UN Sanctions on Iran," *New York Times*, November 9, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/10/world/europe/russia-dismisses-calls-for-new-un-sanctions-on-iran.html>

¹¹ Michal Shmulovich, "Russia: US sanctions on Syria, Iran are hurting our businesses," *Times of Israel*, September 8, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-us-sanctions-in-syria-iran-are-hurting-our-businesses/>

¹² Anne Barnard and Andrew E. Kramer, "Iran Revokes Russia's Use of Air Base, Saying Moscow 'Betrayed Trust,'" *New York Times*, August 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/23/world/middleeast/iran-russia-syria.html?_r=0

Hamadan air base, he claimed, was only "used for refueling."¹³ And more recently, in March of this year, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Russia could use Iranian military bases to launch air strikes against targets in Syria on a "case by case basis."¹⁴ Furthermore, unlike the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, Shia Hezbollah is not designated as a terrorist organization in Russia.

But in Syria, Russia's influence has been visible like nowhere else in the region. Putin had many interests in supporting Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad from the very beginning -- economic, political, cultural, and geostrategic. He has armed Assad, shielded him at the UN Security Council, agreed to take Syria's crude oil in exchange for refined oil products to sustain the country's military and economy, and provided loans to stave off Syrian bankruptcy.¹⁵ He uses the United Nations to delay meaningful action on Syria. To date, Putin continues to deny that Assad used chemical weapons against his people.¹⁶ Putin's enabling allowed Assad to continue his ethnic cleansing policy in Syria that exacerbates refugee flows into Europe. Moscow cynically used Syria as a test case to advertise its newest weaponry and training opportunities for Russian troops, while Iran and Hezbollah learn from the Russian military.¹⁷

Putin also seeks access to warm-water ports. In February 2012 he renewed emphasis on improving Russia's military and in particular the navy.¹⁸ Syria hosted Russia's only military facility outside the former Soviet Union, in Tartus. Syria also provided Putin with an opportunity to entrench Russia's military presence in the region more permanently, and gain an entry point into the region.

Putin says that he went into Syria to fight ISIS, and to kill fighters before they return to Russia.¹⁹ But numerous reports have indicated since September 2015 that Putin's primary focus has not been on ISIS but on those fighting Assad. Moscow's actions show that its primary goal is to force the West to choose between ISIS and Assad, mainly by eliminating everyone else. If anything, Moscow is likely to increase radicalization through discriminatory policies toward Russia's own Muslims, and through enabling Assad, who himself remains the largest recruitment source for ISIS and other radical groups.

¹³ Allen Cone, "Russia gets permission to use Iran's Hamadan air base for Syria airstrikes," UPI, November 30, 2016, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2016/11/30/Russia-gets-permission-to-use-Irans-Hamadan-air-base-for-Syria-airstrikes/8251480520159/

¹⁴ Vladimir Soldatkin and Kevin O'Flynn, "Iran says Russia can use its military bases 'on case by case basis,'" Reuters, March 28, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-iran-rouhani-base-idUSKBN16Z0NU>

¹⁵ Anna Borshchevskaya, "Russia's Many Interests in Syria," PolicyWatch 2023, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 24, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-many-interests-in-syria>

¹⁶ "Путин уверен, что Асад не применял химическое оружие," Pravda.ru, June 2, 2017, <https://www.pravda.ru/news/politics/02-06-2017/1336479-siria-0/>

¹⁷ Paul Bucala and Genevieve Casagrande, "How Iran Is Learning from Russia in Syria," Understandingwar.org, February 3, 2017, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:hz5IUgUkJqAJ:www.understandingwar.org/background>

[er/how-iran-learning-russia-syria+%&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us](http://www.understandingwar.org/background/er/how-iran-learning-russia-syria+%&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us); Rowan Scarborough, "Putin Using Syrian Civil War as Testing Ground for New Weapons," *Washington Times*, February 28, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/feb/28/russia-using-syria-as-testing-ground-for-new-weapon/>

¹⁸ "Владимир Путин: 'Быть сильными: гарантии национальной безопасности для России,'" *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, February 20, 2012, <https://rg.ru/2012/02/20/putin-armiya.html>

¹⁹ "Путин: ВКС РФ воюют в Сирии, чтобы в Россию не вернулись террористы," REGNUM, April 12, 2017, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2262075.html>

In March 2016, many analysts spoke positively about Russia's "withdrawal" from Syria following Putin's announcement that he was partially removing the "main part" of Russian armed forces.²⁰ Yet Russia never withdrew. Putin's actions showed that he was only retrenching Russia in Syria. That Russia's Hmeimim Air Base officially became permanent in October 2016, for example,²¹ demonstrates the danger of taking Putin at his word.

LIBYA AND BEYOND

Moscow's foothold in Libya is growing.²² This issue is important to watch in the months ahead. Putin increasingly supports Libya's Gen. Khalifa Haftar, who controls the oil-rich eastern part of the country but wants more. With the fall of Muammar Qadhafi in October 2011, Russia lost not only several billion dollars' worth of investments but also access to the Benghazi port.

Haftar (who served under Qadhafi) pursues an anti-Islamist agenda and looks to Putin to help secure his leadership in Libya at the expense of the UN-backed civilian government. Haftar is a deeply polarizing figure, one that by expert accounts is the wrong choice for the country. But for Putin he presents an opportunity to do what Moscow did in Syria, as U.S. Africa Command chief and Marine Corps general Thomas Waldhauser characterized the situation at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing this March.²³ This means stepping into a vacuum left by America's absence, gaining influence and creating a short-term fix while ensuring long-term conflict and insecurity.

Russia *provides* the Tobruk government with military advice and diplomatic support at the UN. In May 2016, Moscow reportedly printed nearly 4 billion Libyan dinars (approximately \$2.8 billion) for Libya's Central Bank and transferred the money to a branch loyal to Haftar. In the context of growing tensions with Tripoli, Haftar made *two trips* to Moscow in the second half of 2016, and in January of this year, he *toured* the Russian aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov* as it returned home from Syrian waters. While aboard the *Kuznetsov*, Haftar held a video call with Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu and reportedly talked about fighting terrorism in the Middle East. This February, Moscow flew approximately seventy of Haftar's wounded soldiers to Russia for treatment.²⁴ Officially, Moscow *denies* any talk with Haftar about creating military bases in Libya, but it's easy to see how such a base, or at least another form of Russian military presence, would be consistent with Moscow's actions in recent years.

²⁰ "Путин приказал начать вывод основных сил РФ из Сирии с 15 марта," Tass, March 14, 2016, <http://tass.ru/politika/2738218>

²¹ David Filipov and Andrew Roth, "Russia Has Its Permanent Air Base in Syria. Now It's Looking at Cuba and Vietnam," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2016 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/07/russia-has-its-permanent-airbase-in-syria-now-its-looking-at-cuba-and-vietnam/?utm_term=.f4787278dd2b

²² Idrees Ali and Phil Stewart, "Link seen between Russia and Libyan commander Haftar: U.S. general," Reuters, March 24, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-libya-russia-idUSKBN16V2IW>

²³ Daniel Brown, "Lawmakers Urge US to Get Serious on Russia's Growing Influence in Libya," Business Insider, April 26, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/us-lawmakers-urge-action-in-libya-where-russia-has-gained-a-foothold-2017-4>

²⁴ Ayman Al-Warfalli and Patrick Markey, "Eastern Libya forces fly wounded to Russia in growing cooperation," Reuters, February 1 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-russia-idUSKBN15G4VW>

Meanwhile, Russia's ties with Egypt continue to grow, while Turkey, a NATO ally, is falling deeper into Putin's orbit than perhaps even Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself may realize. That Turkey came to accept Russia's position on Assad in Syria, for instance, is a testament to Moscow's influence. Russia's deep ties to the Kurds that go back at least two centuries are among the key reasons why Putin has leverage over Erdogan.

MOSCOW'S LARGER STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The line between domestic and foreign policies is blurred in Russia to a degree that can be difficult to understand in the West.²⁵ Moscow's aggressive foreign policy often coincides with domestic problems. Prominent Russian satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin once remarked, "They [the powers that be] are talking a lot about patriotism -- must have stolen again."²⁶ And Vyacheslav Plehve, the czar's interior minister, famously suggested in 1904 that what Russia needs is a "short, victorious war to stem the flow of revolution."²⁷

Putin fears domestic protest. It was no accident this March when he compared the recent wave of anti-corruption protests in Russia to the Arab Spring and Euromaidan,²⁸ both of which he believes were orchestrated by the West. From a traditional Western standpoint, it is the rising powers that are most worrisome, but when it comes to Russia, it is weakness that should worry the West. Putin feels that if he doesn't protect his interests in the Middle East, he himself is next. Putin also feels that America's talk of democracy is not real, but pretext for regime change.²⁹ He believes this because if the situation were reversed, that is what he would do.

Taken as a whole, Putin's **military moves** are about creating and extending virtual buffer zones along Russia's periphery through antiaccess/area-denial bubbles in order to limit the West's ability to maneuver. Such moves are not new. For centuries, the Kremlin felt that Russia's expansion necessitated buffer zones in a self-perpetuating cycle: the more lands Moscow gained, the more insecure it felt when faced with the challenges of administering remote territories, and the more buffers it sought.³⁰

²⁵ Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (London: Brookings Institution Press with Chatham House, 2015), pp. 24-25.

²⁶ As quoted in Leon Aaron, "Why Vladimir Putin Says Russia Is Exceptional," *Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-putin-says-russia-is-exceptional-1401473667>

²⁷ As quoted in Anders Aslund, "Russia Will Pay Dearly for Putin's Anschluss," *Moscow Times*, March 25, 2014, <https://piie.com/commentary/op-eds/russia-will-pay-dearly-putins-anschluss>

²⁸ "Путин сравнил митинги в России с началом «арабской весны» и «Евромайдана,»" *Republic*, March 30, 2017, <https://republic.ru/posts/81313>

²⁹ Putin routinely justified his own actions by comparing them to what he perceived as similar U.S. actions. For example, he reportedly defended his control of the Russian media by saying, "Don't lecture me about the free press, not after you fired that reporter," referring to CBS Evening News anchor Dan Rather, who was stepping down after his report on George W. Bush's National Guard service turned out to be fraudulent. See Peter Baker, "The Seduction of George W. Bush," *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/06/the-seduction-of-george-w-bush/>

³⁰ Anders Aslund and Andy Kuchins, *The Russia Balance Sheet* (Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2009), p. 12.

At the same time, as last year's NATO Defense College report indicated, Russia's weakness should not be confused with fragility; Putin's Russia retains certain strengths.³¹ In the Middle East, Putin's increasingly warm ties with Iran -- and more broadly anti-Sunni forces -- also put him in a better position to confront the United States in the Middle East than he would have been able to alone. Putin certainly wants to maintain ties with everyone in the region, but at the same time his actions clearly show a preference for the Shia axis.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

If Washington wants to limit Moscow's influence and improve the U.S. strategic position vis-a-vis Russia in the Middle East and North Africa, it should embrace a strategy that includes the following:

- **Recognize Putin is no partner to fight terrorism.** While fighting terrorism is in Russia's interest, Putin's actions show that he is more interested in undermining and dividing the West than working with it. This includes empowering forces in Tehran and Damascus that are responsible for terrorism. Furthermore, Putin needs the West as a foil upon whom he can blame his own domestic failings. Therefore, U.S. officials should limit contact with Putin to military deconfliction. Conciliation will backfire. Putin responds productively only when American officials act from a position of strength.
- **Engage actively in the Middle East.** Russia need not be America's military or economic equal to pose a challenge to Western interests. For example, Russia has only one aircraft carrier, *Admiral Kuznetsov*; it is rusty, leaky, and prone to fire. The United States meanwhile has ten far more advanced carriers. Yet by simply being present when the United States was absent, Putin has complicated the operating environment in the Middle East and Mediterranean and augmented Russia's influence.
- **Improve security cooperation.** The U.S. Navy could increase port visits in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East to reinforce the notion within the region that America supports and defends allies and is not in retreat.³² The military could also augment exercises beyond those it conducts annually with Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan, emphasizing interoperability among pro-Western Arab states.
- **Engage militarily in Syria.** For years Putin perceived weakness from the West, asserting himself in Syria because he believed the West would do nothing in response. Policymakers deterred themselves into inaction in Syria because they worried about a military confrontation with Russia. Yet Putin understands his limitations, and a direct confrontation is not something he seeks. Indeed, as the April 7 U.S. cruise missile strikes showed, for all of the Kremlin's bluster, in the

³¹ Richard Connolly, *Towards Self Sufficiency? Economics as a Dimension of Russian Security and the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*, NATO Defense College, July 18, 2016, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=964>

³² Anna Borshchevskaya and Cmdr. Jeremy Vaughan, USN, "How The Russian Military Reestablished Itself in the Middle East," PolicyWatch 2709, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 17, 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-the-russian-military-reestablished-itself-in-the-middle-east>

end it could do nothing but complain. Rather than provoking conflict with Russia, for the first time in years Putin received a message that the United States had redlines he and his proxies could not cross. Therefore, instead, of enticing Putin with incentives, Washington should demonstrate that his embrace of Assad brings tremendous costs to Russia.

- **Target diplomacy.** Military strategy alone will not deliver. It is essential not only to resource U.S. diplomacy, but also to direct diplomats to actively counter Russian moves in the region. Funding itself is not a metric for effectiveness absent a broader strategy.
- **Invest more resources in countering the Kremlin's propaganda efforts.** Russian propaganda seeks to confuse, sow doubt, and ultimately create paralysis. Lies don't need to last in order to do lasting damage. In the Middle East, Russian propaganda fuels conspiracy thinking, feeding on the region's existing proclivities. Rather than always being on the defensive, the United States should work harder at creating first impressions. As a recent RAND study indicates, according to psychologists, first impressions remain highly resilient, and because Russian propaganda is not concerned with the truth, it often holds the monopoly on them.³³ Here the United States can work with regional partners to establish outlets that provide alternative sources of information and counter Moscow's negative influence.
- **Recognize there is no easy fix and settle in for the long haul.** We often talk about Putin being a short-term thinker. But he has been in power now for seventeen years and does not have to constrain himself to the limited political timelines under which democratic leaders operate. Putin's Achilles heel is exposed when U.S. policymakers reclaim leadership with moral clarity.

³³ Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>