

Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on  
Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber  
on  
Russia's Waning Global Influence

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Thank you Chairman Keating and Ranking Member Fitzpatrick for this opportunity to speak before this committee and to respond to an important analytical question as we enter the ninth month of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and, as we often forget, eight-and-a-half years of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and occupation of large portions of Donbas:

How has Russia's global influence waned since February 24, 2022?

The question's framing is reminiscent of the State Department's query to the U.S. embassy in Moscow in February 1946: What are the sources of Soviet conduct? Known today as the "Long Telegram," then-Chargé d'Affaires George Kennan believed the question and answer was "so important to the analysis of our international environment."<sup>1</sup> Your question is equally important to today's understanding of the future contours of the international security environment. I hope that you will bear with me as I submit an answer as detailed as Kennan's to your concise question.

Applying Kennan's analysis, I will assess how Russia projects power to maintain its global influence on two levels: the official and the subterranean, or unofficial. The official level is self-explanatory as it is the source of Russia's official power: its status as a nuclear and military power; its economic power through energy resources – oil, gas, and nuclear – and mineral exports; and its diplomatic presence in international organizations (particularly the United Nations Security Council) and in its global bilateral relations. The official level "strengthens the prestige of the state." The unofficial level is designed to be negative and destructive, and to oppose and complicate the West's foreign and security policy objectives. The unofficial level, as my research in the modern era of malign economic influence has suggested, can be called the Kremlin Playbook.<sup>2</sup> Both planes overlap, and the activities associated with each other are intertwined.

I will briefly examine the sources of Russia's pre-February official and subterranean power and assess those same sources today. I will also explore how these sources of power may, in the future, be adapted and reconstituted. Finally, I will offer a few thoughts on appropriate U.S. and allied responses to these evolving sources of power.

### **The State of Russia's Official and Subterranean Power Pre-February 2022**

*The Official Level:* Russia's primary source of power is its status as a nuclear power with the world's greatest number of nuclear weapons. According to the Federation of American Scientists, Russia possessed at the beginning of this year "a stockpile of approximately 4,477 nuclear warheads assigned for use by long-range strategic launchers and shorter-range tactical nuclear forces" Of these, approximately 1,588 strategic warheads are deployed. And of these, 812 are land-based ballistic missiles, 576 are submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and possibly 200 are located at bases with heavy bombers. Another approximately 977 strategic warheads are in storage, along with about 1,912 nonstrategic warheads.<sup>3</sup> Russia has undertaken, for more than a decade, a modernization of its nuclear submarine forces. In recent years, it has also focused on

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<sup>1</sup>Kennan, G. (1946, February 22). The Long Telegram, 1946, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Independence, MO. <https://www.trumanlibraryinstitute.org/kennan/>

<sup>2</sup>Conley, H. A., Mina, J., Stefanov, R., & Vladimirov, M. (2016, October 13) *The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe*. Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook>

<sup>3</sup>Kristensen, H.M., & Korda, M. (2022, February 25). Russian nuclear weapons, 2022. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 78(2), 98-121, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00963402.2022.2038907>

so-called strategic “super weapons,” such as the Sarmat ICBM, the Burevestnik cruise missile, the Avangard Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (HGV), the Tsiridon ship-launched and the Kinzhal air-launched hypersonic missile, and the Poseidon nuclear-armed underwater unmanned vehicle (UUV).<sup>4</sup>

From a force posture perspective, the Russian military has the world’s fourth-largest number of active duty and reservists. Moscow has also embarked on a modernization process following its military’s struggle to invade and occupy 20 percent of Georgian territory in August 2008.<sup>5</sup> The Russian armed forces’ official size is listed as 1 million, but the real figure is much lower. At the beginning of 2022, the Russian military, it is believed, comprised around 740,000–780,000 individuals, and its total combat-capable force likely did not exceed 168,000. Reserve personnel were estimated to be no more than 100,000. Russia’s national guard units (Rosgvardia) constitute the country’s second-largest source of forces. Pre-war, there were likely no more than 60,000–70,000 of them.<sup>6</sup>

Russia’s power as a global energy and critical mineral provider, and European dependency on Russian energy in particular, is well understood and documented. According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency (EIA), Russia exported in 2021 4.7 million barrels of oil per day. Forty-nine percent of its oil and oil condensate went to OECD European countries, 38 percent went to Asia, and the remaining 13 percent went to the rest of the world. In 2021, Russia also exported 8.9 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, piped and liquefied, 74 percent, or 150 billion cubic meters (bcm), of which went to Europe.<sup>7</sup> Most Russian coal exports go to Asia, with 32 percent bound for Europe.

Russia is also a global power in the export of nuclear power and technology, and holds a monopoly on the supply of low-enriched nuclear fuel. It operates nuclear plants in 11 countries and has agreements with more than 30 countries, most in Africa, to build and operate more.<sup>8</sup> Because Russia ranks first in the global production of uranium (45 percent of world supply) and palladium (43 percent), its market dominance here is also a source of strength.<sup>9</sup>

A final dimension of Russia’s official strength and prestige is its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and its active international organizational and bilateral diplomacy in

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<sup>4</sup>Barrie, D., & Boyd, H. (2021, February 5). Burevestnik: US intelligence and Russia’s ‘unique’ cruise missile. *Military Balance Blog*. <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2021/02/burevestnik-russia-cruise-missile>

<sup>5</sup>World Population Review. Military Size by Country 2022. Retrieved Nov 14, 2022, from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/military-size-by-country>

<sup>6</sup>Luzin, P. (2022, September 21). Russia’s Military manpower Crunch Will Worsen. *Center for European Policy Analysis*. <https://cepa.org/article/russias-military-manpower-crunch-will-worsen/>

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Energy Information Administration. Selected energy exports from Russia (2021). Retrieved November 14, 2022, from <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=51618>

<sup>8</sup>Foltynova, K. (2022, September 1). Russia’s Stranglehold On The World’s Nuclear Power Cycle, *RadioFreeEurope, RadioLiberty*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-nuclear-power-industry-graphics/32014247.html#:~:text=Russia%20is%20considered%20the%20world,%2C%20France%2C%20and%20South%20Korea>

<sup>9</sup>IEA, Share of global production and rank for selected minerals and metals in Russia, 2020, IEA, Paris <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/share-of-global-production-and-rank-for-selected-minerals-and-metals-in-russia-2020> IEA. License: CC BY 4.0

the Middle East, Western Hemisphere, Africa, and Indo-Pacific. From its privileged advantage on the Security Council, Moscow can stymie and greatly complicate the desired policy objectives of the United States, and its British and French allies, and thwart transatlantic condemnation of Russian activities. It uses its diplomatic leverage across UN agencies, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council, to advance its interests, highlight the West's weaknesses, and support the machinations of its few allies. Since Russian President Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012, the Russian foreign ministry has worked to reestablish strong diplomatic ties with former Soviet client states.

*The Unofficial, or Malign, Influence Level:* Kennan described in great detail Soviet skills in undermining the West. These skills included penetrating and co-opting political parties and influential political voices, and deploying Russian Orthodox Church, pan-Slav, or other movements and government actors. One particular paragraph in the Long Telegram related to the purpose behind the Kremlin's measures still stands out to me:

*To undermine general political and strategic potential of major western powers. Efforts will be made in such countries to disrupt national self confidence, to hamstring measures of national defense, to increase social and industrial unrest, to stimulate all forms of disunity. All persons with grievances, whether economic or racial, will be urged to spelt redress not in mediation and compromise, but in defiant violent struggle for destruction of other elements of society. Here poor will be set against rich, black against white, young against old, newcomers against established residents, etc.*

Over the past two decades, there have been five primary (but not exclusive) categories of subterranean activities to weaken U.S. and Western internal and external power. They have had significant success. They are: (1) disinformation and misinformation; (2) malign economic influence to achieve state capture and elite capture; (3) private military contractors (e.g., Wagner Group); (4) cyberattacks, implantation of malware, and criminal ransomware attacks; and (5) weaponization of history, the church, faith, and traditional values.

In April 2007, the world witnessed the first Russian cyberattack and consequent rioting in a NATO member, Estonia. The action followed the Estonian government's decision to move a Russian monument dedicated to Estonia's "liberation" from Nazi forces in World War II. Known as the Bronze Night incident, the Russian government cut Estonian internet access for three days, and incited violence among ethnic Russians in Estonia through disinformation and weaponizing a Soviet historic narrative of the Great Patriotic War.

Less than a decade later, during the 2016 presidential election, the United States would more fully understand the power of Russian malign influence, and its disinformation and hacking, to weaken and divide American society by its support of a candidate sympathetic to Russia over one who was critical.<sup>10</sup> The French government also experienced Russian interference in its electoral process. This meddling took the form of direct financial support in 2014 of a future

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<sup>10</sup>Mueller, R. S. (2019). *Report On The Investigation Into Russian Interference In The 2016 Presidential Election*. (28 C.F.R. 600.89c). U.S. Department of Justice. [www.justice.gov/archives/sco/file/1373816/download](http://www.justice.gov/archives/sco/file/1373816/download)

French presidential candidate (for her then candidacy to the European Parliament) and a 2017 hacking and disinformation campaign that was designed to support a pro-Kremlin candidate.<sup>11, 12</sup> The U.S. estimates that Russia has dedicated at least \$300 million to influence political parties, government officials, and individual politicians in more than two dozen countries since its 2014 invasion of Crimea.<sup>13</sup> Russia has developed an extensive and viable network of institutions to hide the flow of funds for this purpose.

It has been the role of the private Wagner Group military contractor, however, that has been the most impactful to weaken or remove Western influence from a range of countries while simultaneously making economic gains for Russia. As Russia first occupied eastern Ukraine in 2014, the Wagner Group deployed approximately 1,000 mercenaries there. Globally, the Wagner Group is believed to have deployed nearly 5,000 mercenaries. They have been deployed to Syria in 2015 to keep President Bashar Assad in power, to Libya to support General Khalifa Haftar's forces, to the Central African Republic and Sudan in 2017 to guard diamond and gold mines (under the guise of mining companies created by Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin), to Venezuela in 2019 to reportedly protect President Nicolás Maduro, to Mali in 2021 to provide security, and to Burkina Faso to support the military coup of Colonel Ibrahim Traoré. This unofficial low-cost and high-reward instrument has thwarted or severely disrupted peace negotiations, increased regional instability, and undercut Western policy objectives at every turn.

Finally, an underappreciated but powerful tool of Russian unofficial influence over the past 15 years has been the role of faith, values, and traditions, and the role of the church, specifically that of the Russian Orthodox Church, to weaken and divide what Russian officials call the “decadence of the West.” Funded in part by U.S.-sanctioned Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeeva, the so-called “Orthodox oligarch” who supports charitable organizations, cultural groups, and the construction of Orthodox churches and community centers, the Kremlin has skillfully used Western social and cultural divisions about same-sex marriages, the rights of women, minorities, and migrants, and the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights to create social division in the West and promote Russia as the only true defender of conservative values, the true center of orthodoxy, and the so-called “Third Rome.”<sup>14</sup> Some Western leaders have used these themes similarly to assume the role of protector of Christian values and supporter of illiberalism against liberal decadence or “wokeness.” While democratic values uphold religious freedom and tolerance, the illiberal and authoritarian seek to use these freedoms as a cudgel.

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<sup>11</sup>Sonne, P. (2018, December 27). A Russian bank gave Marine Le Pen's party a loan. Then weird things began happening. *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/a-russian-bank-gave-marine-le-pens-party-a-loan-then-weird-things-began-happening/2018/12/27/960c7906-d320-11e8-a275-81c671a50422\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/a-russian-bank-gave-marine-le-pens-party-a-loan-then-weird-things-began-happening/2018/12/27/960c7906-d320-11e8-a275-81c671a50422_story.html)

<sup>12</sup>Conley, H. A., & Vilmer, J. J. (2018). Successfully Countering Russian Electoral Interference. *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. [www.csis.org/analysis/successfully-countering-russian-electoral-interference](http://www.csis.org/analysis/successfully-countering-russian-electoral-interference)

<sup>13</sup>Wong, E. (2022, September 13). Russia Secretly Gave \$300 Million to Political Parties and Officials Worldwide, U.S. Says. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/13/us/politics/russia-election-interference.html>

<sup>14</sup>Ruy, D., Conley, H.A., Laruelle, M., Pkhaladze, T., Prodromou, E. H., & Ruge, M. (2022). The Kremlin Playbook 3: Keeping the Faith. *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. [www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook-3-keeping-faith](http://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook-3-keeping-faith)

## **Post-February 2022 Sources of Russian Official and Unofficial Influence**

Has Russian global influence, official and unofficial, waned since the onset of the full-scale invasion?

*Official Level:* Russia retains its arsenal of nuclear weapons and, over the course of the past nine months, has made the most of its nuclear power through saber-rattling and potentially planting false flag operations. Russia has also provoked Western fears of nuclear fallout by using weapons around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant to gain diplomatic and military concessions. The Kremlin's efforts have worked to some extent in the West. Moscow likely views U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's recent visit to Kyiv to press for greater Ukrainian government openness to negotiations, a Congressional letter (now retracted) that supported more dialogue, the reopening of U.S.-Russian discussions on arms control and a visit by CIA Director Burns as gains, even if limited. Russian nuclear saber-rattling fuels fear across Europe, particularly in Germany and its three-party coalition government. It also furthers division between Western and Eastern Europe. The threat of use of nuclear weapons is how Russia has maintained its official power.

Clearly, the last nine months have demonstrated to the world how poorly the world's second-largest military world has performed and how poorly military analysts understood it. Russian military analysts may have succumbed to the "show" of large military exercises and the shiny "super weapon" kit but we now see a poorly led, poorly trained, and poorly maintained force. This, however, does not diminish the Russian military and mercenary corps' sheer brutality, unprofessionalism, and perpetuation of war crimes and violations of the Law of Armed Conflict against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The most "positive" element of Russia's poor military performance has been the Wagner Group's and Russian contract forces' withdrawal from international deployments and those near the Russian border. At the end of March of this year, reports suggest that the Wagner Group withdrew 1,300 mercenaries from Libya replacing them with African mercenaries. The Wagner Group is also recruiting Russian prisoners to replenish its forces. There are additional reports that some Wagner Group forces have been removed from the Central African Republic. It also appears that thousands of Russian contract forces have left the Sino-Russian border, and the borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, for deployment to Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> Estimates indicate that between 70 and 80 percent of units from Russia's eastern military district have been redeployed from the Chinese border to Ukraine.<sup>16</sup>

The imposition of Western technology sanctions has certainly slowed the Russian war machine in its efforts to replace the nearly 6,000 pieces of military equipment lost on the battlefield.

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<sup>15</sup>Up to 1,500' Russian Troops Redeployed To Ukraine From Tajik Base, Investigation Reveals. (2022, September 14). *RadioFreeEurope, RadioLiberty*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-troops-tajik-base-redeployed-ukraine/32033791.html#:~:text=Both%20Central%20Asian%20countries%20%2D%2D,hosts%20about%20500%20Russian%20servicemen>

<sup>16</sup>Trevelyan, M. (2022, August 29). Russia sharply scales back Far East war games with China. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-sharply-scales-back-far-east-war-games-with-china-2022-08-29/>

Because Russia is so reliant on foreign imports of semiconductors and electronics, it has resorted to stripping consumer products of their electronic components and to purchasing materials from the two other most heavily internationally sanctioned countries, Iran and North Korea.

*Energy.* Russia's energy influence presents a more mixed picture, with near-term gains and long-term losses. The United States has banned the import of oil; the EU still allows oil to flow by ship until December 5 (with some exceptions) but would like to impose a price cap. Russia must sell its oil at a discount, largely by ship (a majority by Greek-flagged vessels), to China, India (Russia is now its largest oil supplier), Italy and Turkey, but higher prices have allowed it to earn 41 percent more on its exports. The volume of oil that Russia sells has not fallen despite the oil embargo due to go into effect on December 5.

Regarding natural gas, Europe, in the span of a year, has reduced its Russian imports from 40 percent of total supply to 9 percent. But Russia continues to profit since gas prices have jumped.<sup>17</sup> We do not yet know if a price cap will have much impact. In the long term, Russia's weaponization of energy will result in the loss of one of its strongest assets, its status at a global energy superpower. Through its energy blackmail, Russia has finally proved to be an unreliable energy supplier to Europe.<sup>18</sup>

Nuclear fuel and minerals trade have largely not been negatively affected. Russia benefits from the latter due to rising global commodity prices.

*Diplomacy:* Russia's influence at the United Nations has significantly diminished. In March, the General Assembly voted 141-5 against Russian aggression in Ukraine. In October, a similar vote was 143-5. This month, the Security Council rejected a Russian proposal to create a commission to investigate scurrilous Kremlin claims of a U.S.-Ukraine military biological program while Moscow was thought to be planning to release a dirty bomb or facilitate a radiological event as part of a false flag operation. Moscow has also been suspended from the UN Human Rights Council and other UN agencies. It lost a campaign to lead the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and has been stopped from "reforming" various UN cyber conventions and initiatives.<sup>19</sup> Despite these setbacks, Russian diplomacy can still challenge, slow, and prevent progress of Western objectives (such as that recently at ASEAN).

Russian diplomacy will increasingly evolve and adapt through the axis of the heavily sanctioned. Because Western sanctions are likely to remain and tighten in the foreseeable future, Russia will adapt its diplomacy to exploit sanction loopholes, behaving increasingly like the Iranian and

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<sup>17</sup>Horton, J., & Palumbo, D., (2022, September 29). Russia Sanctions: How can the world cope without its oil and gas? *BBC*. [www.bbc.com/news/58888451](http://www.bbc.com/news/58888451)

<sup>18</sup>Demar

<sup>19</sup>Ignatius, D. (2022, November 10). Opinion: Russia is in retreat in every major international forum. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/11/10/russia-putin-ukraine-un-united-nations/>

North Korean governments, and to explore with Chinese firms sanctions-evading tactics. Some have coined such a grouping the “axis of autocrats.”<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Russian diplomacy has begun to cross over onto the unofficial level. As more international restrictions are imposed on Russia’s state media, the country’s diplomats are filling the void with nine of the 10 fastest-growing Twitter accounts. Russian diplomats and other government actors are using them to spread egregious disinformation, such as that which followed the Bucha massacre. Under previous ownership, Twitter policy was to remove diplomatic posts that included false information, such as those alleging that a pregnant woman who survived a maternity ward bombing was an actor.

In sum, Russia’s official-level influence has waned since February. This has been most acute in the diplomatic and military sphere and less so in the nuclear and energy spheres, where the Kremlin continues to wield influence.

*Unofficial Level 2.0:* The Kremlin’s malign playbook has always been highly adaptive. Disinformation is a perfect example of its adaptive tactics. After February 24<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. and EU’s ban on RT and Sputnik reduced its number of interactions on Facebook. Prior to February, RT Deutsch ranked as the most interacted site on Facebook with German-language media. This is no longer the case. RT America’s closing similarly degraded Moscow’s messaging about the U.S. and commentary regarding the U.S. midterm elections dropped substantially from the levels in 2020 and 2018, likely due to Russia’s focus on Ukraine.

While Russian state media engagements have declined in the U.S. and Europe, they have intensified across the Global South. In fact, RT en Espanol is the most engaged account on Twitter. The French government banned RT France but Sputnik France has been repurposed as Sputnik Afrique.<sup>21</sup> Accounts for RT India and RT Hindi were set up in September. RT en Español has set up multiple spin off accounts, including Ahi les Va, which was for months one of Russia’s most influential state media accounts.<sup>22 23</sup> RT en Español has also taken a range of steps to get around platform restrictions, such as promoting their content via different domains.<sup>24</sup>

Russian narratives and messaging have similarly evolved in relationship to the war in Ukraine. The Russian narrative has traveled from de-Nazification to de-Satan-ization and a focus on Ukraine’s supposed attempts at deploying a radiation device. Our EU colleagues have observed Russian disinformation actors seeking to portray themselves as authentic European news and promoting pro-Kremlin narratives. We have also observed Russian state media migrating to

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<sup>20</sup>Rogin, J. (2022, September 8). Opinion: Putin is trying to build a new axis of autocrats. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/09/08/russia-china-iran-alliance-dictators/>

<sup>21</sup>*Sputnik Afrique*. (2022). Retrieved from <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/?fbclid=IwAR2lCOxaK9Hec7HJBXTCloXugUz-nhWHwyStw0sh0JTztBbodUgZj427nw>

<sup>22</sup>Bodnar, J., Kohlenber, N., Schafer, B., & Soula, E. (2022). *Hamilton Monthly Report: September 2022*. Alliance for Securing Democracy. <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/hamilton-monthly-report-september-2022/>

<sup>23</sup>Motta, I. (2022, August 16). The Russian Media Account Hitting It Off with Spanish Speakers. *Alliance for Securing Democracy*. <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/hamilton-monthly-report-september-2022/>

<sup>24</sup>Balint, K., Arcostanzo, F., Wildon, J., & Reyes, K. (2022, July 20). RT Articles are Finding their Way to European Audiences – but how? *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. [https://www.isdglobal.org/digital\\_dispatches/rt-articles-are-finding-their-way-to-european-audiences-but-how/](https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/rt-articles-are-finding-their-way-to-european-audiences-but-how/)



alternative platforms that cater to specific far-right audiences following YouTube's ban, such as Rumble, Gab, and Odysee channels. Some Russian operatives have run covert information operations on these platforms despite limited engagement. While these platforms do not match the audience of YouTube, they cater to "amping up" a receptive audience. Some of this vibrancy is also due to the accounts of state media journalists who are becoming increasingly influential. In October, seven of the ten fastest growing state media Twitter accounts belonged to individual contributors. We regularly see journalists on the list of the ten most retweeted state media accounts. Often, platforms don't label these contributors as state media. Despite Sputnik being banned from YouTube, Sputnik host George Galloway can upload his show to the platform, where his videos regularly receive tens of thousands of views.<sup>25</sup>

*Government and Political Party Influence Begins to be Exposed.* Similar to the disinformation space, Russia's malign political influence continues to adapt to increased scrutiny and transparency measures with some success. The most impressive success post-February 24<sup>th</sup> was Wagner's ability to dislodge French forces from the Sahel. The French government estimates that approximately 2,400 Wagner mercenaries located in Africa, primarily in the Central African Republic and Mali, were able to leverage their presence to commit widespread human rights violations, exploit natural resources (as they turn a nice profit), and support both countries' governments to officially cut ties with Paris in support of Moscow.

Since February 24<sup>th</sup>, there also has been a new level of appreciation for the level of alleged Russian penetration of senior European officials. They include a former president of the Parliament Assembly Council of Europe in Strasbourg and a former Dutch senator,<sup>26</sup> the most senior German cybersecurity official, and a climate foundation that was allegedly established to circumvent Western sanctions for the development of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline led by a former premier of a German Länder.<sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> While investigative journalism and Western sanctions list have heightened awareness and scrutiny of leading political figures and their interactions with Russian intelligence operatives, we may yet be at the early stages of understanding the web of political and economic enablers of Russian malign influence globally and its detrimental effect on democratic institutions and governments.

*Russia's Cyberattacks Evolve and its Risk Appetite Increases.* Analysts had predicted a wave of significant cyberattacks directly preceding and following February 24<sup>th</sup>. Many believed a Russian cyber war would ensue. Yet this prediction did not appear to come true. Most of the cyber softening occurred prior to February 24<sup>th</sup>. The United States experienced a series of very serious cyber and ransomware attacks which included a Russian implanted malware on thousands of computers through the Solar Winds hack and the crippling of a mid-Atlantic oil pipeline, these attacks were reduced following the June 2021 summit between Presidents Biden

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<sup>25</sup>George Galloway. (n.d.) *Straight Talking Straight Forward*. Retrieved November 14, 2022 from [www.youtube.com/c/GeorgeGallowayOfficial](http://www.youtube.com/c/GeorgeGallowayOfficial)

<sup>26</sup>Heck, W., & Dohmen, J. (2022, November, 11). Hoe CDA-politicus Rene van der Linden een pion van de Russen werd. *NRC*. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/11/11/hoe-cda-politicus-rene-van-der-linden-een-pion-van-de-russen-was-2-a4148020>

<sup>27</sup>Schuetze, C.F. (2022, October 18). German Cyber Chief Removed Over Claims of Ties to Russia. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/18/world/europe/germany-cyber-chief-russia.html>

<sup>28</sup>Dahm, J. (2022, May 18). Nord Stream-funded German foundation to be dissolved. *EURACTIV*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/18/world/europe/germany-cyber-chief-russia.html>

and Putin.<sup>29, 30</sup> Also in 2021, Russia allegedly compromised the Hungarian foreign ministry network, even reaching into its encrypted network. These attacks continued into early 2022, putting at risk anything the Hungarian government gleaned at classified NATO or EU meetings regarding Ukraine and Russia.<sup>31</sup> However, Russian cyberattacks did not seem extensive in the earliest days of the war. While there were many attempts to reduce the communications capabilities of the Ukrainian government, their systems were able to resist these attacks due to eight years of experience, practiced resilience, and technical support from the West and the private sector.

Increasingly however, Russian physical attacks, through the use of drones by Russian nationals, so-called dark vessels that turn off navigational transponders, are threatening European and transatlantic infrastructure. Damage to Norwegian energy platforms and undersea cables to the Norwegian archipelago, as well as explosions of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline close to Danish territorial waters, and the alleged sabotage of northern German railroad suggest that Russia's unofficial plane is creeping closer to kinetic effect on NATO civilian populations.<sup>32, 33, 34, 35</sup>

*Beware the NATO Sanction Sieves.* Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. and EU, as well as Japan, Australia and other like-minded countries imposed heavy sanctions against Russia, among the most powerful were aimed at reducing its ability to import electronics and freezing Russian central bank assets held outside of Russia. Russia has also adapted to these severe sanctions. New ownership structures of Russian firms can circumnavigate these sanctions. The Russian government's quick imposition of capital controls and skillful financial management has minimized economic blowback. The U.S. government's own assessment expects that Russia will now rely on its malign finance toolkit, including a vast network of institutions dedicated to moving funds covertly from Western view, will be dedicated to undermining Western sanctions and unity.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Temple-Raston, D. (2021, April 16). A 'Worst Nightmare' Cyberattack: The Untold Story Of The SolarWinds Hack. *NPR*. <https://www.wbur.org/npr/985439655/a-worst-nightmare-cyberattack-the-untold-story-of-the-solarwinds-hack>

<sup>30</sup>Turton, W., & Mehrotra, K. (2021, June 4). Hackers Breached Colonial Pipeline Using Compromised Password. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-04/hackers-breached-colonial-pipeline-using-compromised-password#xj4y7vzkg?leadSource=uverify%20wall>

<sup>31</sup>Szabolcs, P. (2022, March 29). Putin's hackers gained full access to Hungary's foreign ministry networks, the Orban government has been unable to stop them. *Direkt36*. <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/putyin-hekkerei-is-latjak-a-magyar-kulugy-titkait-az-orban-kormany-evek-ota-nem-birja-elharitani-oket/>

<sup>32</sup>Lewis, M. (2022, October 23). Unidentified drones over Norway's offshore platforms fuel fears of Russian threat. *PBS NewsHour*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/unidentified-drones-over-norways-offshore-platforms-fuel-fears-of-russian-threat>

<sup>33</sup>Burgess, M. (2022, November 11). 'Dark Ships' Emerge From the Shadows of the Nord Stream Mystery. *WIRED*. <https://www.wired.com/story/nord-stream-pipeline-explosion-dark-ships/>

<sup>34</sup>Nilsen, T. (2022, January 9). Disruption at one of two undersea cables to Svalbard. *The Barents Observer*. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2022/01/disruption-one-two-undersea-optical-cables-svalbard>

<sup>35</sup>Deutsche Bahn is hit by suspected sabotage (2022, October 13). *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/business/2022/10/13/deutsche-bahn-is-hit-by-suspected-sabotage>

<sup>36</sup>Wong, E. (2022, September 13). Russia Secretly Gave \$300 Million to Political Parties and Officials Worldwide, U.S. Says. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/13/us/politics/russia-election-interference.html>

Western sanction leakage is centered upon NATO member Turkey, which plays a complicated geopolitical balancing act in the Black Sea region. While supporting Ukraine militarily with Turkish drones, on occasion, preventing Russian military vessels from transiting the Turkish Strait, and diplomatically supporting grain shipments from southern Ukrainian ports, Turkey does not place restrictions on Russia economically.<sup>37</sup> If anything, Turkey has welcomed Russian wealth and seeks advantage to become a future Russian energy hub. In August this year, Turkey's exports to Russia increased by 87% as compared to the same period in 2021. Turkey has been facilitating trade between Western and Russia companies through re-exportation sleight of hand.<sup>38</sup> Further, Ankara has encouraged Russian oligarchs who have fled Russia to reside in Turkey, bringing their substantial assets to Turkey as they obtain Turkish citizenship through any real estate or other investments above €405,000 per Turkish law.<sup>39</sup> The government does not require visas for Russians, making Turkey the second largest destination for Russians in the first eight months of the year. The Turkish government had accepted payments in rubles but reversed this decision on October 1<sup>st</sup> under pressure from the U.S.

NATO member Hungary also does not support EU sanctions against Russia and is planning to hold a national consultation on the question, with Orbán's government blaming the EU for its current economic difficulties rather than Moscow. Hungary is currently blocking the European Union's proposed €18 billion financial aid package to Ukraine.<sup>40</sup> Over the past several years, Hungary has intensified its energy dependency on Russia, particularly gas and nuclear energy, and has successfully received carve-outs from the EU on its sanctions policy or has prevented certain Russian oligarchs from being placed on the sanctions list.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the reported hacking of Hungary's classified foreign ministry networks, Hungary continues to host Russia's International Investment Bank (IIB) in Budapest which allegedly economic supports Russian clandestine operations.<sup>42</sup>

For its unofficial power post February 24th, Russia continues to wield influence but in new and adaptive directions. It concentrates its malign influence and disinformation operations toward new outlets in the Global South. Its cyber and physical attacks on critical infrastructure near and on NATO territory is escalatory and it continues to divide willing NATO members Turkey and

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<sup>37</sup>Jones, D. (2022, October 13). Russian, Turkish Leaders Meet Again as West Voice Concern. *VOA*.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/russian-turkish-leaders-meet-again-as-west-voices-concern/6789521.html>

<sup>38</sup>Bourcier, N. (2022, November 24). Turkey has turned into a trade platform between Russia and the West. *Le Monde*. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-west_6001620_4.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20same%20period%2C%20Turkey,Exporters'%20Assembly%20(TIM)

[west\\_6001620\\_4.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20same%20period%2C%20Turkey,Exporters'%20Assembly%20\(TIM](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-west_6001620_4.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20same%20period%2C%20Turkey,Exporters'%20Assembly%20(TIM)

<sup>39</sup>Bourcier, N. (2022, November 24). Turkey has turned into a trade platform between Russia and the West. *Le Monde*. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-west_6001620_4.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20same%20period%2C%20Turkey,Exporters'%20Assembly%20(TIM)

[west\\_6001620\\_4.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20same%20period%2C%20Turkey,Exporters'%20Assembly%20\(TIM](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-west_6001620_4.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20same%20period%2C%20Turkey,Exporters'%20Assembly%20(TIM)

<sup>40</sup>Herman, Y. (2022, September 28). Brussels proposes EU support plan for Ukraine, Hungary says 'no'. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/brussels-proposes-eu-support-plan-ukraine-hungary-says-no-2022-11-09/>

<sup>41</sup>Simon, F. (2022, September 27). Hungary opposes EU sanctions on Russian nuclear sector. *EURACTIVE, AFP, & Reuters*. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/hungary-opposes-eu-sanctions-on-russian-nuclear-sector/>

<sup>42</sup>Makszimov, V. (2022, March 4). Hungary stands by Russian 'spy bank'. *EURACTIV, & Telex*. [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/hungary-stands-by-russian-spy-bank/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/hungary-stands-by-russian-spy-bank/)

Hungary toward its preferred policy outcomes including the NATO membership of Finland and Sweden that together Turkey and Hungary are effectively blocking.<sup>43</sup>

### **How Should U.S. Policy Respond and Be Positioned**

Over the past nine months, official Russian power has waned (nuclear saber-rattling and energy policy notwithstanding) and its unofficial power has adapted, how should the U.S. respond?

The U.S. and its allies must sustain and prioritize analytical attention on the ongoing adaptation and reconstitution of Russia's official and unofficial power, despite its policy preference to focus singularly on the Indo-Pacific. Russia will reconstitute both sources of power over time.

Although the Biden administration remains attentive to growing Sino-Russian political and military alignment, the intelligence community must assess and call out any shift in China's economic support to Russia designed to evade Western sanctions. Scenarios and table-top exercises should be conducted in exploring a variety of Russian economic scenarios that resemble Iranian and North Korean sanction evading tactics. U.S. sanctions toward both regimes have not been effective in altering their policy directions despite prolonged and severe sanctions. New and more robust intelligence surveillance and interdiction policies will be required to prevent Russian sanctions evasion.

The Biden administration should also more fully appreciate that Russia weaponizes diplomacy and deploys it as a source of its both official and unofficial power. The Kremlin seeks a bilateral agreement with the United States to reach a new European security architecture in part because the very rumor of such an agreement feeds European insecurities and would deeply divide the United States from its NATO allies. While diplomacy is the art of the possible, Russia's diplomacy and its legally binding processes are designed to ensnare the United States and Europe in a status quo loop which Russia utilizes to advance its policy preferences and territorial advantage.

A fresh diplomatic approach toward Moscow must be wholly transparent publicly and privately based on international legal principles (e.g., the United Nations Charter) and establish clear and transparent goals for achieving success. It is critical for Washington to state with greater frequency what it will do and act upon it if required; it is prudent to remain silent on all other options to strengthen deterrence. While diplomatic and military-to-military channels must remain open, diplomatic pressure must remain laser focused on Moscow, not Kyiv.

A clear, consistent, unified, and confident policy message that does not respond to Russian saber-rattling can achieve results. Take for example Finland and Sweden's NATO membership. For years, Russian officials have threatened use of nuclear weapons against both countries should they consider joining NATO. Russia had repeatedly probed their defense capabilities using grey

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<sup>43</sup>Henley, J. (2022, November 1). Finland and Sweden call on Hungary and Turkey to ratify Nato applications. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/01/finland-and-sweden-call-on-hungary-and-turkey-to-ratify-nato-applications>

zone tactics. But when both countries announced their decision to join NATO due to Russia's military actions, Moscow did not carry through on its threats. This is instructive.

Russia's most consistent influential gains have been directed at the Global South. The U.S. and EU should worry less about mirroring the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative or scolding governments for welcoming help from the Wagner Group. The U.S. and its allies need consistent diplomatic and economic presence in these countries, a positive agenda, and tactical patience to seize opportunities for Western engagement. Rather than worry about Russian narratives in the Global South, the U.S. should focus on advancing its broad and positive agenda.

In other words, our answer to Russian influence – as it was in February 1946 – is our hopefulness in the future and our confidence in the ultimate triumph of the dignity of the individual. As Kennan's closing comments in the Long Telegram command us,

*We must formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in past. ...Finally, we must have courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society.*